UN Mongolia Development Dialogue
Harnessing Culture for Development in Mongolia

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UNESCO REMARKS

by

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On behalf of UNESCO, it is a great pleasure to address this UN Mongolia Development Dialogue on the theme of Harnessing Culture for Development in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Culture is who we are; it defines how we relate to the world. Culture, defined as “the set of distinctive spiritual and material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or a social group”, (Mondiacult, Mexico, 1982) is a dynamic force for change.

UNESCO is convinced that culture both enables and drives development. As a means, culture is an enabler of sustainability, through the specific contributions that it makes – as knowledge capital and a sector of activity – to promote inclusive social and economic development, environmental sustainability, harmony, peace and security. Cultural resources are essential elements for the development of people and communities.

As an end, culture is a driver for sustainable development, a source of meaning and vitality, a wellspring of creativity and innovation, and a resource to address challenges and find appropriate solutions. Culture enhances the opportunities of all human beings, framed within a rights-based approach and the respect for diversity. Access to – and participation in – culture is a fundamental right and an essential dimension of life. Culture enables individuals “to live and be what they choose”. It also promotes understanding and exchange among peoples.

But we must acknowledge that there is no prescribed pathway for the development of a society, no single model towards which development strategies should be directed. In short, ‘one size does not fit all’. And to be most effective, development approaches should be adapted to local contexts. They should respond to local needs. A sustainable development strategy cannot be culturally neutral: it should be not only culturally sensitive but should also capitalize on the gains resulting from the dynamic interaction between cultures and the economic and social benefits generated by the culture sector.
For UNESCO the cultural dimension of development underlies the protection and promotion of cultural diversity in different forms, which has been repositioned and promoted over the last 40 years by UNESCO through a range of normative and technical instruments and tools. These are especially the seven culture Conventions such as the World Heritage Convention, the ICH Convention or the most recent Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions which was the first convention to place sustainable development explicitly at its core. It emphasizes the right of all States to enact their own cultural policies to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions and facilitates international cooperation for development by strengthening cultural industries (in developing countries).

Furthermore, a diversified and mainstreamed cultural approach can help respond to contemporary challenges, from poverty eradication to issues such as resource management, safeguarding biodiversity and climate change. Moreover, only culturally sensitive action can successfully address a wide range of societal issues and problems (e.g. HIV/AIDS, family planning, social inequalities etc.).

Despite this evidence the role of culture in and for development has not yet been explicitly recognized at all levels, including the MDGs, and UNESCO’s role and commitment is to address this issue with world leaders, the UN system, civil society, the global community etc. This global commitment has been affirmed in two consecutive “Culture and Development” Resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly in 2010 and 2011, and one in 2013, calling for the integration of culture into global and national development policies and strategies and inviting Member States to cooperate internationally and to support national legal frameworks and policies for the protection, promotion and preservation of cultural expressions.

This is progress but more concrete efforts are required at all levels to ensure that culture is at the heart of transformative change and that the integration of culture within development efforts is crucial to tackle a large number of the current global challenges more effectively and sustainably. Let me share with you two examples of such efforts.

In May 2013, UNESCO organized in partnership with China the “Hangzhou International Congress on Culture: Key to Sustainable Development”, which brought together, for the first time in 15 years, a world of evidence to showcase culture’s vital role as an enabler of sustainability. The final Hangzhou Declaration adopted by the congress’ 500 participants urges governments, civil society and the private sector to make full use of the potential of culture to address development challenges. The Declaration includes a clear plea that culture be included in the post-2015 UN Development Agenda with a goal of its own.

Another effort to highlight the transformative power of culture is represented by the UNESCO/UNDP joint 2013 Creative Economy Report. This landmark publication focuses on creative economy at the local level in developing countries and speaks specifically to decision makers, demonstrating some of the key factors that make creative economy’s initiatives successful in the field.

Let me also turn to Mongolia. Mongolia has demonstrated its commitment in advocating the role of culture for national development by organizing the “Culture and Development” conference in
December 2012 initiated by the Mongolian State University of Arts and Culture and UNESCO Beijing Office. This conference has been acknowledged as an important step to promote culture as a key factor for sustainable development; to promote Mongolia’s cultural heritage and traditions in the world; to enhance Mongolia’s competitiveness by valuing creative production and innovation in the cultural sectors; to attract interest about 21st century’s new trends in the art field; and to share experiences with the private sector, researchers as well as people related with culture and creative industries and to disseminate these trends to the individuals, communities and government accordingly. This commitment has been expressed in the Ulaanbaatar Declaration adopted by the participants.

Today’s Dialogue is a further step in the culture and development discussion for Mongolia, bringing together a wide range of stakeholders to reflect upon the role of culture for development in measurable aims and targets:

- Integrate culture within all development policies and programmes;
- Mobilize culture and mutual understanding to foster peace;
- Ensure equal access to, and participation in, culture, especially for minorities, women and youth;
- Leverage culture for poverty reduction and inclusive economic development;
- Leverage cultural industries as powerful engines of economic growth;
- Build on culture to promote environmental sustainability;

I wish you all a fruitful and successful Dialogue.

Thank you.