

The Cultural Agenda of the OAU/AU Since 1963

by

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Abstract

Different attempts have been made to develop policies and strategies aimed at promoting African cultures at national and regional or continental levels in Africa. Thus, this paper looks at the work of the OAU and AU in dealing with cultural development agenda since 1963. Based on a review of the policies, strategies and recommendations of international fora or events on African cultures, the paper concludes that considerable efforts have been made to promote African cultures by adopting pertinent policy instruments. Also, the paper recognizes the potential gap between good intentions as expressed in policies and strategies and actual implementations, and therefore, the paper underlines the need for further studies to determine achievements registered, challenges encountered and the way forward to avoid the proliferation of policies and strategies absent of their proper implementation.

Keywords: culture, Africa, policies, strategies, OAU/AU.

Introduction

Africa is not only rich in natural resources but is endowed with a wide variety of untapped cultural resources embodied in its art, music, languages, belief systems, norms and values; social institutions as well as tangible and intangible heritages representing its past glories and present diversities. However, these resources have largely been subjected to centuries of neglect, misinterpretation, and exploitation by external forces as well as internal mismanagement due to poor resource allocation, shortage of trained personnel, and lack of understanding on the role of culture in the improvement of the other sectors of the economy and social life. Consequently, the continent has lost and continues to lose a considerable amount of its cultural resources. This neglect and mismanagement of African cultural resources has contributed to the persistence of poverty and underdevelopment. It has often been argued that the future of Africa is not so much on the technological advances that the developed world has mastered over many centuries; but rather on the continent's renaissance and rise to prominence in its varied cultural riches.

Therefore, without necessarily abandoning the pursuit of technical innovation, Africa needs to place greater emphasis on areas and sectors where it has comparative advantages. The cultural sector is one of such most promising sectors which should be taken seriously if Africa has to ensure inclusive, sustainable, equitable and people-centered development as set out by the AU's Agenda 2063.

Realizing this fact, the continental umbrella organization, the OAU/ AU, has been attempting to develop cultural policies and programmes with the view to developing them further so that they can facilitate development in the other sectors. However, there exists no systematic account of such policy-making efforts of the OAU/AU over the past 50 or so years. More particularly, not much has been written about the various directives given and decisions/declarations adopted by the relevant policy organs of the OUA/AU: Heads of State and Government, the Executive Council, the Conference of Ministers responsible for culture; as well as other regional or international bodies, including the UENSCO. Consequently, there is an information vacuum on the types of policies and instruments adopted leave alone the status of their implementation. This knowledge gap has resulted in three erroneous assumptions. First, it would appear that Africa has not given enough attention to culture. Second, some tend to assume that African cultures are primitive or traditional and that they do not have noteworthy contributions to economic growth and therefore should be changed through planned technical or cultural change. Third, absence of documented evidence on the various policies and strategies adopted by the OAU/AU has often led to a desperate attempt to come-up with new policies without checking what already exists and how much previously adopted instruments have been implemented.

Objectives of the Study

This paper aims at providing an overview of the OAU's/AU's efforts at generating and formulating continental cultural policy frameworks and priority action areas. By so doing, the paper wishes to describe the major thrusts of the continental agenda in the field of culture and to highlight the emphasis put on culture in different time periods in the history of our continental Organization.

The specific objectives of the current research on the African cultural agenda include (a) to highlight decades of efforts made by the OAU and AU in shaping continental cultural policies enshrined in the various decisions, declarations and frameworks as well as other relevant instruments adopted in the field of culture over the past 50 or so years; this will help shed some light on how African leaders perceive the importance of culture and its role in other aspects of African life; (b) to outline the major and recurring themes in these decisions and policy directives; and (c) to identify specific recommendations on the way forward so as to enhance the development of African cultures and thereby to expand their role in regional integration and sustainable socio-economic development of the continent.

Materials and Methods

This paper uses the plural form ‘African cultures’ to recognize the diversity and multiplicity of cultures in Africa as there is no one African culture that represents the whole of the continent though there are universals in all the cultures of Africa as in the rest of the world. The paper is a result of a desk/internet review of key decisions/declarations and other instruments since the establishment, in 1963, of the OAU and the continuation of efforts at promoting African cultures by the AU, notably since the launching of the new AU Commission in 2002. Accordingly, the methods used are simple descriptive, narratives and textual interpretations.

As laid out in the OAU Charter and the Constitutive Act of the AU, the continental Organization has been entrusted with policy formulation, coordination, and harmonization as well as monitoring and evaluation of implementation of the policies and decisions or commitments of the OUA/AU. However, actual implementation, or the lack of it, rests within the jurisdiction of Member States, national civil societies and other non-state actors, depending on the subject of the decisions or commitments. This will be a subject of another paper on progresses made, challenges encountered and the way forward in the successful implementation of various instruments adopted over the years. Obviously some of these policies have become obsolete or replaced by others over the years. The exercise is hoped to bring to light some of the obscured policies that may still be valid.

Why Cultural Policies Matter?

A source document at the Webster's World of Cultural Policy website describes “The rubric ‘cultural policy’, in the aggregate, [refers to] the values and principles which guide any social entity in cultural affairs.” The source further points out that “Cultural policies are most often made by governments ... but also by many other institutions in the private sector, from corporations to community organizations” (<http://www.wgcd.org/policy/policy.html>).

Policies provide guideposts for those making decisions and taking actions which affect cultural life. In discussing the meaning of a cultural policy, the above source states that “A policy is a system of ultimate aims, practical objectives and means, pursued by a group and applied by an authority.” The document further adds that “Just as culture is all-encompassing, cultural policy incorporates a broad range of measures taken to develop cultural life” (<http://www.wgcd.org/policy/policy.html>)

In the past many years, there has been a dilemma as to what type of cultural policies to be followed, especially among newly independent countries of Africa and other regions. On the one hand, there was and is a tendency to protect, revive and revitalize native cultural values, whose development has been suppressed, degraded and abused by colonialists.

On the other hand, newly liberated countries wanted to embark, at least in the early years of their independence, on modernizing their economies and thereby transform the life-ways of people more in tune with that of the West through modern education, new style of eating and living and rationalization of behavior. This dilemma is captured very well in the following paragraph in the document from Webster's World of Cultural Policy cited above:

For developing societies, the crucial question has been how to preserve and extend indigenous traditions, which root them strongly in the past and provide their deepest sources of energy and inspiration; and at the same time, to take what's best from the industrialized world without being inundated by it. Most developing societies have been struggling to overcome a long history of cultural colonization -- the fact that their theaters, libraries, and airwaves are dominated by the cultures which colonized them centuries ago. (<http://www.wgcd.org/policy/policy.html>).

Despite such problems in choosing the direction of cultural policies, several efforts have been made and continue to be made by individual nations, regional and/or international organizations to adopt some kind of frameworks for the development of cultures. Such policies, or the urgent call for having them, recognizes the multidimensional role being played and to be played by culture. For example, Rene Maheu (1970), the former Director-General of UNESCO, outlined the interplay between culture and development in his opening remarks to the First Intergovernmental Conference on Institutional, Administrative and Financial Aspects of Cultural Policies held in Venice, Italy, in 1970:

“... if culture was now recognized as a matter for joint reflection and study by those with the particular responsibilities, it was because States had awoken to their responsibilities to the cultural life of the nation. Two great ideas underlie this change: firstly, it follows from the recognition of the right to culture that the public authorities have a duty to provide the means to exercise this right; secondly, the concept of development has gradually been extended, diversified and elaborated, so that cultural development is now realized to be part and parcel of total development, for which therefore the national authorities should have a policy. The methods of cultural policy are no different from those of general development policy.”

Resolution No.12 of the same Conference emphasized that “culture is one of the essential factors in general development and that the economics and sociology of culture are among the least investigated aspects of cultural policy” (ibid).

Cultural Policies, the Right to Culture and Development

The ideas of the right to culture and the close interaction between culture and development were first highlighted in a Meeting of African Experts held in Dakar, Senegal, in 1969, with the aim of identifying and discussing "... the problem with which developing countries, and more specifically, African countries are confronted with in the formulation and implementation of cultural policies (UNESCO, 1970). At that Meeting, the Senegalese Minister of Culture of the time, Amadou Mathar M'Bow, who, later became Director-General of UNESCO (1974-1987) "...stressed the importance of the problem of cultural policies for African countries, who had been endeavoring to build their economies while ensuring the promotion of man through education, science, and culture". The Meeting underlined a very important theme "culture for all"; that later became a key concern for cultural experts, policy/decision-makers, development practitioners, and institutions since the 1970s. African experts emphasized that "The right to culture was a requirement of [the] time", and "The question which the Experts had to answer ... was: how can governments enable their people to enjoy this right" (UNESCO, 1970). The Venice Meeting indicated that "Cultural needs may not, at first glance, appear as evident and pressing as some others, such as health, education or welfare. It is therefore necessary that governments and other public authorities accept a clear responsibility for culture and formulate long-term policies" (ibid).

The recognition of the need for taking responsibility in promoting culture and building the requisite institutional and resource capacities for the task emanates from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which, among others, recognizes that "Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and share in scientific advancement and its benefits" (ibid). Therefore, policies were needed to ensure the inalienable rights of people, especially indigenous communities, to culture. With regard to the link between culture and development, the above-mentioned Conference noted that "In the developing countries, cultural development is being increasingly recognized as an essential component of social and economic development" (ibid). Development and decolonization were taught to be inseparable processes. For this reason, the Venice Conference emphasized that "The establishment and strengthening of national identity through cultural action can even be regard as a prerequisite for social and economic progress in post-colonial conditions". The Preamble to Resolution No.11 of the Conference re-iterated the belief that "... culture is an inalienable and indivisible human right and that it pervades all aspects of life" (ibid). It further recognized the "... growing importance of culture in individual and community development, and the increasing role of public authorities in promoting cultural activities". With regard to providing the necessary support to African countries in their efforts to promote African cultures, Resolution No. 4 of the same recommends, among others, that UNESCO should:

- Arrange a series of meetings to bring cinema, radio, and television specialists together with African musicians, poets, historians and other experts in oral traditions to explore film, radio, and television possibilities and their adaptation to the expression of African modes of thought and life;
- Produce a systematic series of films in cooperation with African producers on the main manifestations of different African cultures;
- Assist African States in the production and distribution of films and television programmes specially designed for African children and young Africans;

The Dakar Meeting also recognized the various impediments to the promotion of African culture, including the “insufficient recognition on the part of governments of the importance of culture politically and for social and economic development” (UNESCO, 1970). In order to tackle these obstacles, the Meeting highlighted the need for creating awareness among stakeholders “to stress the role cultural action could play: politically: in helping to develop an African personality; in contributing to the unification of Africa, because there were many similarities which crossed over present boundaries; socially: in restoring the psychological and sociological stability of the Africans, perturbed by the tension between technological civilization and Africa cultures; economically: in providing African workers with the incentive to production” (UNESCO, 1970).

The Meeting went on to recommend the creation of continental “consultation and coordination” mechanisms at the “Pan-African level through existing bodies” because “It was at that level that cultural exchanges had to be stimulated, organized and further developed”.

Therefore, the OAU, now the AU, continued to lead regional and international efforts to make culture one of the policy making agenda of the continent since the early years of its establishment. The following section will look into some of the key policies and strategies of this continental Organization.

Cultural Policies of the OAU/AU

As suggested in the foregoing paragraphs, continental cultural policies are deemed important to the promotion of culture in its diverse forms as a means of social, regional and economic integration. Over the years, OAU and its successor the AU have made several attempts to put cultural policies and strategies in place. However, there is a need to determine the contributions of these instruments to the development of African cultures on the one hand and the role of culture in the socioeconomic development of the continent.

The founding leaders of the OAU which include some of the prominent students of culture and society, such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyrere, just to mention a few, considered that cultural policies are essential for cooperation among the newly independent African States.

They also sought to promote African cultures and languages as means of breaking down linguistic barriers and promote understanding amongst people in the continent (OAU, 1963). Therefore, as one of their priority actions towards the promotion of culture as a tool for understanding and cooperation, the heads of state and government of the OAU proposed, in 1963, to: “Establish an institute of African studies to be a department of the African University proposed by Ethiopia”. Though the said African University was not created in the form desired by the early leaders, the proposal shows the place they wanted to give to language and culture in their policy/decision making endeavors.

This emphasis on culture was pursued by the OAU’s activities in the years that followed by instituting cultural festivals and other important events of continental scale. Some of such early notable efforts included (a) the First International Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, Senegal, in 1966; (b) the First All African Cultural Festival in Algiers, Algeria, in 1969; and (c) the First Workshop on African Folklore, Dance and Music held in Mogadishu, Somalia in 1970. According to an anonymous observer, “Never before had African culture and arts given such a brilliant display of their richness, variety and genius. Above cultural and artistic achievements, this First Festival was the triumph of African Solidarity and Sense of Purpose, Triumph of AFRICANITY.” (http://training.itcilo.it/actrav_cdrom1/english/global/law/oau.htm)

The Charter of OAU recognized the role of culture; and one of the sectoral specialized bodies, the “Educational, Scientific, Cultural and Health Commission” was tasked to deal with the promotion of culture on the Continent (OAU, 1963). Among others, the Charter urges Member States to harmonize their policies in “educational and cultural cooperation”. Consequently, African Ministers of Culture adopted the “Cultural Charter for Africa” in 1976, which was subsequently endorsed by the OAU Heads of State and Government.

In the early stage of cultural promotion, emphasis was placed on the role of culture in the struggle against colonialism and political independence. The OAU Heads of State and Government adopted the Cultural Charter cognizant of the “... importance of the role of culture in political emancipation in the economic and social development.” In this connection, they “...Recommended a biennial meeting of the Ministers of Culture with the view to defining and harmonizing the programme of cultural activities in Africa” (OAU, 1976). Accordingly, ministers in charge of culture convene periodic conferences to jointly identify common priority areas for the development of culture and through culture the development of the continent. The desire continued but realization of the ideals enshrined in the various documents remains to be investigated.

The 1980s saw a remarkable progress in attaching greater emphasis to the role of culture in all aspects of African life. The 1985 Declaration of OAU Heads and Government on the Cultural Aspects of the Lagos Plan of Action stressed the need to “... align cultural development with the economic development of Africa,” on the ground that “... the success of the Lagos Plan of Action depends on the results of analyses of the interaction between culture and the other social and economic sectors”.

The Declaration further outlines the commitment of African leaders in “facilitating the integration of human factors, cultural realities and the system of values into development strategies.”

To this effect, in the above Declaration, African leaders reiterated the relevant recommendations of the Pan-African Cultural Manifesto of Algiers of 1969 and the provisions of the African Cultural Charter (1976). Some of these recommendations emphasized that:

- (a) Priority should be given to the role of culture as an essential dimension of the global development process, which should ... not be *solely aimed at economic growth* [emphasis added]. In this connection, there is an urgent need to integrate social and cultural factors within our development strategies so as to ensure a balanced and self-reliant development.
- (b) Development thus should take its root from our people’s culture and consistent with their values so as to emancipate them from all forms of economic, social, political, and cultural dependence;
- (c) Cultural identities, as dynamic process of continuity, creativity and altitudes vis-à-vis innovation, should be the basis and finality of development, promoting and safeguarding stability and structural cohesion, as well as the social development of peoples.

The leaders of the OAU also agreed to “pool... efforts”, in the context of the Lagos Plan of Action, “... to implement the short, medium and long-term integrated programmes of activities...” in the cultural sector. More specifically, they set a timeframe to develop (between 1985 and 1988) national cultural policies with a view to: accord an important place to the promotion of scientific research for cultural development; give priority to the promotion of education for development; promote the development of cultural industries; promote traditional cottage industries; ensure cultural exchange and the development of cultural tourism; take the necessary steps to promote cooperation for cultural development at Inter-African and International levels.

By adopting this Declaration, African Heads of State and Government appeared firmly convinced that the development of their respective countries and that of the continent will: further take into consideration the social and cultural realities; enable the OAU to harmonize... national policies, define common priorities and thus, become a focal point of all sub-regional activities in the field of cultural, scientific and technical cooperation for development (OAU, 1985)

The Secretary General of the OAU was requested to submit annual reports of activities undertaken in the process of implementing the above Declaration.

Over a decade later, the cultural agenda was brought back onto the policy making stage. The Yaoundé Declaration: Africa preparing for the 21st Century (OAU, 1996) re-examined the overall development in Africa, identified key challenges and imbalances in the relationship between Africa and the rest of the world, particularly Europe, and declared a number of directives for the betterment of life on the Continent through, among others, the use of culture as a formidable weapon for development and adjustment in the new century. In this Declaration the Continent's leaders further expressed their deep commitment for the promotion of African culture and their clear understanding of the role of culture in the overall socio-economic development of the continent. They strongly asserted that:

Culture is one of the qualitative components of development and complementary to such other quantitative components as those pertaining to the economic domain. It is therefore a truism to say that the kind of development we want for the 21st century will also depend on the dynamism of our continent's culture. Consequently, the continent's place in the concert of nations of tomorrow and beyond and the pull it will have on the other regions will depend on its cultural development; for there is no doubt that the continent's culture will go a long way to enable other people to better understand the African identity in all its dimensions and thereby change the negative image commonly portrayed of the continent (OAU, 1996).

This is a more penetrating insight and positive self-assessment. Africa was out of the ramshackle of colonialism only three decades ago when this declaration was made. South Africa was about five years away from the tight grips of Apartheid while for some countries, independence was just coming of age even though the impact of neo-colonialism was and still is considerable on most aspects of life, including culture. In any case, the 1990s was a period of both self-assertion and reflection regarding the place of Africa and the realistic roles she could play onto the world stage in the next century.

The Yaoundé Declaration cited above stressed that “The creativity of ... peoples, the liveliness and richness of African cultural heritage and values should contribute to this [sustainable socio-economic] development ...” (OAU, 1996).

In order to do so, the OAU leaders stressed the need to improve the production, protection and distribution of cultural goods and services both within the continent and abroad “Especially by discarding the small-scale production methods currently in use and evolving their circulation, and controlling their exploitation networks” (OAU, 1996). In addition to realizing the role of culture in the continent's development, the OUA was aware of certain emerging threats to Africa's cultural products.

These include: (a) the potential negative impacts of technological expansion, (b) rapid computerization and profit-making by greedy vandalizers; and (c) the information communication revolution bolstering the trend towards cultural hegemony. All these challenges confronted Africa thereby calling for appropriate policies and strategies to reduce the vulnerability of African cultures. At the same time, African leaders were cautiously optimistic about the relevance of modern scientific and technological advances for the preservation and even promotion of African cultures. This tone of both optimism and perception of threat can be seen from these lines: “We are convinced that the preservation of African traditional values is perfectly compatible with the assimilation of advanced scientific and technological know-how. However, the ongoing process of cultural standardization today threatens the perpetuation of these values. We must therefore adopt appropriate strategies to safeguard Africa’s traditional values” (OAU, 1996).

With the view to ensuring the survival and revival of African traditional cultures and values, African Heads of State and Government called upon the then Secretary-General of the OAU to, among others, “... explore the possibility of setting-up a Pan-African Institute of Culture and Arts with the double purpose of training experts for the management of cultural industries at all levels and serving as the center of support for African Cultural Artistic Creation” (OAU, 1996). The final statement of the Declaration was most telling about the purpose and functions of the would-be Pan African Cultural Institute because “it’s only this way that Africa can survive culturally and continue to contribute to the culture and world civilization” (ibid).

The Cultural Agenda during the Transition to the AU

The late 1990s and early 2000s seem to have experienced a blackout in the cultural agenda at the Continental level. Since the 4th Conference of African Ministers in charge of culture in Benin in 1993, there was virtually little or no major movement in the Sector. It seems paradoxical, indeed, to find no major activities following the decision of the AOU Heads of State and Government, in 1996, in the context of the Lagos Plan of Action discussed above. There are a lot of questions to be raised here. What happened to the proposed Pan-African Institute of Culture and Arts? What happened to the Inter-Africa-Cultural Fund? Why is that, after having committed and recommitted themselves to the promotion of the promotion of African culture, African leaders did not ensure follow-up of the implementation of the various instruments? Of course, these questions also speak a lot on the role of UNESCO and other regional organizations that have at the core of their mandates the promotion of African cultures and to assist the OAU in discharging its responsibilities.

Part of the reason for the relative slowdown in cultural programmes and dialogues at the OAU during this period could be explained in terms of emerging national and international phenomena including (a) rising civil and cross-border conflicts and the urgency as well as major preoccupation attached to conflict resolution, crisis mitigation and post-conflict reconstruction;

(b) the structural adjustment programs that have been imposed by IMF and the World Bank on Africa with emphasis on budget cutting from the various social or non-economic sectors including culture; and (c) the process of transition from OAU to AU which began in the late 1990s and materialized in the early 2000s.

The formal inauguration of the AU and establishment of the various organs of the Commission, in 2003, heralded a new era for the revival of the cultural agenda in the history of the continental umbrella Organization. Right from the start, the AU put culture and African languages top on the continental Agenda. The Vision and Missions of the AU emphasized that "... the requisite condition for Africa to become a force to be reckoned with, a force we can rely upon, include, among other things ... the immense human and natural resources, the diversity and vitality of our cultures, our languages, our sense of solidarity and our readiness to dialogue, etc" (AU, 2004). More specifically, the Vision and Missions document recognized "cultural entrepreneurs, artists and sports associations... possess immense potentials for enhancing Africa's image and for reminding everybody that development is also a matter of culture (AU, 2004). It also ensures that adequate funding is allocated for cultural programs. In the new continental architecture, culture was seen as a tool for continental integration and African renaissance.

Therefore, during the first few years of the AU's establishment, culture came to the fore and the Commission organized a series of continental and international events, including a series of sessions of the African Ministerial Conference on Culture; the First and Second Conference of Intellectuals in Africa and the Diaspora, held in Dakar and Brazil, respectively, in 2002 and 2006; as well as the first, second and third editions of the Pan African Cultural Congress since 2006. The AU also partnered with regional, continental and international institutions dealing with the different disciplines of African culture to organize, or co-sponsor and participate in different fora aimed at presenting or debating the state of African cultures, identify key challenges; and chart out the way forward towards ensuring the development of culture and harnessing culture as an engine for sustainable development of the continent.

In addition to the foregoing, the AU facilitated the updating of the 1976 Cultural Charter for Africa which is renamed as the Charter for the Cultural Renaissance of Africa (2005). The AU also revised the 1992 Dakar Plan of Action for the Cultural Industries which became the Nairobi Plan of Action for the same. Moreover, during the mid-2000s, the AU held a series of dialogues using the AU-EU troika platforms on the inventory and possible return of looted cultural goods of Africa found in different European museums and private curators. Though this was a complex and difficult endeavor due to numerous factors, the realization by both continental bodies on the repatriation of Africa's stolen goods and resources, was a good start. In recent years, the idea seems to have died down but it will be imperative for the AU to revive and drive the negotiation forward despite the formidable challenges surrounding the subject.

Along with revising the Charter for the Cultural Renaissance of Africa, the AU put culture in its program for the period 2004 to 2007 with the strategic objective to “enhance the dynamism of African Culture and creativity” (Action Area 6) with the corresponding strategies to:

- Promote an African view of its heritage, its diverse cultures, and its values, especially for a new generation of Africans, and its acceptance in the international arena;
- Develop cultural and heritage industries throughout Africa;
- Promote Sports in Africa and take advantage of its exchange and integration capacity.

These strategies are anchored on the fundamental understanding that “... Culture is and should remain at the beginning and at the end of any development undertaking (AU, 2004)”. The most important dimension of the new emphasis on culture, as noted elsewhere, is embedded in the African cultural renaissance” articulated in the revised Charter which, among others, calls for the revival of “traditional” or native cultures of Africa that had been suppressed and stunted by external forces like colonialism, globalization and the invasive power of the so-called modern education with its attendant marginalization or bastardization of indigenous knowledge and value systems.

Key Achievements of the AU in the Promotion of Culture

Since the establishment of the AU in 2002 and assumption of duty by the new leadership of the Commission, a number of key achievements were registered. Most of these include popularization and revitalization of the cultural agenda as well as putting relevant frameworks and institutions in place to encourage member states to develop their cultural resources. As mentioned elsewhere, the following list indicative list shows the efforts of the AU to revive the cultural agenda in the first few years of its establishments:

- Convening of the First Conference of Intellectuals from Africa and the Diaspora (CIAD I), October 2004 in Dakar, Senegal; and (CIAD II), July 2006, in Salvador/Bahia, Brazil;
- The First Conference of African Union Ministers of Culture (CAMC), in December 2005, Nairobi, Kenya and subsequent sessions of the Conference every two years ever since ;
- The First Pan-African Cultural Congress in November 2006) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia;
- The Charter for the cultural renaissance of Africa (December 2005, January 2006);

- The Statutes of the Academy of African Languages (ACALAN) 2005 and 2006;
- The Language Plan of Africa (2005 and 2006);
- The Revised Dakar Plan of Action for the Development of the Cultural Industries (2005)
- The Plan of Action and Declaration of 2006 as the International Year of African Languages;
- The establishment, in Bamako, Mali, of the African Academy of Language, 2006;
- The establishments of ECOSOC, 2004 (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)
- The creation of a separate Division of “Culture and Sports” in 2007 (within the AU Commission at the Department of Social Affairs),

Besides these, a feasibility study was conducted in 2007 on the possibility of establishing a Pan-African Cultural Institute as per the decision of the Ministers of Culture in their December 2005 Conference in Nairobi, Kenya.

Summary and Conclusions

African cultures are its greatest assets and potentials for sustainable development. The full realization of these resources requires favorable policies and strategies at national, regional and international levels. In particular, continental organizations have been playing and can continue to play pivotal roles in creating common understanding and consensus for collective action towards the development of cultures and to use cultures as engines of development in the other sectors.

The OAU and its successor, the AU, have been engaged in the promotion of culture through policies, strategies and programs over the past 50 or so years. It is also hoped that the AU can drive the cultural development initiative forward in the context of the 2063 Agenda. However, it is also important to note that there will also be a great mismatch between good intention as enshrined in the various decisions, declarations, policies and strategies discussed in this paper, and actual implementation of these instruments to be explored further.

It is therefore imperative to exhaustively study the status of implementations of the various instruments adopted by the OAU and AU in the past with the view to appreciate positive developments and to recommend mechanisms for effective translation of policies and strategies into practical action. In this connection, future investigations would focus, for example, on how many member states have signed and ratified the revised Charter for the Cultural Renaissance of Africa? To what extent have member states adapted continental policies and implemented the provisions of these policies and strategies?

Such interrogations would help the AU to see how much have continental instruments influenced or contributed to national level decision and actions. Without such critical and periodic appraisals it will be useless to produce policies after policies that will have no significant impact on the development of culture at national and grassroots levels. The same holds true for other sectors. It should be the duty of academic and research institutions both in Africa and the diaspora to step in periodically and render the much needed service of assessing progresses made, challenges encountered and the best way forward.

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