

Cultural Diversity and Empowerment: Co-operation during Changing Times

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In this presentation, an introduction is made to the conference topic, its streams and objectives through UNESCO culture activities and programmes that exemplify how UNESCO has progressed in the enhancement of co-operation among stakeholders, and incorporating private and corporate sectors in culture and development.

I would like to congratulate SPAFA and its director, my friend and colleague Pisit Charoenwongsa, for having the foresight to convene this international conference on *Issues of Culture, Context and Choice in Development*. Such a topic could not be more timely in our world today as we face not only the economic challenges of globalised development but also the consequent social challenges of cultural decontextualization.

I would also like to acknowledge IDP Education Australia and the Japan Foundation Asia Centre for recognising the seriousness of these global challenges as they apply to our region and to thank them for generously supporting this international conference.

I have studied the participants' list, and know that we have brought together an impressive range of talent, intelligence and professionalism. I am confident therefore that our deliberations will contribute to deepening global understanding of the role of culture in development, as well as advancing our regional capacity to put the best of these ideas into action.

In my presentation this morning, I have been asked to plunge headfirst into the ranging current of ideas from which our discussion over the next three days will be channelled into three distinct but convergent "streams:"

- Security, solidarity and co-operation
- The changing landscape of knowledge
- Reconciling requirements with reality

I have also agreed to illustrate with concrete examples from projects initiated by UNESCO, ways in which we have attempted to learn to swim in the swirling currents of our times without drowning.

The Dialogue Between Culture and Development

But before going into these examples, let me spend a few minutes placing our debate into its contemporary global context, in the wake of the World Summit on Sustainable Development which recently took place in Johannesburg.

The main topic before the Johannesburg Summit was a critical examination of the obstacles thwarting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2000.

For those few of you who are not familiar with the Millennium Development Goals, briefly summarised they are:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

What is immediately obvious to all of us, is that these goals, as worthy and ambitious as they no doubt are, will surely fail to be achieved because they are framed outside of any geographical, historical, or cultural context.

This omission of the cultural context of development is truly disturbing, especially considering the efforts made by UNESCO over the past ten years to mainstream culture into the international development paradigm.

The World Decade for Culture and Development (1988-1997) produced a series of handbooks on mainstreaming culture into the various fields of

development: agriculture, health, education, technology, tourism and so on.

The highpoint of the Decade was the promulgation in 1995 by UNESCO and the UN General Assembly, of the World Report on Culture and Development entitled *Our Creative Diversity*, in which an ambitious international action agenda was outlined, consisting of:

- Reporting on the progress of linking culture and development
- Preparing new culturally-sensitive development strategies
- Mobilising culture heritage volunteers
- Adopting an international plan for gender equality
- Enhancing access, diversity and competition of the international media system
- Ensuring media rights and self-regulation
- Protecting cultural rights as human rights
- Promoting global ethics in global governance

In 1998, at the conclusion of the Decade, a global summit was held in Stockholm on Cultural Policies for Development, with the aim to assist governments to put into practice the recommendations of the World Report. In Stockholm, the world's governments adopted 5 policy objectives:

- To make cultural policy one of the key components of development strategy
- To promote creativity and participation in cultural life
- To reinforce policy and practice to safeguard and enhance the cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, movable and immovable, and to promote cultural industries
- To promote cultural and linguistic diversity in and for the information society
- To make more human and financial resources available for cultural development

Next year there will be a Stockholm + 5 review of the progress towards achieving these policy objectives.

To ensure that the international development agenda keeps pace with national policies in regard to culture and development, at its last General Conference in 2001, UNESCO Member States adopted the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, which is intended to take its place alongside the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as a fundamental document of international discourse.

And to this end at the Johannesburg Summit, UNESCO opened a debate on the integration of the principles and action agenda of the Universal

Declaration on Cultural Diversity into the Millennium Development Goals.

This was accomplished by the adoption of two paragraphs on cultural diversity, which read:

- *We are determined to ensure that our rich diversity, which is our collective strength, will be used for constructive partnership for change and for the achievement for the common goal of sustainable development.*
- *Recognising the importance of building human solidarity, we urge the promotion of dialogue and co-operation among the world's civilisations and peoples, irrespective of race, disabilities, religion, language, culture and tradition.*

Clearly there is a torrent of debate around the issue of culture and its role in development; and just as clearly there is a foment of thinking on these issues which is resulting in an entirely new understanding of the immense power of culture to affect our world for good – or for evil.

The Challenge of Cultural Diversity

What does all this mean for us in practical terms, as we try to swim in the currents of everyday life, trying to make our communities better, more accommodating, more sustainable, places in which to achieve our aspirations?

There can be no doubt that dialogue between culture and development needs fresh energy and purpose. And it needs new and better ideas for forging unbreakable bonds between culture and development.

The Director General of UNESCO has identified three challenges facing culture at the beginning of the 21st century, and in the wake of the events of September 11:

- (i) globalisation, which in its powerful expansion of market principles has created new forms of inequality, which seem to foster culture conflict rather than cultural pluralism;
- (ii) states, which were able to handle the demands of culture and education, are increasingly unable to handle on their own the cross-border flow of ideas, images and resources which affect cultural development; and
- (iii) the growing divides in both digital and conventional literacy have made the renewal of cultural debates and resources an increasingly elite monopoly, divorced from the capabilities and interests of large segments of the world's population, who are now in danger of cultural as well as financial exclusion.

These challenges correspond with the three streams we are discussing in this conference:

- Security, solidarity and co-operation
- The changing landscape of knowledge
- Reconciling requirements with reality

Security, Solidarity and Co-operation

In this stream we want to address four key issues:

- i. What factors encourage citizens to take the initiative and pursue courses of action to address their concerns and what factors hinder them, including issues of language, literacy and gender.
- ii. How to strengthen, promote, encourage and catalyse the wide variety of initiatives by citizens to address issues and problems in their everyday lives.
- iii. Cultural autonomy focusing on issues of identity and ownership.
- iv. Exploring the balance between interventionism and integration.

By way of practical illustration let me introduce to you a UNESCO project which attempts to tackle one of the thorniest cultural issues in our region: the seemingly unstoppable yet clearly unsustainable juggernaut of tourism, which is obviously destroying both the cultural and natural heritage in its path. The project is entitled: **Culture Heritage Management and Tourism: Models for Co-operation Among Stakeholders.**

Over the past four years we have been working with 8 pilot sites around the region to answer the question: how would you go about developing a truly sustainable and profitable culture tourism industry in your community?

Over the course of this project, communities have:

- developed vision statements of what socio-cultural development should look like in their communities
- tested various strategies for tourism promotion
- kept track of indicators of progress made in obtaining benefits, as well as costs involved especially those concerning resource sustainability
- analysed how the costs and benefits are distributed among members of the community

Four models have emerged from this exercise which can be used as policy framing documents to guide a radically new form of community-based culture tourism. The models are very detailed involving indicators and feedback loops, but in brief summary they involve:

- *Models for fiscal management of heritage conservation, maintenance and development at the municipal level*, achieved through (i) review of the impact of current income-generating mechanisms, and by (ii) identification and implementation of new income-generating strategies.
- *Models for investment by the tourism industry in the sustainability of the cultural heritage resource base and supporting infrastructure*, achieved through (i) education of tourism operators on the value and conservation needs of the heritage, and by (ii) formulating mechanisms by which the tourism industry can contribute financially and in other ways to preservation activities.
- *Models for community education and skills training leading to employment in the heritage conservation and culture tourism sectors*, including activities associated with intangible cultural heritage, with an emphasis on new opportunities for women, youth and the elderly, achieved by (i) identifying new business and employment opportunities which can be made available locally, and by (ii) designing programmes of skills training plus financial incentives to turn these potential opportunities into reality at the local level.
- *Models for conflict resolution among tourism promoters, property developers, local residents and heritage conservationists*, achieved by (i) providing a structural venue where all stakeholders can raise and discuss their situations and concerns as well as receive education and information about heritage conservation needs and tourism development plans, and through (ii) the empowerment of local stakeholders through joint participatory and planning and implementation of both heritage conservation projects and culture tourism activities.

Then the question is, do these models stand up to practical application in a wide variety of circumstances?

To test this, we have applied the models to a very difficult situation: the introduction of community-based ecotourism among indigenous cultural groups inhabiting the highlands of northern Laos.

The objectives of the **Nam Ha Ecotourism Project** are:

- To use tourism as a tool in an integrated approach to rural development;
- To ensure that tourism serves to contribute to, and not detract from, the conservation and preservation of the natural heritage;
- To use tourism as a means of validating traditional

cultures, thereby promoting and supporting their continuity and preservation;

- To ensure community participation and management of tourism development, with the aim of protecting the cultural rights of the affected indigenous people;
- To respect traditionally evolved practices of land use and stewardship;
- To enable local communities to preserve their environments while simultaneously developing their economic potential through ecotourism and cultural tourism;
- To provide training and human capacity building in skills relevant to the local tourism industry to the members of local communities; and
- To integrate public and private sector activities.

This successful project has recently won two development awards — one from the public sector, the UNDP Award for Poverty Reduction 2001, and one from the private sector, the British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Awards 2002.

The Changing Landscape of Knowledge

Now let's look at the second stream, and another example.

In the second stream we also want to direct our discussion towards four key issues

- i. Communities and individuals as innovators.
- ii. How to use knowledge effectively and efficiently, taking into consideration where relevant knowledge is obtained, how it is collected, stored and transmitted.
- iii. Developing strategies to take advantage of the knowledge economy, including investing more in education and information and communications infrastructure.
- iv. Examining the tensions between providing intellectual property rights and the desirability of disseminating knowledge at a marginal cost.

The example I would like to take to illustrate this stream focuses on the loss of traditional professional skills and job opportunities in the wake of globalisation of core cultural professions involving the building and artisan trades, with the resultant disenfranchisement of local knowledge, degradation of the built environment and loss of heritage resources.

The **UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Conservation Awards** were established just 3 years ago to encourage private sector initiative to rescue and reuse the built heritage around the region, through the revival of traditional cultural skills in conservation.

Over the past three years, 112 qualifying projects have been examined by the panel of judges and 28 selected for recognition, from a wide range of project types.

The criteria for selection include not only excellence in conservation, but more importantly highlights the social impact of the project.

Award recipients must demonstrate excellence in:

- a. The understanding of the issues of conservation/restoration in relation to the cultural, social, historical and architectural significance of the building or buildings.
- b. The interpretation of that social, historical and architectural significance.
- c. The employment of appropriate building and artisan techniques.
- d. The use of appropriate materials.
- e. The manner in which the process and the final product contribute to the surrounding environment and the local community's cultural and historical continuum.
- f. The influence of the project on the surrounding environment and community.

Winning entries demonstrate a combination of technical excellence, community-based development and best practice in the use of cultural resources.

What has emerged from the now very popular and highly sought after Awards competition, is that there is both the need and the opportunity to build a regional base of endogenous professional capacity within the cultural sector.

And to this end, UNESCO and ICCROM, with involvement of SPAFA and other regional training institutions are mobilising universities around the region to network themselves in a virtual **Asian Academy for Heritage Conservation**.

The Academy will offer several services to the profession:

- Post-graduate resident degrees in conservation.
- Internet-based extramural diploma courses for in-service professionals.
- Short certificate courses in specific conservation techniques.
- Licensing of professional specialisation.
- Conduct of cultural impact assessments.
- Joint field schools, organised and hosted on a rotating basis.
- Seminar and workshops for professionals and decision-makers.
- Joint research and co-publication of results, including benchmarking best conservation practice.

But the principle objective of the Academy is to create and empower a local base of cultural professionals to combat the negative effects of globalisation on the cultural resource base.

Reconciling Requirements with Reality

Turning to the final stream, we have to bite the bullet and come to grips with the fact that our best intentions do not always — or even usually — produce the results we had hoped for. The issues here are:

- i. Reconciling national directives with local aspirations — including strategies for promoting conflict prevention, mediation and resolution
- ii. Reconciling donor and recipient requirements and needs
- iii. Exploring project partnerships to widen outreach, impact, mutual benefits and maximisation of participation.
- iv. Examining how issues of accountability, monitoring and evaluation impact on choice.

For my example here, I would like to take an example of a problem that is well known to all of us: the mismanagement of World Heritage sites. We'll look quickly at a few rather alarming examples of very recent damage to World Heritage sites caused by the government-appointed site managers themselves. In fact, all three examples which I choose are ongoing problems as we speak.

Paharpur Vihara

First Paharpur Vihara in Bangladesh.

Paharpur is inscribed on the World Heritage List, and the subject of an UNESCO-financed international safeguarding campaign. Because of inadequate maintenance of the site, and lack of any system to patrol or guard the site, the priceless collection of ceramic tiles is being lost. These tiles contain the only record of pre-Islamic folk culture in the region and give insight into an indigenous cosmology, which has shaped life and landscape for generations.

In the process of conservation, however, we have contributed to the accelerated and now complete loss of this traditional and local knowledge, through ill-advised replacement of original art with inaccurate and thus inauthentic replicas.

Paharpur is now being considered for delisting as a World Heritage site, representing an irreplace-

able loss and dismal failure of the culture profession to save itself.

Lumbini

Now, let's turn to Lumbini, birthplace of Lord Buddha and recently inscribed on the World Heritage List.

An elaborate development plan has been adopted in order to attract tourists to the site. This plan could have safeguarded the site as well as provided access to the large number of pilgrims — if it had been implemented according to plan and without corruption. However, this has not been the case, with the result that the serene Maha Devi temple has been transformed into a shrine to reinforced concrete and the greed of developers. Hardly an appropriate end to one of the region's most sacred spots.

Finally, let's conclude with a hopefully happier example.

Vat Phou

The site of Vat Phou in southern Laos has also recently been inscribed on the World Heritage List, not as a monumental site, but as a large sacred cultural landscape.

This of course has led to immediate confrontation with an international consortium of contractors who want to construct a new road to bring tourists from Thailand into the site.

Fortunately, a very detailed site management plan exists for this site, which lays out in great detail what resources are protected, where and why.

In a test case, UNESCO has insisted with both the government and the international consortium of contractors that a "cultural impact assessment" be carried out before any work is begun. This has resulted in the re-routing of the road away from the monuments and avoids the yet-to-be excavated underground archaeological deposit. Even more importantly, as a result of the cultural impact assessment, issues involving the protection of the environment and serenity of the living temples have been assured.

With this success story, UNESCO is now involved in a vigorous campaign to insist that cultural impact assessment become standard operating procedure as part of every internationally financed development project throughout the region, and we are working with a wide range of partners in the public and private sector to develop protocols for the conduct of cultural impact assessments.

Confronting the Challenges from a Common Platform

Let me conclude with some questions.

From the examples which I have briefly presented, are there any common questions which we might be able to extract, which we can use to analyse other activities which will be presented in this conference and from which we can construct a structural framework for integrating culture into the development paradigm?

- From the example of the tourism projects, we ask the core question: *How can cultural diversity be mobilised in the fight against poverty?*
- From the projects to empower the cultural professions, we can add to that question to ask: *How can cosmologies co-exist with markets and what is the benefit of diverse visions of the use of culture for development?*
- From the heritage projects, we learn that we must also ask questions about sustainability: *How can diversity and creativity be protected and nurtured in the long run?*

Fortunately, and as I have pointed out at the start of my presentation, we are not starting from ground zero.

The debate on the central role of culture diversity for development is already well advanced, and from this debate we have learned and made the objectives of this conference:

1. Inculcate in the implementers of development projects the need to prioritise the emphasis of the cultural context within which the projects are proposed.
2. Promote the achievement of sustainability and future independence of donor-initiated projects for the benefit of the communities they intend to serve.
3. Contribute to the pursuit of an equitable social, economic and intellectual environment by providing a forum for exchange of views through the presentation and dissemination of related experiences on what defines responsible development.
4. Increase mutual understanding, tolerance and respect for diversity in cultures and living context of peoples involved in the design and implementation of development programmes.
5. Heighten the relevance of choice in the formulation of projects to obtain successful outcomes.

This is the challenge before us: to find the will and the way to ensure culture — in all its glorious diversity — finds its rightful place at the centre of human development.

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