



arts and culture
Department
Arts and Culture
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**Commonwealth
Foundation**



Coalition
for cultural diversity

Making Cultural Policy Work

**Consultation held in partnership with South African Coalition for Cultural Diversity and Department of Arts and Culture
SAMRO House, Johannesburg, 19 May 2008**

The views expressed in this summary report are not necessarily those of the Commonwealth Foundation and other meeting partners.

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As part of its research into issues of cultural policy and culture in development, the Commonwealth Foundation, in partnership with the South African Coalition for Cultural Diversity (SACCD) and Department: Arts and Culture (DAC), held a consultation with members from key government and civil society organisations in South Africa. Views from the meeting are summarised below.

Key questions and topics of discussion

1. How successful have South Africa's cultural policies been so far for the different creative sectors and for development? What lessons can be learned?
2. How has the UNESCO *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* been implemented in South Africa? What impact, if any, has the Convention had and what lessons can be learned?
3. How are the South African experience and approach to culture unique, and how can they be shared, regionally and globally?

Key points and recommendations arising from discussion

1 The South African experience

- South Africa is often portrayed as being a country that has taken a lead in implementing good cultural policy. While this role at the global forefront should be embraced and celebrated, there needs also to be a real awareness of the limitations and specific circumstances of South African engagement with cultural policy.
- Modern South African cultural policy originates from the period immediately after the end of apartheid in 1994. Nevertheless, to see the end of apartheid as 'square one' or a blank canvas on which modern arts and culture policy was founded would be to ignore the links between the two eras and the debates that took place prior to 1994. The experience of apartheid was important for modern cultural policy in at least two key respects:
 - (i) The schisms existing in South Africa at the end of apartheid required real responses by government towards healing and reconstruction. With significant funding available, post-apartheid 'cultural' policy arguably became oriented towards nation-building socio-cultural policy than an explicit arts policy. The need to create jobs and deliver economic benefit influenced the priorities of the policy that emerged, rather than necessarily taking the concerns of creative and cultural practitioners themselves as the starting point. For example, there has been significant investment in infrastructure and facilities, such as the creation of the network of local arts centres, without perhaps enough attention being given to content.
 - (ii) Second, much of the community activism that existed under apartheid had a strong cultural edge, and cultural practitioners were often in the forefront of the struggle against apartheid. There is a sentiment amongst many South African cultural practitioners that they have been sidelined in post-apartheid policy processes, and this should be seen in the context of a shift away from the important role that they played in South African society during apartheid.

2 The inclusion of civil society in policy planning

- In the environment that existed immediately after the end of apartheid in 1994, policies were adopted in a large number of areas, including cultural policy. Given the need to do this relatively quickly, externally-derived models and structures from other countries were put into place. For example, the Arts Council and national lottery models were imported from the United Kingdom. However differences between South Africa and other countries (for example, size, scale and diversity) may have resulted in these models not always proving to be as successful in South Africa. While the need was great at the time to implement policy quickly, and while there remains great potential in looking internationally for examples of good practice, there is an ongoing need in 2008 to now

meaningfully review the success of policies and models previously adopted and to look at the potential for learning from non-Western models.

- In processes of policy planning, development, implementation and review, civil society and cultural coalitions and organisations often do not feel that they have been adequately included. While the willingness of government to protect and promote culture is welcome, discussions have often tended to exclude practitioners themselves. For example, there is a perception that while South Africa has taken a welcome lead on the 2005 UNESCO *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, the process of doing so has been significantly state-driven and with limited engagement or understanding from civil society. Both with the Convention and other cultural policy initiatives, civil society would welcome recognition of the role that they can play in policy formation, review and implementation given that they often possess invaluable grassroots experience.
- Many people during the consultation felt that the views of civil society bodies and cultural organisations are often insufficiently taken into account during the policy planning process. They felt that consultation was often a matter of form rather than substance. Cultural civil society feels it could play a bigger role in strategy development and implementation.
- In this respect there was a feeling amongst many of the participants that the South African Coalition for Cultural Diversity could play a central role as a vehicle of civil society concerns, particularly with regards to advocacy.
- There are various fora which civil society could and should work within in order to maximise their influence. First, dialogue needs to begin between civil society and National Commissions for UNESCO, which often act as gatekeepers and conduits between civil society and government. Second, civil society can play a role in international debates. For example, there needs to be a debate over intellectual property issues and how they interact with the creative economy debate currently being put forward by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). However, many international fora privilege elite civil society involvement at the expense of organisations with relevant expertise in the field, and do not engage sufficiently early for civil society to exert influence. Third, the power of creative individuals to form personal alliances and influence organisations should not be underestimated.

3 Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing policy

- A critical part of making cultural policy work is engagement with the monitoring, evaluation and review of policy. While there has been an emphasis on policy planning and development, and while much good work has been done as a result, there continues to be a need to evaluate the success of these policies. With this in mind, a mandate came from Cabinet in 2004 requesting that all national policies and legislation promulgated and implemented during the ten year period since 1994, including those relating to arts and culture, should be reviewed, and the review process led by the Department: Arts and Culture is a

timely one. The first stage of this process culminated in 2006 in the Arts and Culture Policy Review Report, available on the DAC website.

- However, further review is both expected and needed. Again, the experience of apartheid should not create a false dichotomy of a static 'before' and 'after' but rather allow room for continuity and recognition that policy review must be an ongoing and dynamic process. There is real need to involve those operating at the grassroots level in this review process. There is often confusion, across the spectrum, of what civil society means, is and can be. This confusion can contribute to its marginalisation and the adoption of a top-down policy process in which government can tend to take it upon itself to be the architect of civil society's house without consultation.

4 Different arenas, different policies

- One limitation of the post-apartheid emphasis upon nation-building has been that 'cultural policy' has been approached, on the whole, as simply a national question. In fact, there may be different levels and arenas, calling for different policies and approaches which do not necessarily assume the national unit as the sole basis for policy.
- (i) Sub-national/provincial: there is considerable regional diversity within South Africa, which has not always been taken into account when planning national policy. Under apartheid, which effectively extended colonialism for forty years and brought about South Africa's isolation from much of the world, indigenous cultures were to some extent protected from the globalising forces of cultural homogenisation, and flourished, not least as forms of resistance. One particular aspect of regional diversity is different language cultures, which interact in different ways with English as a universal language. With this diversity in mind, there is a real need to explore and discuss devolved structures and local solutions to local problems. Local government structures emerged after much of the existing cultural policy, and a review process needs to take account of this, updating cultural policies to take account of the role that local government now has. Further, there are real funding implications and structural consequences in making provincial, rather than national, structures primary drivers of cultural policy, including an acceptance of geographical scale and the cost of transport in South Africa.
- (ii) Supra-national/continental: South Africa should also be aware of its place and role in the region. While significant differences do exist (for example, regarding cultural budgets, with cultural funding in South Africa far exceeding any neighbouring country) there are also commonalities and areas for sharing experiences, particularly on the ratification and implementation of the UNESCO 2005 Convention. South Africa also needs to develop relationships in the field of culture with regional peak organisations such as the African Union (AU) and the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).
- (iii) International: although caution should be exercised when borrowing models from other countries, South Africa must continue to proactively engage in international exchange of 'best practice' experiences. For example, lessons can

perhaps be learned on how to successfully invest in the creative economy from countries which may offer success stories, such as China and Singapore.

5 Challenges and opportunities for civil society

- There are many challenges for civil society. Inclusion by governments and international bodies can sometimes be limited, characterised by a donor or patron-client relationship rather than genuine mutual partnership. There is often misunderstanding of civil society by government, and of government by civil society, which could best be resolved through greater dialogue and interaction. Further, it was felt by many that consultative processes between government and civil society had often been somewhat superficial. Nevertheless, the value of the existence of real political will to make good cultural policy in South Africa should not be underestimated. Other difficulties for civil society, however, include:
 - (i) Limited capacity: institutionalised space for civil society will mean little unless it is matched by capacity to act. While funding in the cultural sector has not been in short supply in South Africa compared to other SADC countries, there has been a notable decline in funds for civil society cultural organisations as donor funds have become more closely aligned with and responsive to the priorities of the new democratic government. Further, resources are inconsistent and limited, particularly in terms of staffing, where a culture of volunteerism results in individuals sitting on multiple boards. Similarly, cultural civil society is often expected to contribute its expertise for free.
 - (ii) The challenge of working together: even when a clear definition of civil society prevails, different organisations often have difficulty working together and operating with a single unified voice. Co-ordinating efforts will be important, and while creative unions have a role to play in this, until recent attempts to merge and consolidate, they have often operated in isolation. Cultural coalitions can play a critical role in bringing civil society to a position where it is able to speak with one voice on certain issues. Rather than re-inventing the wheel, there may simply be a need to develop mechanisms to bring together the voices of those that are already working on the same issues and to support the capacity development of existing organisations. The South African Coalition for Cultural Diversity can play a convening role here.
 - (iii) The challenge of engaging: even taking into account such institutional difficulties, there is still much that civil society can do. Government-civil society relations are a two-way process, and the responsibility for improving engagement should be shared. Civil society must identify targets and areas for advocacy, such as parliamentarians and legislators, and continue to adopt clear and vocal stances.

6 Challenges and opportunities for research

- The processes of policy planning and review must be supported by high quality research. Research must be consistent and ongoing rather than simply ad hoc. There is also a need to develop an evidence base which speaks to locally appropriate benchmarks and indicators. Examples of good practice on how to

translate policy into legislation, practice and successful programmes should be captured and shared, both within South Africa but also regionally and internationally. The use of the web will be important in achieving this. Research should also be backed up by the gathering of sector-specific statistics, which could be achieved through further collaboration with UNESCO.

- Civil society specifically should engage more in research where possible. Research will enable consistent and coherent positions to be adopted, as well as enabling targeted and pinpointed advocacy, which will be critical given limited resources. Case studies of good practice of genuine mutuality and equal partnerships will help civil society articulate their concerns and demands for a meaningful role in policy planning and review. Coalitions of cultural organisations can play an important role, therefore, not only in bringing together isolated organisations but also in the facilitation of combined research to empower an advocacy position.

7 Challenges and opportunities for awareness-raising

- Both government and civil society have a real responsibility to raise awareness of the issues that cultural policy seeks to address. Without proper explanation of issues such as copyright and piracy in terms which are relevant to citizens and which connect with their lives and concerns, there will not be popular engagement and mobilisation on issues of cultural policy. Events such as the Cape Town Book Fair and other national and regional festivals should be used as platforms to encourage debate and promote understanding and cross-sectoral collaboration. There is a precedent here from the United Kingdom in the 1960s where festivals were first used as an opportunity to debate issues and as a cost-effective means of creating enduring national networks. Key documents such as the UNESCO 2005 Convention can and should be translated into different languages and made more understandable in popular terms. These objectives of awareness-raising and popular participation are ones which should be shared by government and civil society.

Conclusions

The discussion on 'Culture in Development' was the second in a series of Commonwealth Foundation consultations on different aspects of culture, cultural policy and development. The consultation's findings will feed directly into the Foundation's new research project, 'Putting Culture First', which is set to culminate in the publication of a report in November 2008. Further details of this research project are available at www.commonwealthfoundation.com/culturediversity/research.