

# African Culture: Versatile Approach to Realize the Africa We Want

**Ayoub Z. Elrashdi**

*Senior Advisor, Economic  
Affairs,  
AU Observer Mission to the  
United States*

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## Abstract

In recent years, prominent Nigerian Artists have been advocating for the establishment of an Artist Registrational Council in Nigeria. This registration council is expected to regulate and support the professional activities of visual artists, ensuring high standards and providing essential services. However, the establishment of this council will raise significant issues that would hinder its effectiveness. This paper examines the multifaceted challenges associated with establishing and maintaining an Artist Registration Council in Nigeria while comparing it with the proverbial Pandora box. Key challenges include ensuring accessibility and inclusivity for all the visual artists, establishing fair and high standards for credentialing and managing bureaucracy as well as conflicts of interests within the membership. By identifying these issues and exploring strategic solutions, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in managing the Artist Registration Council and suggests pathways to enhance its success, sustenance and support for the artists if eventually established in Nigeria.

*Corresponding Author:*

Ayoub Z. Elrashdi

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### **Background to the Study**

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), culture defined as a "complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society." As the mother continent and first inhabited region on earth, Africa is characterized by vast lands and one of the largest populations on the planet with rich human heritage and cultural diversity. The broad history of Africa tells the world about the story of her civilizations ranging from the first artists that left impressions on their rock shelters to the scholars who built great universities in the Sahara.

The treasure of Africa's unique identity encompasses iconic natural places as Serengeti, Table Mountain, and Victoria Falls and the origin of the history of mankind from the fossil hominid sites of Olduvai Gorge and Sterkfontein to the pyramids of ancient Egypt. The high walls of her great forts and castles from the colonial era recite sad stories of slavery and remind us of the long history of Africans' struggle for independence and liberation. Africa's rich history and culture are so diverse that it varies not only from one country to another but also within regions and countries. The culture of each ethnic group holds together the authentic social fabric of traditional practices and rites, art, music, and oral literature through which identities are built. As such, diversity of cultures, religions, languages, and traditions should not be addressed as a barrier to development, rather the continent should take advantage and build on this rich diversity in its quest for prosperity and change of the attitudes of its people towards issues related to economic growth, social development, and relation with the environment. What matters most is the ability to use Africa's legacy of cultural resources to trigger the development and economic transformation of the continent in order to realize the vision of The Africa We Want by 2063.

### **Discovering the Treasure**

The first step to harnessing the potential of Africa's culture is to create global economic opportunities and raise awareness of Africa's massive contribution to modern life and global culture. Music and fashion are good examples of the global impact African culture tend to have. Many modern icons in the music industry have incorporated African instrumentation, ideas, and ideals into their music. There are various forms of music most of which have either originated from Africa or at least have been affected by African music on some level. Many modern instruments have evolved from ancient African forms, and many other types of music have adopted similar techniques in terms of rhythms, patterns, harmony, or simply the evolution of melody.

On another hand, the modern fashion industry often borrows very heavily from African culture in the design of the latest fashion trends. Today's music and fashion industries undoubtedly owe an immense debt of gratitude to Africa's culture and creativity. It, therefore, becomes evident that the rich culture of Africa has not only contributed but also continues to sustain development in many industries in modern societies. The collective consciousness of opportunities towards the potential of African cultural resources can go

a long way in reinforcing pride and confidence in local products as well as triggering innovation and creativity. Furthermore, it could open an avenue for unleashing innovative resources to enable people, particularly youth and women to lead full, productive, and meaningful lives by raising their income and improving their standards of living in terms of income, health, education, and security.

### **Indigenous Solutions for Global Questions**

With an increasing human population, trees and forest reserves globally are cleared every day to make way for agriculture in fertile lands and to meet the increasing needs in food as well as urban planning to meet housing demands. The current increasing rate of natural resource degradation and loss of species has a major adverse effect not only on human beings but on all life on the planet. The loss of species in the ecosystem comes with the loss of economic benefits and social well-being, especially within rural populations. It is well documented that formal mechanisms of natural resources conservation and protection have not yet halted the aggressive land degradation and deforestation. However, long-standing practices such as traditional agroforestry, a method still employed in many African communities, could provide a solution that balances agriculture and maintenance of forests and trees across landscapes.

If the question is how to conserve and protect biodiversity, an answer to this would be to revisit the wealth of culture before industrialization and the introduction of modern forms of conservation models. African traditional beliefs, environmental ethics, and socio-cultural practices in the conservation of natural resources can contribute to addressing the global questions of biodiversity conservation and environmental rehabilitation and protection. Apart from economic aspects, African communities have a close and intimate cultural connection with their lands, forests, trees, and surrounding biodiversity. The benefit of the ethical and responsible use of the planet's resources and ethics remains apparent in many cultural and social systems of traditional Africa, especially in sedentary and pastoralist farming communities where their practices directly impact the conservation of valuable biodiversity in their immediate environments.

Over time, Africans have developed elaborate and resilient traditions associated with the conservation and management of environmental resources. In fact, the conservation of environmental resources and ecosystems is an integral part of the indigenous African culture. This culture can enlighten policymakers, inspire research and innovations and provide a solid foundation for sustainable use of ecosystems and development. There is great potential to scale up the environmental experience in Africa through empowering rural communities to develop their own traditional practices to scale up innovative solutions for forestry management and farming. Ecological practices, traditional knowledge, and beliefs should be properly preserved and retained so that they can be modeled, scaled, and replicated through generations to maintain their valuable contribution to addressing serious environmental and developmental challenges.

Furthermore, African environmental culture can expose environmental injustice and assist local communities to protect their environment by seeking environmental justice. It can create awareness within countries and globally about malpractices and irresponsible actions of transnational and local industries which damage the environment. Governments, development agencies, and donors have a role to play in strengthening cultural-based solutions through enabling policies; sharing experience across communities and national economic sectors; provisions of financial and non-financial resources; and enhancing research and development.

### **Culture of Peace**

The main reason for conflict and civil wars in Africa is the desire to acquire power and secure resources for one group, tribe, or ethnicity at the expense of others. The issue of identity has mixed with culture, heritage, and the control of economic resources to create political tension and violence. In all cases, violence has led to the breakdown of social order, and societies at large, and the tragic loss of human lives. Consequently, Infrastructure has been destroyed, education and health services have suffered, and the environment has been damaged. Wars and conflicts are consuming the scarce resources which could rather be utilized to improve education, health services, social protection, and infrastructure needed for development. It is therefore that the link between peace and development cannot be denied. In an important sense, peace is not just the absence of violence, but also the presence of social solidarity. In order to re-establish social solidarity in war-affected communities, a key step would be to find a way for members of these communities to revisit the cultural logic that emphasizes solidarity, sharing, and equitable resource distribution. This, in effect, means emphasizing the importance of reviving progressive cultural attitudes and values that can foster an environment within which peace can flourish. However, issues like women and youth inclusion need to be addressed in the cultural approach, considering the gender and generational biases that are inherent in prevailing social structures.

An integral part of achieving sustainable peace is promoting social solidarity. In an important sense, peace is not just the absence of violence, but also the presence of social solidarity. In order to re-establish social solidarity in war-affected communities, a key step would be to find a way for members of these communities to revisit the cultural logic that emphasizes solidarity, sharing, and equitable resource distribution. This, in effect, means emphasizing the importance of reviving progressive cultural attitudes and values that can foster an environment within which peace can flourish. However, issues like women and youth inclusion need to be addressed in the cultural approach, considering the gender and generational biases that are inherent in prevailing social structures.

We need to combine present notions of inclusivity and participatory decision making with progressive local norms and principles to create formulas that distinctively suits social norms of African communities with the aim to ensure the human dignity and inclusion of all members of society, including minority groups, women and youth. There is a need to reinforce the role that culture can play in enabling communities to resolve

their disputes and to strengthen the ties that bind them together. African traditional cultures could help shape a collective sense of peace, justice and solidarity that are needed to stem conflicts and build peaceful societies. The promotion of peaceful culture among societies can facilitate the regional and global cooperation necessary to address cross broader challenges to human security and well-being. Building on this, African-cultural narratives, norms and practices could enhance and strengthen social norms and attitudes against wars and violence while it can also be integrated into institutional and legislative structures.

### **From One Generation to the Next**

Africa is the fastest-growing continent in terms of population. It is expected to increase by roughly 50% over the next 18 years, growing from 1.2 billion people today to over 1.8 billion in 2035. In fact, Africa will account for nearly half of global population growth over the next two decades. At the same time, the share of working-age individuals relative to the non-working-age population is increasing, which is good news for the economy. This can be translated into increased productive capacity and can help to boost economic growth. In typical African traditions, young people do not need to worry about future jobs because the community creates vocational training for the younger generations.

This value was naturally practiced as youths serve as apprentices in their families' businesses. Reinforcing this tradition with the necessary financial and non-financial resources including proper vocational training, science and technology, and promotion of Small and Medium Enterprise, will partially address the questions of unemployment as well as internal migration in the continent.

There is also a crucial need to ensure that African cultural values are growing at the pace of its population. Social, economic, and environmental components can be addressed by culture when it is introduced to the learning process. In the absence of sound policies and programmes addressing the cultural component of development, African norms and values would be overwhelmed by social values other than African norms and cultural impact will shrink at the pace at which its population is growing. This would create a gap between culture and socio-economic development and eventually dilute the impact of the cultural contributions to prosperity and peace on the continent. Many have advocated that "development in Africa will continue to be a mirage as long as the concept of development does not take into account African cultural realities". In pursuing the Africa, we want, we need to build on existing vast African heritage and ensure the passing of knowledge and cultural traditions from one generation to the next. This can be done cross-culturally, by integrating indigenous-cultural dimensions into educational systems at all possible levels and being cognizant of structure, texture, and tendencies of local norms when setting development policies and designing programmes and action plans in Africa.

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