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**HOW TO ENHANCE THE CULTURAL HERITAGE
AND PRODUCTION OF WEST AFRICA?**

LE DEBAT DE WATHI

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Introductory Note

HOW TO ENHANCE THE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND PRODUCTION OF WEST AFRICA?

1. Why this theme?

- **Because** West Africa and its neighboring regions have a very rich and diverse cultural heritage, which they struggle to preserve and promote within their own populations as well as on the global scene.
- **Because** cultural diversity in West Africa is a bridge between populations originating from different countries of the region and beyond and also constitutes the fundamental base upon which to build a future of sustainable peace and cohesion in each country and between neighbors.
- **Because** the populations, particularly the majority of the youth in the region, do not have access to in-depth knowledge of their country's cultural heritage and even less to the ones of other countries in the region. Therefore, they seem destined to an exclusive consumption of cultural products coming from outside their region and the African continent.
- **Because** the assumption about West Africa that dominates most of parts of the world is of a position of dependency and need. This does not fit with the dynamism and originality of West Africa. Nor with the assertion that our diverse cultural identities in the region are perfectly compatible with a broader opening to other parts of the world.
- **Because** the diversity and the proximity of cultural expressions in the region from the arts, to languages, to ways of living together, to gastronomy, to fashion, to value systems, and to traditions and beliefs all constitute an unexploited mobilizing force to deepen political, economic, and human integration in West Africa and to reinforce exchanges between this region and the rest of the continent.
- **Because** activities associated with enhancing cultural heritage and artistic creations are also economic activities capable of generating precious incomes and jobs in a region that needs to mobilize all of its material and non-material resources to meet the needs of a fast-growing and young population.
- **Because** we observe a marked difference between countries from the region with regards to the dynamism of their individual cultural industries. This raises the question of the existence and effectiveness of public policies in this domain.

2. What are the main topics to be explored?

The preservation and enhancement of cultural heritage

- What are, on a country by country basis, the main cultural and natural sites of the WATHI zone (West Africa, including Mauritania, Cameroon and Chad)?
- To what extent are inhabitants of the region aware of their own national cultural heritage and diversity?
- What is the position given in school curricula to the presentation of cultural heritage in each country?
- Which public policies are in place to preserve and enhance cultural heritage in the region?

- Who are the private actors (business and philanthropic foundations) that participate in the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage in the region?
- Which are the regional level cultural policies?
- How to use cultural heritage to develop new economic activities?
- How is West Africa compared to other African regions with regards to the promotion of its cultural heritage and what lessons can we draw from the rest of the world?
- How to use the cultural diversity of the region to strengthen the presence of Africa on the global cultural scene?
- What is the state of our cultural industries and their promotion?

Performing arts (theatre, music, dance, etc.)

- Often considered as the main ambassadors of African culture, are musicians supported by the State?
- What are the economic realities of the music sector?
- What are the factors that enabled some musicians as well as current and older African ones to become internationally known (Youssou Ndour, Salif Keita, Fela Kuti, the late Cesaria Evora and Papa Wemba, Angélique Kidjo, Magic System, P Square and many others)?
- Where are music, dance, and theatre schools? Are there programs to find and develop young regional talents?
- Does the region have theatre troops and national ballets which can enhance cultural diversity and also strengthen the internal cohesion of countries as well as enhance regional integration?
- How to promote both traditional and modern African dances and to integrate them in national economies?
- What role does the media play in how youth's preferences for cultural products have evolved? What is the impact of the globalization of information?

Visual arts (painting, sculpture, design, photography, etc.)

- What countries in the region have influential painters, sculptors, and photographers?
- What artists contribute to the promotion of West African culture on the continent and around the world?

Film and audiovisual media

- Do African films promote the cultures, traditions, and modern realities of African societies?
- Which African countries distinguish themselves in the region through their film industry and why?
- How to view the Nigerian film industry (Nollywood) and what lessons can the other countries of the region learn from it?
- What role do African television channels play in the promotion of local audiovisual content?

Handicraft

- What initiatives and policies allow artisans to better promote their productions in national and regional African markets and internationally as well?
- Why are the different types of handicraft not promoted enough in the region?
- What types of handicraft should particularly be encouraged in each country of the region based on their ancestral knowledge and the availability of natural resources?
- What are the artisanal associations and other professional organizations doing to promote all artisans, and can they do more?

Gastronomy

- Is the region diverse in terms of cuisine?
- Is the slogan “eat local” a reality in the region?
- Which countries mostly or exclusively use locally grown products in their cuisine?
- Should we “wage war” on imported rice and other imported products that have become a must in West African cuisine?
- Do the citizens of the region know each other’s most popular dishes?
- Is the wealth and diversity of West African cuisines sufficiently promoted in the region and internationally?
- Why does African cuisine not have as much popularity as Asian cuisine in the world?

Fashion

- Why does the private sector not develop large-scale textile industries to promote local fabrics and knowledge?
- Are the traditional clothes of the region and those presented as such actually produced locally?
- Who dominates the production and marketing of the most commonly used fabrics?
- Should we encourage fashion designers and small tailors or push for the creation of local industries to manufacture ready-to-wear clothing?
- What does the African fashion market represent to the region and to the world?

Books and languages

- Is African literature read?
- What is the economic reality of the publishing industry?
- Who are the most popular contemporary and former authors in each country?
- What is the role of West African literature and African literature in school curricula?
- What are the existing incentives for quality literary production?
- Are our regional literary products exported to the world?
- Why are the great African literary works not translated into local languages?

- Which authors write in local West African languages?
- What role can regional languages other than French, English, and Portuguese play in consolidating and promoting West African cultural production?

African culture in the digital age

- Does African cultural production integrate into digital technology?
- In the battle of online content, where does Africa stand?
- What are the policy options to make the Internet a powerful vehicle for promoting West African cultural industries?

3. How to participate in the debate?

- Contributions by experts of the issues discussed are welcome but observations, testimonies, opinions and proposals from all citizens are equally so.
- We particularly welcome articles that refer to one or more specific countries, are based on concrete examples and include recommendations for action and reform.
- You are invited to submit a short audio or video interview, or oral narrative detailing your experiences about this theme while outlining concrete policy steps that can be done as well.
- You can submit short articles (500-1000 words) or longer ones (1500-2000 words). Although the maximum length of a contribution is 2000 words, short articles are more likely to be selected and published. All articles must be accessible to the general public, well written and structured.
- We invite you to send a biography of 50 words, and preferably one of your pictures of very good quality along with your article submission.

CONTACTS

www.wathi.org

Please send your articles and contributions at: infowathi@wathi.org

The debate is also taking place on WATHI's Facebook and Twitter accounts:

Link to Facebook : <http://on.fb.me/1L2kOSk>

Link to Twitter : https://twitter.com/WATHI_Africa