ADS 2021
Africa Dialogue Series

ADVOCACY PAPER

THEME: CULTURAL IDENTITY AND OWNERSHIP: RESHAPING MINDSETS

Sub-theme 1: Sustainable peace for development: factoring in history
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1. BACKGROUND

Africa's long history of civilization from the Pharaonic, Kush, Punt-lands, Carthage and the ancient civilization of Mali, to the pyramids (the oldest stone building in history), temples and castles has contributed vastly to African culture and heritage, and has helped shape the identity of Africans as an intangible asset, which when well harnessed has a great potential to foster economic growth, sustainable development and peace on the continent.

Africa is known as a continent with a very rich history of oral tradition characterized by a wide variety of genres that convey all cultural values which belong to the African continent, including its diversity in languages, customs, religions, tribes, and arts. The Nubian heritage inspired by the Nile River with its arts and practices related to the river and its craft and forms of oral expression practiced and created anew by Nubia societies and groups in the regions of Egypt and Sudan is a case in point. Also, the rich heritage of the Baggara and Abbala tribes who traveled seasonally, and are known for their transhumance in the regions of Chad and Sudan, to the Maghreb countries with equally rich cultures in terms of food, celebrations, customs and practices shared between Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, shows how culturally rich the African continent is in its heritage.

2. A CALL FOR ACTION!

The "Africa we want" can only become a reality if African history and oral traditions are preserved and passed along to newer generations. This rich heritage and wisdom can foster peace when young people are taught the importance of African unity and identity through cultural heritage education. Reimagined and well supported cultural institutions need to preserve more than precious artifacts but also bring out intrinsic cultural values in to daily life, thus actively shaping a rich African identity.

Over time, a greater sense of Africa's common cross-border culture and heritage will permeate across the continent with a renewed sense of Pan-Africanism and African unity, with shared understanding and respect for all of Africa's diversities and heritage to ensure sustained peace, development and prosperity.

To achieve these aspirations, the following points are a call for action for all Africans!

First, the need to change the African narratives by reimagining Africa's influence on the world and the world's influence on Africa:

Generally, Africa is presented as a receiver of gifts from others, of knowledge, of religion, of science, technology of cultural advancement. In a word modernity arise from the outside. Even in terms of historical representation, it is as if Africa was suspended in an empty void before it was "discovered" by Europeans. Africans must categorically reject this narrative and focus on dismantling this misrepresentation by focusing on the following:

- Africans need to redefine the concept of modernity and civilization, decoupling it from ideals solely espoused abroad. Alternatively, Africans should push for and shift perceptions towards an exchange of ideas on a

plethora of topics ranging from mainstreaming traditions, redefining ideals of beauty and experimenting with cuisines, rejecting a one directional flow of these elements into Africa but not out of Africa.

- Africans need to embrace indigenous knowhow including religious and cultural practices, such as symbolisms in wedding traditions, coming of age ceremonies, and traditional approaches to healing and medicine. These cultural identities should not be relegated as "non-modern" or somehow "inferior". Instead more work needs to be done in cataloging, preserving and teaching these ideas, their origins and their significance for a new generation as a way of weaving a rich tapestry of shared identities.

- Long before its colonial history, Africa had several inclusive and participatory forms of local governance systems. These traditional governance systems, along with conflict prevention, management and resolution mechanisms were weakened and/or destroyed with the emergency of colonial structures. Africans need to revive these traditional mechanisms, such as those for conflict resolution, and the wisdom contained within and incorporate them into formal structures to promote peace through local ties, shared ideals and intertwined futures.

Second, the need to build shared identities and pride by preserving tangible and intangible cultural heritage:

African heritage sites constitute only 8% of the more that 1000 World Heritage Sites. What is ever more challenging is that 40% of these sites are in danger, where 17 of the 35 World Heritage Sites in danger are in Africa. These heritage sites along with Africa's intangible cultural heritages must be safeguarded and preserved as foundations for building a peaceful young generation. Africans can achieve this by:

- Educating children to have pride in their cultural heritages and for this heritage to be fully integrated into their formal and informal education. Heritage education for children and comes as an important part for safeguarding and preserving culture, history and identity. The oral tradition of stories needs to be translated into books, cartoons, comics, games, TV shows and films that are age appropriate and can capture the imagination of young children. While the creativity to bring these stories to life is not lacking, funding and technical knowhow are limiting factors.

- Reimagining cultural institutions, such as museum, to play an important role in supporting peace education, enhancing opportunities for life-long learning and preserving cultural values. In doing so these institutions must move beyond the display of cultural and historical artifacts geared not just to tourists, but as education centers for local populations as well. These institutions can play critical roles in incorporating Africa's tangible and intangible cultural heritage to shape day to day values, to understand the past, atone for mistakes and build on shared ideals to pave a way for a peaceful future.

- African cultural institutions must be empowered and supported to present the breadth of Africa's rich intangible cultural heritage to children and youth, moving from narrow local scopes to include a continental view, focusing on similarities and shared nature of values, challenges and identities, for sustainable peace and sustainable development of the whole.

- Local communities should be empowered through education of the cultural, economic and historical values of cultural artifacts both as a preservation measure but also as a protection measure. In addition to neglect and underfunding that threaten cultural sites, these sites also become targets in some conflicts, exposing them to looting and destructions. Local populations need support in preserving these sites through an understanding of the nontangible, intrinsic values of cultural sites and artefacts, beyond any temporary monetary gains they may bring, especially in conflict situations. Protection measures can also be enhanced by training border police and customs officials on how to fight the illicit trafficking of cultural artefacts.