

How to Enhance the Cultural Heritage and Production of West Africa?

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The third debate in 2016 focused on the issue of valorisation of culture in West Africa. WATHI 5 presents five recommendations to guide the collective action of decision-makers and citizens to promote cultural heritage in the region and abroad.

AVENUES FOR ACTION

- 1** Sensitize the populations to the pressing need of knowledge acquisition, preservation and promotion of the cultural heritage of their country especially by using the media as vehicles to promote the cultures of the region; by creating a regional internet portal promoting West African cultures; by restoring the colonial buildings and instituting in the countries of the region a day on which populations of all ages and all social categories can freely visit the national cultural heritages.
- 2** Awaken the consciousness and curiosity of children, cultivate knowledge and self-esteem at an early age so that they feel concerned by the promotion and preservation of the cultural heritage of their community, their country and their region of the world, in particular by increasing the amount of lessons on cultural diversity and African history in school and university curricula; by using local languages and tales as teaching aids and by supporting African publishing houses.
- 3** Modernize traditional knowledge (values, concepts, products) and promote them among populations through a strict supervision by States, in particular by codifying and standardizing this knowledge in books and platforms on the Internet; by establishing a regional training and research school dedicated to traditional medicine and by developing national strategies for the promotion of traditional medicine.
- 4** Make festivals and cultural gatherings in the region more attractive and encourage cultural interaction among the populations of the countries in the region, in particular by incorporating existing festivals into an annual cultural program; by significantly increasing public and private resources for the communication on the regional cultural agenda and promotion of intra-African cultural tourism and by promoting “cousinage à plaisanterie” (a social practice that uses jokes between members of different ethnic groups to strengthen social cohesion) as an important element of shared cultural heritage in the region.
- 5** Establish national funds or cultural banks to support culture, such as the Autonomous Fund to Support Culture (FAAC) in Cape Verde, which would be institutions to fund and support cultural projects developed by artists and cultural operators.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

To go beyond recommendations and take concrete action requires:

- ✔ To analyze the most lucrative sectors of the cultural industry of each country and make them a priority in the economic development programs of the countries of the region;
- ✔ To identify the categories of actors who work most for the promotion of local cultural heritage and include them in the formulation of public policies concerning the sector;
- ✔ To establish, or strengthen where they already exist, the national institutions dedicated to cultural conservation and promotion as well as the regional institutions and commissions of the African Union and ECOWAS set up for this purpose;
- ✔ Involve the actors of the educational sector so as to include elements of the African cultural and historical heritage in the school curricula in a concerted manner;
- ✔ Create coalitions at the country, regional and continental levels to make the virtues of African traditional medicine recognized and to actively promote it;
- ✔ To involve the audiovisual regulatory authorities of the countries of the region in order to put in place incentives for televisions, radios and other media to give high priority to quality cultural shows in their programming schedules.

The promotion of the cultural heritage and production in West Africa is a crucial issue for the future. It is at the crossroads of politics, economics and culture. The cultural potential of the countries of the region is immense but not valued enough among the local populations and abroad.

It is necessary to develop the cultural sector with the help of entrepreneurs who are already active in each country of the region. A more effective support of the public services in charge of this mission and a strong political impulse of State leaders at the highest level are the missing links. The views, analyses, avenues for action highlighted do not put an end to the debate. Their objective is to install it in the citizen public space.

You can send your comments, reactions, recommendations to refine the proposals and the means to implement them to the following address: ledebat@wathi.org

WATHI

WATHI, the West Africa citizen think tank, is a participative and multidisciplinary think tank which aims to contribute to the sharing of knowledge and the production of ideas on the crucial political, economic, social and cultural issues for the present and the future of the countries of West Africa.

The geographical area of WATHI includes 15 countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as well as Cameroon, Chad and Mauritania. Freely inspired by «waati», which means «time» in Bamanankan language of Mali, WATHI expresses both the urgency of a collective mobilization and the need for long-term commitment.



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