How can creativity and cultural resources promote economic growth and help individuals and communities to enlarge their life choices and adapt to change? These questions outline the foundation of the Culture for Development Indicators Suite, the objective of which is to include culture in national and international development strategies. Through a participatory and decentralized process, this initiative, launched in 2009 with the support of the Spanish Agency of International Cooperation for Development (AECID), is a practical tool to raise awareness and promote the analysis and management of culture and development at national level. By combining quantitative and qualitative elements and giving priority to national contextualization, this Indicators Suite guides decision-making and allocation of development resources where the influence of culture as an intervention sector is still underestimated.

I. Culture: a resource not wisely used in development strategies

In 1996, a report submitted by the World Commission on Culture and Development, Our Creative Diversity, placed culture as a development priority and showed how it interacts with other key areas as, for example, education, governance and gender-based equality. This report represents a milestone in both reflection and action and brings about a great number of future initiatives. Thus, the 1998, 2000 and 2010 UNESCO World Reports on Culture, the 2004 Human Development Report submitted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the countless attempts to measure and evaluate how culture can either reinforce or restrain development processes have stemmed from the paradigm proposed in Our Creative Diversity.

Nevertheless, efforts made to develop cultural indicators and indexes have not rendered conclusive results and culture is still greatly disregarded in most development indicators and indexes, such as the Global Development Indicators (GDIs) of the World Bank; the Human Development Index (HDI) of the UNDP; or, more recently, the Quality of Life Index of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The lack of measuring tools has a direct bearing on the marginalization of culture in development strategies, as well as on the poor allocation of resources for cultural cooperation, both at national and international level (around 1.7% of total assistance for development at global level). Indeed, the absence of a reckoner to measure the potential and impact of culture is particularly counterproductive in an environment where indicators seem to turn into development “standards” and have an increasing influence when formulating and legitimizing discourses, guiding political decision-making and prioritizing the types of intervention. UNESCO specifically intends to develop this Indicators Suite to explain and specify the nature and scope of the relationship between culture and development (the “how”). Thus, it intends to meet the demands posed by decision-makers from the South and the development community at large in order to define the theoretical discourse and to promote, at an operational level, the inclusion of culture in national and international strategies that could favor a development focused on the human being, inclusive, sustainable, and adapted to local conditions.

Today, efforts to measure culture in development processes are feasible thanks to a favorable context resulting from, above all, the recognition
of the culture and development binomial in the international political agenda. A clear example of this has been the brisk coming into effect of the Convention for the Protection and Promotion of Cultural Diversity, the first international treaty dealing with this issue in its provisions on obligations of the Parties. Likewise, culture has been finally included in debates on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) as has been evidenced with the adoption, by the United Nations General Assembly, of a document entitled “Keeping the promise: united to achieve the Millennium Development Goals” and even more evident, a specific resolution on culture and development.

II. A pragmatic bet that takes on the complex issue of culture and development without giving up action

The Culture for Development Indicators Suite, in which UNESCO has been working since 2009, is a timely answer within this context. Its objectives are: i) to disseminate an inclusive approach to human development taking full advantage of cultural potential: ii) to demonstrate the contribution and potential of culture to achieve national development goals as well as the MDGs: and iii) to provide actors in charge of development programs and strategies with a shared and flexible platform adapted to their needs so as to include culture in programming exercises. In short, the aim is to facilitate and guide the implementation, among others, of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution on Culture and Development and the Convention for the Protection and Promotion of Cultural Diversity (Art. 13).

This Indicators Suite, developed under a conceptual framework based on the Report submitted by the World Commission on Culture and Development, adopts a pragmatic approach that can overcome methodological and technical difficulties, especially the conceptual ones, which hindered previous efforts.

On the one hand, mindful of the inevitable —and at the same time enriching— ambiguity and complexity around the two pillars of the culture and development agenda, the Indicators Suite focuses on the outstanding features of both concepts in order to adopt operational definitions that might give way to action.

Thus, in conformity with the UNDP definition of human development, development is understood as the capacity of individuals and communities to adapt to processes of change (“globalization”, “modernization”, “progress”, etc.) with the opportunity to choose full, satisfactory, useful and acknowledged lifestyles, both individually and collectively.
Regarding culture, it adopts an inclusive approach and acknowledges its multidimensional nature, centering on:

1. Culture as a particularly dynamic sector of activity generating both employment and income, promoting diversification and, therefore, contributing to an equitable economic development.

2. Culture as a sustainable framework for social capital and cohesion, coexistence and peace, which are indispensable for human development.

3. Culture as a number of resources adding value to development interventions and increasing its impact, efficiency and sustainability.

It should also be mentioned that the Indicators Suite focuses on the first two dimensions and deals with the third one in a more tangential fashion, based on the fact that any well formulated and articulated development strategy or intervention should have an open and participatory approach and, therefore, be sensitive from a cultural point of view.

On the other hand, this set of Indicators should be adjusted to a number of established premises, namely:

- Be especially aimed at developing and middle-income countries where the collection of development data, and above all cultural data, is frequently poor and/or fragmented and where the coverage, periodicity, updating level and reliability vary.

- Be based on previously existing national sources, the most complete and reliable ones, and avoid the generation of new sources which will significantly reduce on-the-spot implementation costs.

- Be a flexible tool that can be adapted to different national contexts and realities.

- Reject comparisons or rankings among countries. Instead, to demonstrate and show the contribution of culture for development at national level.

Based on this, a model Indicators Suite has been selected that thematically encompasses fifteen to twenty indicators of different dimensions. The purpose is to identify, visualize and deepen the understanding of relationships among the different dimensions of a specific domain (culture) and examine them in the light of a concrete thematic question (culture and development) so as to better understand existing potentialities and gaps and provide new information and indications within a political domain where outcomes are abstract and hard to measure. The Culture for Development Indicators Suite draws on Tufte’s pioneer approach on the use of different kinds of information and its further implementation by H. Anheier and R. Isar in The Cultures and Globalizations Series. One of the main advantages of this model is precisely its capacity to overcome existing information gaps. Thus, by recognizing that available data might be fragmented, it accepts that important interrelations with political implications can emerge when data is collected by themes.

The selected dimensions include: Cultural Economy, Education, Cultural Heritage, Communication, Governance and Institutional System, Participation and Social Cohesion and Gender-based Equality. Each dimension is broken down in two to four subdimensions which, in turn, include two to four indicators (or proxies) to illustrate them. As an example, the dimension on Culture Economy is broken down in the following subdimensions: added value of cultural activities, employment in culture and expenses in cultural goods and services at home. Therefore, it provides a guide to travel across the universe of culture for development contribution, which is broad and complex, in order to suggest potential crossings, potentialities and deficiencies.
III. An ongoing Project with promising preliminary outcomes.

After requesting the submission of written contributions and holding broad consultations with a great number of researchers in key development spheres, under the guidance of a meeting of experts held at UNESCO’s Headquarters in December 2009, twenty preliminary indicators were selected to illustrate interrelationships between culture and development at macro level. These indicators are relatively simple to build and easy to read and they include general basic indicators and national alternatives (the variable-geometry principle).

Against this background, the Preliminary Methodological Manual describes in detail how to collect data and develop indicators. The first test phase was launched in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ghana, Uruguay, and Vietnam and will conclude in September 2011. In keeping with outcomes, the manual will be reviewed and improved and then a second test phase will be launched in five to six additional countries in 2011-2012.

The purpose of this process is to implement a participatory and decentralized approach aimed at ensuring the adjustment of this Suite to realities faced in these countries and preventing data collected from being considered in isolation as goals to be achieved. Therefore, attempt to contextualize and construe outcomes together with national specialists is one of the key elements of the implementation methodology.

Arguments reinforcing the relevance of this Indicators Suite include its capacity to compile and provide an additional way of using information sources and existing data. Therefore, previous efforts made on cultural information and policies can be appreciated and valued and new statistics and studies on culture with an impact on development can be promoted. Since it is mostly based on the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics, the Suite aligns national cultural information with international statistical standards, thus promoting the latter.

On the other hand, the implementation of this Suite articulates and interrelates existing data for the first time in order to have a global and inclusive view of relationships between culture and development at national level. In line with this, it allows the generation of new information on decision-making key areas. For example, indexes on institutional systems and cultural employment in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Colombia and Costa Rica account for data collected for the first time thanks to the Suite.

Halfway in implementing the Project, which will conclude in 2013, it should be pointed out that the test phase national appropriation confirms our initial hypothesis, namely, that for this tool to be efficient, it should be based on collaboration processes. Since all stakeholders (public authorities, Ministry of Planning, research centers, statistical offices, cultural agents, development agents, etc.) meet together, one of the main visible outcomes is that the “building” itself of this set of Indicators promotes cooperation among institutions and fosters trust among stakeholders involved. Therefore, the Indicators Suite complies with one of its main objectives: it is not intended to

(...) the UNESCO Indicators Suite attempts to articulate a language that could foster a culture-based dialogue with development actors and decision-makers
provide a static or exhaustive image of relationships between culture and development, but to serve as a learning platform including the value and potential of culture for development in the national debate using quantitative data and qualitative interpretations.

All in all, the UNESCO Indicators Suite attempts to articulate a language that could foster a culture-based dialogue with development actors and decision-makers. An operational and practical language clearly reflecting why culture is so important and where to intervene. This is a first step to advance in the creation of such important indexes to measure culture and development and, finally, to give culture the place it deserves in national and international development strategies. Consequently, the main challenge is that, once concluded, it should be effectively used by actors in charge of development programs and strategies and serve as an inspiration to introduce specific indicators in the most relevant series and indexes of indicators associated with development. A more human, equitable and sustainable development is at stake.

For more information on UNESCO Culture for Development Indicators Suite, visit www.unesco.org/culture/CDIS.
OECD “Progreso de las sociedades” summarizes the global search for national strategies not exclusively based on economic growth.

2United Nations General Assembly Resolution 65/1, September 2010.


4For more information on Culture and Development Fund to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, visit http://www.mdgfund.org/es/content/cultureanddevelopment.

5“La expansión de las libertades de las personas para llevar una vida prolongada, saludable y creativa; conseguir las metas que consideran valiosas y participar activamente en darle forma al desarrollo de manera equitativa y sostenible en un planeta compartido. Las personas son a la vez beneficiarias y agentes motivadores del desarrollo humano, como individuos y colectivamente”, 2010 Human Development Report, (UNDP, 2010).


7The definition contained in the 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity is used as the starting point: “Culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs”, Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, (UNESCO, 2001).

8As an example, in 2007, cultural sectors approximately accounted for 3.4% of the global GDP, representing almost $1.6 quintillion US dollars (practically twice the tourism-generated income that same year) and between 2000 and 2005, trade in creative goods and services averaged 8.7% annually (Report on Creative Economy, UNCTAD, 2008; a summary is available in http://www.unctad.org/sp/docs/dtc20082ceroverview_sp.pdf). Besides, it is worthwhile mentioning that these sectors are characterized by their willingness to take risks, invest in new talents and aesthetics, promote creativity and cultural diversity while creating, at the same time, multiple positive synergies in areas such as the acceptance and use of new technologies of information and communication (NTIC) and the promotion of research and innovation.

9Being a creative manifestation, a source of expression and a driving force for dialogue, culture is essential in the creation, interpretation and reinvention of value systems, collective memory and “ways of living together” in a society. By providing a creative way out to expression, both individually and collectively, culture can promote a sense of individual well-being and a better understanding of and greater respect for social and cultural diversity. Social cohesion and intercultural dialogue are important human development markers as they generate trust and social capital, favors the inclusion of minorities and help building stable and sound societies where individuals feel empowered and masters of their destiny not only from the individual, but especially from the collective point of view.

10Having this approach in mind, culture is a “means” for development, since it adds value to interventions in other development spheres such as health, environmental protection, governance or education. The cultural approach to development increases the relevance, sustainability, impact and efficiency of interventions thus adjusting to the values, traditions, practices and beliefs of their partners, beneficiaries and main actors.

11For more information on the full table of dimensions and subdimensions of the Culture for Development Indicators Suite visit http://www.unesco.org/new/es/culture/themes/cultural-diversity/convention-tools/culture-for-development-indicators/seven-connected-dimensions.