Regional Conference on the Theme:
"Governance of Cultural Diversity: Challenges and Opportunities
for Sustainable Development and Peaceful Coexistence in Africa"
Venue: Accra, Ghana
Date: 10-12 October 2019
Deadline for submission of Abstracts: 23 August 2019

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

I.   Background

The 2018 UN Report on Cultural Rights on "Universality, cultural diversity and cultural right"[1] makes ample reference to the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), which provides some elements of definition, when indicating that: "culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations" (art. 1).

The UNESCO Declaration further emphasized that respect for cultural diversity is a guarantor of international peace and security and of social cohesion, and a root of development, as well as "an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity" (art. 4). It therefore grounds respect for cultural diversity in a commitment to the implementation of universal human rights, in general, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular.

Besides, this concept is not an override of universality, and the Declaration makes it unequivocal when upholding that: "no one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope" (art. 4).

More precisely, the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) is more generous in its definition of cultural diversity, when highlighting that: "Cultural diversity" refers to the manifold ways in which the cultures of groups and societies find expression. These expressions are passed on within and among groups and societies. Cultural diversity is made manifest not only through the varied ways in which the cultural heritage of humanity is expressed, augmented and transmitted through the variety of cultural expressions, but also through diverse modes of artistic creation, production, dissemination, distribution and enjoyment, whatever the means and technologies used."

The 2018 Report however warns against the fact that respect for cultural diversity has in recent years been threatened by those who deny this human reality and seek to impose monolithic identities and ways of being, by those who advocate various forms of supremacy and discrimination, and by diverse populists, fundamentalists and extremists[2]. Cultural diversity is still wrongly understood as being in opposition to universality, including by some Governments and other actors who misuse it as an excuse for violations of the very universal human rights within which its enjoyment is explicitly embedded, and by others who oppose the concept altogether.

Bringing this discussion to Africa, commonly referred to as the cradle of humanity, an exception in its breath diversity and a home to hundreds of ethnic groups speaking over 800 languages, it is important to acknowledge that most of these States contain numerous ethnic groups, which came to live together within the same country, only as a result of colonial fiat.

Hence, the finding of the 2018 UN Report on Cultural Rights are certainly trivial, but need more attention and consideration to address some emerging challenges today. For instance, the Report recalls that : "we must recognize the very real histories of forced assimilation that have sometimes been imposed, inter alia, on

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[1] https://undocs.org/en/A/73/227
[2] see A/HRC/34/56 and A/72/155

indigenous peoples, minorities and people living under colonialism and the disdain with which their cultural resources have often been treated." Universality is about human dignity, not about homogeneity. But we must also recognize the diversity of diversities, not only between, but within all human collectivities, and the fact that, among others, women, minorities, freethinkers and persons targeted because of their sexual orientation or gender identity have also been wrongfully subject to hegemony and abuse within groups."

Indeed, there is a rise of instability within sub-Saharan countries, manifested through social unrest, political tensions, entrenched xenophobia, hate speech, violent extremism, insurgency, militancy, secessionism, terrorism, populism, etc. Very often, they are driven by ethnicity and religion or even language, exacerbated in the realm of politics. Civil wars in Angola, Central African Republic, DRC, Ethiopia, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Uganda, massacres between Hutus and Tutsis in Burundi and Rwanda have all involved ethnicity and demands based on it. The ongoing situation in the Anglophone Cameroon follows a similar path.

According to some experts, sub-Saharan African States are generally divided by language, culture and religion. Good governance of diversity is indispensable to create a society where citizens are respected and acknowledged based on their cultural identity. Hence, effective diversity management is critical to the socio-economic transformation of African countries and to its sustainable development. Hence, instilling discussion, research and concrete policy-oriented action for establishing and strengthening mechanisms to enhance diversity governance is much needed in African.

II.   Objective and expected outcomes
This conference aims to provide a platform for knowledge production and experience sharing on the governance of diversity, notably cultural diversity, and exploring how best to improve both the existing scholarship and academic work in this area to nurture more effectively policy environment, practices and programmes for grounding peaceful and sustainable inclusive societies. Besides, it is about identifying and sharing of existing good practices worth leveraging on, as well as appropriate review mechanism that could be useful to monitor and inspire a more systemic approach to monitor countries efforts to lay the foundations for peaceful co-existence, unity in diversity.

III.   Duration and format
The conference is proposed to take place over three days. Upon reception of abstracts, a Committee will analyze, select and suggest an agenda that will include a keynote to address in a broader sense the theme, and shed more light on the discussions that will be organized within plenary panels and sessions. Each session will comprise panelists with diverse background including, but not limited to academics, experts, government authorities, civil society organization, religious leaders, traditional rulers, as well as youth organizations. Methodologies, approaches and tools offered by the UNESCO Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme will be used throughout this process.

IV.   Conference Sub-themes
Abstracts for this conference are therefore invited in any of the sub-themes under Section IV below, welcoming in particular expression of interest and submissions from young researchers, with a selected number of scholarship to be made available to cover the cost of their participation in the conference. In this regard, Abstracts should be directed to the UNESCO Regional Abuja Office via e-mail at abstracts.abuja@unesco.org, best before 30th August 2019.

1. Conceptualizing Cultural Diversity in Africa: Semantic, Epistemological and Philosophical Considerations;
2. Governance of Cultural Diversity: An overview from Pre-colonial to Post-colonial African State;
3. Governance of Cultural Diversity and the Shaping of National Unity;
4. Indigenous peoples and minority groups: Integrating the right to difference in nation building;
5. Reporting diversity, conflict and violence in a plural-ethnic society: the role of the Media;
6. *Assessing, measuring, and enhancing cultural diversity: What concrete tools, mechanisms and good practices to sustain reconciliation and resilience for national unity and peaceful coexistence?*

More specifically, submissions should consider the scope and expectations highlighted under each of the sub-themes below:

1. ***Conceptualizing Cultural Diversity in Africa: Semantic, Epistemological and Philosophical Considerations***

Africa is one of the most diverse continents in the world. The identity in Africa borrows from culture, ethnicity, gender, religion, language, occupational group, etc. In most occasions, such identities overlap with each other. Papers invited under this session shall discuss the features and commonalities of cultural diversity in Africa states. The panel will investigate how cultural identities are defined and perceived by the States, the public and even at the regional level, and how the history of animosities or peaceful coexistence plays in the narrative. Exploring and suggestion of new narratives and conceptual frameworks to consider the complexity of diversities in Africa is much invited and exploring the unifying or dividing influence of existing narratives and the shifts in perception of identities in different instances is also welcome.

Besides, this panel will analyze some concepts surrounding that of cultural diversity, starting with culture, but also concept and approaches such as "interculturality", "cultural pluralism", "nationalism", "federalism", among others, considered in the African context, with suggestions on how they influence or not the policy environment. Experiences from other regions of the world are also invited.

2. ***Governance of Cultural Diversity: An overview from Pre-colonial to Post-colonial African State***

Contributions expected under this sub-theme shall shed more light on how the diversity in the continent was addressed in the precolonial Africa, with concrete examples, including for instance the assessment of practices and approaches used at the time to promote unity in diversity, such as alliances, non-aggression pacts, as well as traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. The Kouroukan Fouga or Kurukan Fuga in the Mali Empire or practices and expressions of joking relationships in Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, among others, will be worth considering in this regard.

The mechanism used by colonizers to classify indigenous population and divide among different identities within could also shed light on the perceptions of identities on the post-colonial African State.

Besides, realities of the nature of African States and States building after colonization is peculiar in this context, with a view to recall some of the challenges post-colonial African States had to deal with to build national unity, while highlighting related challenges and consequences today.

Proposals of abstracts under this sub-theme will also seek to engage further on approaches taken by different States vis-à-vis the management of diversity and its institutionalization, notably through the constitution or within specific other national legal frameworks, including the geographical organization of the national administrative landscape as well as national programs with the aim of enhancing unity in diversity, promoting tolerance and celebrating diversity within the country such as unity schools in Nigeria. Critical analysis on how effectively this shapes the nation building and above all, national unity is invited in this regard, as well as recommendations for relevant actions to be considered as a way forward. Analyzation of identity politics in some African countries i.e. how identities are manipulated and even recreated by political parties or leaders to raise identity-based agitations and achieve political goals would also be welcome.

3. ***Governance of Cultural Diversity and the Shaping of National Unity***

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity states that: "as a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature."

However, in different contexts in Africa, we continue to witness uses and abuses of cultural diversity, ethnicity and religion, especially from the political elite. This provides fuel for agitation, hate speech, exclusion, division and crisis, with fertile ground during electoral processes.

Effective management of diversity, (namely ethnic, religious and linguistic) within a country is a requisite for nation building. This entails the integration of the different identity groups, with their languages, cultural practices, religious and spiritual belongings into a community of citizens under an agreed shared system of values, norms and institutions. Recognizing common cultural heritage and unifying values of a people and

nation, while respecting the rich diversity of the peoples within, their identities, cultures and religions, are important steps for forging a national identity.

Under these sections, we are inviting abstracts to help with a critical diagnosis of the management of diversity at country levels, especially in the electoral processes. Concrete examples from countries like Nigeria and Kenya, analyzed from the perspective of their recent passed Presidential elections, or Cote d'Ivoire, Togo and Benin, in respect to ongoing critical political situation, in preparation of upcoming elections in 2020 or 2021, will be more than welcome.

Besides, a case like Cameroon could be given attention, with a view to analyzing the ongoing crisis in the North-West and South-West Region, and assess the historical challenge of building National Unity from the colonial heritage from France and Great Britain.

Insights on the building of national unity, such as how does history education play a role in nation-building and geographical organization of the State could also offer entry points to the discussion.

Analysis building some international and regional standard setting instruments designed for a more effective governance of diversity. This may include, but not limited to UNESCO Declarations and Conventions in the field of culture, with a view to assessing how constitutional design as well as national legal frameworks and policies can meet with international standard setting instruments requirements, and how this could contribute to the effective management of diversity at regional, national and grassroots levels? Analyzing the cultural policies of given countries and assessing their contribution to enhancing better mutual understanding will be interesting in this context.

4. Indigenous peoples and minority groups: Integrating the right to difference in nation building

Guiding Principle 1 on "Principle of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" contained in Article 2 of the UNESCO 2005 Convention states that "Cultural diversity can be protected and promoted only if human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression, information and communication, as well as the ability of individuals to choose cultural expressions, are guaranteed. No one may invoke the provisions of this Convention in order to infringe human rights and fundamental freedoms as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or guaranteed by international law, or to limit the scope thereof."

As such, Cultural diversity implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular, the rights of persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, including indigenous peoples. Cultural exclusion often brings economic marginalization, which causes resentment, tribalism, radicalization and social conflicts.

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights stresses the importance of recognizing collective rights in addition to promoting individual rights. As such, special policies targeting minority groups intended to promote equal rights including economic rights, land rights, and cultural rights are adopted and implemented in many countries in Africa.

Echoing the role and contribution of traditional rulers or religious authorities is essential in this context, namely for prevention and negotiation of secessions of hostilities, as well as their experience in peacebuilding, guided by longstanding practices rooted in cultural traditions and customary rules in practice, far before the establishment of modern African States.

For instance, traditional institutions such as the Akan court in Ghana, the Acholi Justice System in Northern Uganda, the Poro and Sande, which are traditional institutions of education by Kpelle people of Liberia, the Ngon of the Bamun peoples in Cameroon or the Gatchacha in Rwanda, have contributed to conflict prevention and resolution as well as to reconciliation in Africa.

In this panel, papers invited should address best practices in promoting indigenous peoples knowledge, languages, traditions and customs to promote their specificity and added value within a national context. In this regard, it will be important to analyze how modern African States manage to bridge traditional values, customary norms and practices with the modern laws to improve social mediation for more justice and peace. Papers submitted here shall build on experiences from different regions in Africa in laws and policies concerning minority group rights, notably with regard to languages, and explore how such policies could best promote cultural diversity and peace. NGOs and community-based organizations with relevant experience are welcome to participate and to share their experience. This session will contribute to 2019, International Year of Indigenous Languages.

5. Reporting diversity, *conflict and violence in a plural-ethnic society: the role of the Media*

This section borrows extensively from the analysis provided by Professor Umaru A. Pate[3] in the book he co-edited with Professor Lai Oso and entitled: "Multiculturalism, Diversity and Reporting Conflict in Nigeria, Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Limited, 2017. This book outlines that Nigeria's diversity has been both its strength and weakness, with, of recent, the negative side of its diversity and pluralism having been oversighted the positive side. In this context, the mass media have been accused of providing the oxygen that keeps the fire of conflict burning.

The submissions under this sub-theme, the role and responsibility of the media, shall help addressing some key questions, such as: What's the origin of people's perception of their identities? What really cause the conflicts related to ethnic, religious or political identities? Why are governments and institutions failing to monitor and contain these conflicts? Whom do we blame? Could it be specific individuals or institutions? Is there a role for or a responsibility of the media in resolving or aggravating such conflicts? How is the public's perception of the other identity including stereotypes shaped by the media? Linguistic studies on the use of language in reporting on people of different religious and ethnic origins as well as on reporting conflict situations are also welcome. Researches focused on the development and influence of one-sided narratives in conflict situations either created through traditional media or spread across social media under the Africa context will be invaluable. What role does media, including social media play in shifting conflict situations in different African countries? Comparison of press coverage of conflicts between international news agencies and local agencies, between the coverage with different indigenous languages could also provide insights.

6. Assessing, measuring, and enhancing cultural diversity: What concrete tools, mechanisms and good practices to sustain reconciliation and resilience for national unity and peaceful coexistence?

This session shall offer a space for practical discussions on opportunities and challenges to make cultural diversity a reality, through shared experiences of tools, approaches, initiatives and ideas from different perspectives. The relevance of research and academic literature for policy development action in the field of cultural diversity in Africa will be interesting to consider, building for example on existing cultural policies and the role of governments in the development and implementation of such cultural policies. Emphasis will be given to the place, role and contribution of civil society organizations and even ordinary citizens and their effective use of culture and the arts more generally in promoting creativity, dignity, tolerance, reconciliation and resilience in multicultural and diverse environments, especially in post-conflict or post-crisis settings.

Above all, the session will showcase some experiences and good practices, as well as shaping and fine-tuning methodologies and approaches to support countries for a better integration of cultural diversity. The relevance of the setting of indicators that could assist in monitoring the effectiveness of intercultural dialogue for the promotion of cultural diversity within a given country will be particularly addressed.

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[3] Umaru A. Plate is a renowned Professor and Dean, Faculty of Communication, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria