

## **CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND PERSPECTIVES**

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Honourable Members of Parliament, fellow speakers in the panel, ladies and gentlemen...

I am an independent evaluator of development assistance. I have had the privilege of evaluating a wide range of different sectors over a period of 20 years. Culture and development is one area I work in and I remain engaged in this area, because I have seen the unique and important results it can achieve on the ground.

I would like to share with you the experience and perspectives of other countries working in the field of culture and development.

### **SLIDE 2**

Among donor governments, culture is seen to have a role in **three aspects** of development assistance:

First, Culture can contribute to socio economic growth through investments in the creative industries. The UN estimates that the World trade of creative goods and services totalled US\$ 600 billion in 2011.

Secondly, culture is seen as having a role in fostering peace- and bridge-building. This is nothing new. Culture was the foundation of the bridge-building among the Nordic countries that led to the close cooperation we enjoy today. Since then, culture has played a role in the peace processes of for example, the former Yugoslavia.

Third, culture has an important role in efforts to promote democratic development, good governance and human rights. A strong and well-functioning democracy depends on a vibrant and independent culture sector to voice social, political and moral concerns.

There are studies and reports that provide evidence of the role of culture in all three of these areas.

### **SLIDE 3**

**So how do countries work with culture in developing countries?**

### **SLIDE 4**

This roughly depends on what kind of country they are. The large and post-colonial countries, and here I mean the USAs, Great Britains, Spains and Frances of the world, put **cultural diplomacy** at the fore. In this work, national institutes (like the Göthe Institute, British Council, etc) are central. Their main mission is to promote their national culture and their language. While they may support exchange & dialogue among peoples, the main aim is not reducing poverty in developing countries.

When this group of countries do support culture as part of their development effort, they tend to be ad hoc.

#### **SLIDE 5**

Another important type of donor are the larger foundations such as Ford Foundation, Soros's Open Society Foundation and the Prince Claus Fund. These tend to have progressive strategies that focus on creativity and free expression. Civil society and dialogue tend to be central components of their culture support.

#### **SLIDE 6**

A third group of donors are what are often termed the like-minded donors. They are smaller countries with a commitment to poverty reduction and free expression. Denmark is included in this group. Leading up to the mid-2000s, this group was relatively active in the culture and development arena. For example, Sweden played a leading role with an average of 225 million kronor a year for its culture programme. Switzerland set a goal of dedicating 1% of its development budget to culture. Norway developed a comprehensive strategy and Denmark continued to expand its work in the area.

#### **SLIDE 7**

Today the situation is different. The Swiss have not met their 1% goal. Because of institutional reform and economic downturn Swedish Sida drastically reduced its cultural commitments in 2007. It has however expressed new ambitions in this area, but the process is on hold for the moment. The Dutch and Norwegians have held low profiles.

Meanwhile Denmark burst to the forefront in 2013 with its innovative strategy. Its well-grounded and refreshing approach served as an inspiration for national institutes and cultural funds in Europe. UNESCO has been very interested in the Danish approach and the UN Secretary General mentioned Denmark in reports. The pending closure of CKU is thus of course greatly regretted by many in the culture and development community. It will be missed.

#### **SLIDE 8**

But there are also positive developments going on. Some of the national institutes are starting to recognise the benefits of a southern perspective, like the one applied by CKU. A few are being given a larger role in the country's development work. An example is the British Council which has established a culture and development entity.

Second, the developments in the Middle East are creating a genuine understanding of the importance of both culture and freedom of expression. Inter-cultural communication and dialogue are higher on the agenda. The concept of Inclusion is becoming central and seen as critical to reverse negative trends towards radicalisation.

And while cultural aspects make a very **minor** appearance in the **new** UN Sustainable Development Goals, at least there is **some** recognition of them compared to the 2015 millennium goals.

#### **SLIDE 9**

But there are quite a few challenges ahead. First, the mainstream development community generally fail to embrace the role of culture in development. Why? For a start, culture is a complex concept. It is hard to define. Second, the most important results from cultural

programmes involves changing attitudes and social transformation. This takes time. Third, results achieved can be difficult to measure (but not impossible). Fourth, paradoxically it is a disadvantage that effective cultural projects **do not cost** much – because this makes the **administration** of the support relatively **more** expensive.

Another challenge that looms ahead is that of **rising cultural relativism**. As China plays an increasingly large role on the world stage and in developing countries in particular, its influence will increase. Its so-called “human rights with Chinese characters” in which freedom of expression is overlooked, may inspire certain leaders of the developing world.

## SLIDE 10

### What are the needs ahead?

First, there is a need for leadership with vision in the sector. Denmark will leave behind a vacuum by closing CKU.

Second, there is a need for greater championing of freedom of expression through culture – this is a prerequisite for democratic development (through critical thinking) and socioeconomic growth (through creativity and innovation). Cultural freedom, diversity, the voices of the excluded AND democratic culture itself need to be promoted.

## SLIDE 11

Third, there is a need to support **peace** and bridge-building **within** countries, **among** people and **between** regions. This includes supporting dialogue to find common ground and promote mutual understanding. It also means support to culture in conflict areas – from documenting what war is doing to society; to arts and cultural activities for trauma & reconciliation.

Fourth, there is a need for resources. While there are quite a lot of small sums available from different donors here and there, long-term support has become practically non-existent as has predictable funding.

## SLIDE 12

These needs that I mention assume that supporting culture in developing countries is worth it. But can it make a difference? Does it matter? I would like to answer that by reading one of many quotes I have gathered from the ground level. This one is from a young Palestinian man.

## SLIDE 13

“I used to be one of the **violent** people. I was **dangerous**. Before, my **gun** did the talking. **Now theatre** has given me **another** way to talk. Power is not all in your muscles. I can write, perform and I have power **within** myself. Before I did not know how to speak out and I was afraid. I can now reach people with my messages. I make society better by teaching **children** to think, imagine, express themselves and act. When I had a gun, I was afraid to die. Now I am not afraid because now I can **touch** people's hearts.”