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Integrating Culture in Planning & Action for Sustainable Development : Role of ICH NGOs

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Abstract

The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) and its Operational Directives outline the important role of NGOs in creating awareness on the Convention, generating space for dialogue and the exchange of good practices and challenges for inputs to programming and policy making at varied levels, and facilitating community participation in taking safeguarding measures through knowledge and tools support and capacity building. The contributions of ICH NGOs have been manifold, including building the capacity of communities, researching and documenting ICH, upholding distinct identities of places and communities through cultural tourism, facilitating transnational flow of creativity, strengthening cultural resources, and developing artist organizations. Now the ICH NGOs need to play a critical role in enabling the inclusion of cultural dimensions in the post-2015 development policy framework. So far culture is not identified as a goal in the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, culture may be explicitly integrated as a target or as

enabler in SDG goals like Poverty Eradication, Building Shared Prosperity & Promoting Equality, Quality Education & Lifelong learning, Gender Equality and Women Empowerment, Strengthening Global Partnership for Development, Ecosystems & Biodiversity, and Creating Peaceful and Inclusive Societies. Through knowledge sharing, networking, and mediating, they can effectively raise awareness among decision makers on the importance of the cultural dimension in development policies. By formulating innovative culture-based development projects with the participation of traditional bearers and practitioners, they can contribute to adoption of locally owned creative economy policies. Key areas of action will include mapping cultural resources; developing indicators on socio economic gains based on heritage, creativity, and cultural resources; and supporting capacity building for managing arts and strengthening the value chain.

I. Introduction

NGOs have earned a key place in the global development agenda owing to their ability to effectively harness social capital for articulating and advocating citizens' rights, interests and demands. The NGOs working in the realm of intangible cultural heritage across the globe, referred to as ICH NGOs in the rest of this document, have pioneered innovative solutions to address developmental challenges using a culture-based approach. They have enabled the participation of tradition bearers and practitioners in safeguarding efforts. Their efforts have also led to a strong, sizable, and valuable productive sector composed of creative and cultural resources and activities across the world. They have also played a critical role in enabling marginalized communities to participate fully in their cultural life, thus strengthening pluralism and reducing conflict. ICH NGOs vary in terms of stature, constituency, objectives, geographical coverage, etc. Some NGOs are community-based organizations that are representative of traditional ICH bearers. Others play a facilitating role supporting capacity building, safeguarding and strengthening the value chain for generating creative industries, and mediating in the representation of culture. Some are the non-governmental counterparts of governmental bodies. (www.ichngoforum.org)

The international community now acknowledges culture as a 'driver and

enabler of development' and its critical role in supporting socio-economic development and social inclusion. In the following paragraphs, we first delve into how culture contributes to sustainable development and take a look at standard-setting instruments and international initiatives for integrating cultural dimensions in a developmental framework. We then present the possible roles and action areas for ICH NGOs as a harbinger of sustainable development using cultural capital as assets for transformative action.

II. Culture & Sustainable Development

Sustainable development implies equitable environmental, economic, and social well-being for today and tomorrow. Cultural heritage, creative industries, sustainable cultural tourism, and cultural infrastructure contribute to improved income and job opportunities, especially for women, who are the traditional bearers of ICH and youth. As per UNCTAD data published in May 2013, total world trade of creative goods and services amounted to US\$624 billion (UNDP, 2013). Cultural tourism is an interesting case study. With the number of annual tourists exceeding one billion, tourism represents 9 per cent of the world's gross domestic product, 30 per cent of total exports and services, and one out of eleven jobs. As per World Bank, 25 per cent of tourism revenue goes to people below the poverty line in some of the poorest countries, and tourism employs young people at almost twice the rate than other industries (UNGA, 2014).

Revitalization of ICH leads to strengthened cultural identities, improved self-esteem, and pride among the indigenous communities, leading to social inclusion. The process empowers marginalized communities to participate fully in social and cultural life, and they get a platform for acting as a social and political agency. Increased social capital and active citizenship fosters inclusive development. As Irina Bokova said in a recent debate on culture and development, "Culture can foster participation and craft a more balanced and meaningful development model for the people and by the people" (UNGA, 2014).

Multicultural exchange and interaction through festivals, collaborative art workshops, and cultural tourism promotes cultural pluralism, social cohesion, and peace through multicultural dialogue, leading to a shared understanding

and greater empathy for the ‘other’. Global partnerships forged through the transnational flow of creativity and multicultural and multinational dialogue and exchange gives people the right to access their own heritage as well as that of others.

Protection and preservation of cultural diversity and biodiversity and the rejuvenation of traditional systems of resource management contributes to environmental sustainability. In Africa, for example, traditional leaders and doctors are vital in gaining confidence to strengthen the health care sector, to combat HIV, and to enhance education (UNGA:2014). Culture-based livelihoods and enterprises also contribute to a green economy as they are inherently based on intellectual resources and entail low-resource consumption. Quality education enriched by culture transmits shared values, knowledge, and skills and supports lifelong learning.

ICH is all about people, so investment in ICH directly benefits communities and helps in strengthening identity, cultural diversity, skill development, and empowerment as well as developing creative enterprises and generating new resources. Thus investment in ICH is critical for achieving all three pillars of sustainable development and a natural corollary is the significant role of ICH NGOs in achieving the goals of sustainable development.

ICH » Skill » Enterprise » Resource Generation » Sharing

ICH » Identity » Owning Development Charters» Impact on MDGs

ICH » Recognition » Social Inclusion » Pride » Aspiration » Safeguarding

Investment in ICH » Development of Ecosystem, Enabling Growth » Sustainable Development

III. Culture and Post-2015 Development Framework

Today we are in a critical phase in human development, when nations are reviewing their progress towards Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and shaping a new post-2015 development agenda. There has been a paradigm shift in development strategies, which are moving away from industrial/ production intensive models to human-centred sustainable approaches. When the MDGs were adopted in 2000 by the United Nations General Assembly in Resolution 55/2, the importance of culture was not explicitly recognized. However since then, several instruments have

been adopted by the international community to strengthen the linkage between culture and development.

UNESCO approved the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005). Reports have been prepared by the UNDP and the UNCATD on culture and development and creative economy. The Outcome Document of the 2010 MDG Summit recognized the contribution of culture in achieving the MDGs. The UN General Assembly Resolutions in 2010 (65/166) and 2011 (66/208) recommended mainstreaming culture into development policies and strategies. The increasing trend of integrating culture in development agenda is manifested at the level of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) where we see culture is included in 70 per cent of the UNDAF work plans by early 2012 in comparison to 30 per cent in the 1990s (UNESCO International Congress, 2013). The outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and the 2013 ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review acknowledged the importance of culture and cultural diversity for sustainable development. The International Congress “Culture: Key to Sustainable Development” held in Hangzhou at China in May 2013 specifically focused on understanding the linkages between culture and sustainable development in view of the post-2015 development framework. The World Culture Forum held at Bali had deliberations on the impact of culture on the three dimensions of sustainable development—environmental, economic, and social.

However, developing a shared understanding and recognition on integrating culture explicitly in global, regional, and national policy frameworks still remains a challenge. Various international cultural agencies are now advocating for recognizing culture as a fourth pillar of sustainable development in future development frameworks. So far, culture is not mentioned as a focus area of the SDGs. In October 2013, four global cultural organizations—the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies, Agenda 21 for Culture, Culture Action Europe, and the International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity—published a plea to integrate culture as a Millennium Development Goal in the United Nations’ post-2015 agenda. Finally, the United Nations General Assembly adopted by consensus a resolution (68/223) on culture and

sustainable development on 20 December 2013 that asks Member States and all UN organizations to “give due consideration to the role of culture and sustainable development in the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda”. The increased attention to culture in the UN system under UNESCO’s leadership was appreciated (UNDP,2013, UCLG- 2013, UNGA 2013).

IV. Areas of Action

ICH NGOs are already working for community capacity building for managing local assets, building community-based organizations/institutions, and strengthening their business and managerial skills. While their role as cultural mediators have so far dealt with safeguarding and representation of heritage, they now have the significant tasks of raising awareness among decision makers on the importance of the cultural dimension of development policies and also enabling participation of traditional bearers and practitioners in policymaking processes so that appropriate owned creative economy policies are adopted. Key areas of action as detailed in the following paragraphs are mapping of cultural resources; building evidence on socio-economic gains resulting from revitalizing cultural assets, mediation, and linkages among different stakeholders, including the government and the communities; and supporting capacity building for managing arts and heritage at various levels.

V. Mapping Cultural Resources

The community of practice on safeguarding ICH has developed standards for inventorying of ICH elements. To link cultural resources with a development agenda, it is imperative to create databases on the ICH practitioners. In India, for example, there is no statistical data on the number of artists and cultural practitioners in the country nor is there any information on the contribution of the cultural sector in terms of employment and GDP. The National Census of India does not have any classification for artists or crafts persons, nor does India’s National Industry Classification have any economic activity categorization

pertaining to performing arts or crafts. As a result, the creative artistic skills of a large part of the population remain mostly unrecognized. Owing to poverty and the lack of scope for performance and practice in the changing socio-cultural environment, the practitioners stop nurturing the art form, leading to loss of heritage and cultural diversity. Mapping cultural resources, including the traditional bearers and practitioners, is critical not only for drawing up effective plans for revival but also identifying benchmarks for monitoring project outcomes and assessing creative talents and community assets.

VI. Establishing Enabling Legislative and Regulatory Environments

ICH NGOs have a key role in mediating necessary conditions for encouraging creativity; recognizing artists, artisans, and traditional knowledge bearers; and addressing the needs for minorities, disadvantaged groups, indigenous people, and women. Culture-based development programmes have contributed to the establishment of supportive legislative and regulatory frameworks. In Cambodia, for example, the Living Human Treasures (LHT) concept led to the implementation of a royal decree to implement a national LHT system. In China, a major achievement is the inclusion of culture-based ethnic minority development in policy recommendations for the twelfth Five-Year Plan on Social and Economic Development of Ethnic Minority Areas. (MDG-F, 2013)

Inequality is a challenge in a creative economy. Though ideas and creativity are globally sourced, the global north has largely greater control over distribution. In India for example, although considerable efforts were made since independence to promote the diverse cultural heritage of the country, funding support was limited for folk arts and crafts. The eleventh plan implemented from 2007 to 2012 was influenced by the 2003 and 2005 conventions and focused on cultural diversity. It recommended that “all forms of art and culture should have an equal footing and deserve financial and other support.... Accordingly, the imbalances in flow of funds for various activities under promotion and dissemination of performing arts will have to be set right, particularly in favour of vanishing folk arts and crafts that cannot be pitted against classical arts to compete for resources and media attention”

(planningcommission.nic.in).

- Countries are at present in different stages of enabling supportive policy/ institutional and regulatory environment at the national level. The Creative Economy Report identifies five categories as follows:
- Countries with coherent creative economy policy having human-centred approach
- Countries with consumption driven “essentially economistic creative industry agenda”
- Countries having sector driven and/or limited frameworks despite recognition of the creative industries paradigm
- Countries that, despite awareness, have not adopted creative industries paradigm owing to the nature of their cultural sectors
- Countries that have not recognized the creative economy as such. (UNDP,2013)
- Weak governance is another challenge in accessing schemes and programmes governments may have on offer for small- and medium-sized creative enterprises. The latter also need greater efforts to support value chains.

VII. Networking and Sharing of Knowledge and Practices

Lack of evidence-based analysis and absence of comprehensive statistical framework for integrating culture in development have hindered the inclusion of culture in development frameworks. Building a knowledge community of ICH NGOs is important for accessing the wealth of experience developed, sharing best practices and tools, and developing better alignment strategies and action for lobbying to include culture. Currently, in absence of a systematic sharing platform, such knowledge is not open for public access. Knowledge management is also critical for developing clear guidance and monitoring mechanisms and capacity building “to identify, formulate culture and development projects and implement them through more adequate, more relevant and more informed methodologies that meet project realities and objectives directly” (MDG-F: 2013). The ICH NGO community can catalyse such efforts by working together to develop concrete delivery-based projects along with identifying indicators for improved assessment and monitoring of impact.

VIII. Strengthening Management of Arts Organizations, Institutions, and Cultural Heritage

Research and capacity building for arts management are two other areas where the ICH NGOs may contribute. Evidence building necessitates macro-level research on the cultural sector and its linkage with social and economic sectors. ICH NGOs have already contributed in developing artist/community-based organizations managing cultural resources and nurturing creative enterprise. By working closely with research and academic institutions, they can develop networks to support interdisciplinary research and training for producing able managers and institutions.

IX. Conclusion

ICH NGOs can become catalysts in sustainable development where people can “lead the lives they have reason to value” through full participation in cultural life (UCLG,2013). Culture has the potential of developing a micro-economy, creating opportunity for transformative development where people labelled as ‘unskilled’ or ‘lacking employable skills’ in conventional development pathways become stakeholders in creative economies. ICH NGOs are equipped with knowledge, experience, resources, and community linkages to innovate delivery-based programmes and projects addressing both cultural rights and sustainable development aspects. Their efforts will be leveraged through the creation of effective platforms for knowledge sharing and networking.