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Swiss Agency for Development  
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# REFLECTION PAPERS ON CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT



## CULTURE MATTERS – WHERE WOULD WE BE WITHOUT IT?

2020 is a year of global crisis: the COVID-19 pandemic has placed many restrictions on every day and public life. It has deprived people of their livelihoods, taken healthcare systems to the brink of collapse and brought the travel industry to a temporary standstill. In a pandemic, public health unquestionably comes first.

But the crisis has also shown us what matters in our dealings with those around us, and what makes us human. Although the lockdown brought cultural institutions – museums, theatres, cinemas and clubs – to a standstill, inspiration was not lacking. On the contrary, artistic expression showed itself to be crisis-resistant, adaptable and highly creative. Cultural institutions and creative people switched to digital communication channels at short notice and hosted concerts or film festivals via livestream. People played music from their balconies and got creative online. They demonstrated the importance of cultural inspiration – all over the world. Art and culture provide an outlet that helps people face crises, deal with the situation emotionally and overcome challenges.

Over the centuries, culture has helped Switzerland to overcome many crises on the way to peaceful coexistence. Linguistic and cultural diversity is part of our identity and is one of the fundamental values of our federal system. Switzerland also recognises that protecting and encouraging culture internationally is a great way to foster peace around the world and to support sustainable development. Culture is essential to the self-determination and peaceful coexistence of peoples. Culture can give minorities a

voice, build people's self-confidence and drive social change. However, the COVID-19 pandemic in particular has also shown how heavily the culture sector depends on an engaged public, creative freedoms and opportunities, and also funding.

Culture Matters stands for the SDC's commitment to supporting a dynamic, independent arts and culture scene in its partner countries. Even though at first glance it is difficult to quantify the added value of art and culture, much is to be gained from their promotion and support. This publication examines how the SDC's commitment to culture can have an impact on various traditional development cooperation themes. Drawing on a discussion of the theory and practical examples from different regions, it demonstrates the potential and impact of cultural production, and how it can shape the future of society. We would like to thank the author, François Matarasso, for the reflection papers compiled in this issue. They formed the basis for a discussion and learning process that will help us to better direct and realise our commitment to the arts and culture. We are delighted to be able to share these inspiring and thought-provoking reflection papers with you.



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## INTRODUCING CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

### Author: François Matarasso

François Matarasso (b. 1958 UK) is a community artist, writer and researcher. He worked as an artist with communities for 15 years before applying this experience to researching the theory, experience and outcomes of people's participation in culture. His 1997 report, *Use or Ornament?*, established influential concepts in cultural policy, and was followed by other studies of culture and community development, including *A Restless Art, How participation won and why it matters*, (2019). Alongside this research he combines practice as a community artist with consultancy specialising in evaluation and training, and has now worked in about 40 countries. He has served as trustee of Arts Council England, the National Endowment of Science Technology and the Arts, and the Baring Foundation and held honorary professorships at universities in the UK and Australia. His broad experience and expertise in the field of culture were also central to the SDC commissioning him as author for this booklet. In the form of reflection papers, he examined ten topics in the field of culture and development. The selected themes are based on the principles of the SDC's culture and development policy.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, the idea of universal education was controversial, with many in the governing class arguing that it was unnecessary and would merely give working class children ideas above their station in life. Today, with primary school enrolment across the world standing at 91%, such attitudes seem absurd, offensive even.<sup>1</sup> Now a comparable change is under way in how culture is valued, and who participates in its creation. Long regarded as a privilege or a luxury – an idea that is itself cultural – culture is emerging as a powerful resource for social and economic progress. Why is that happening? And what do we mean by culture anyway?

Humans need meaning. Our consciousness compels us to seek answers to the mysteries of life, to understand and explain our own existence. From their earliest steps on earth, human beings made images, rituals, stories and performances, in an effort to make sense of an unpredictable environment, to comfort and console, to create community, and to mark moments of joy and fulfilment. That need produced many complex languages of symbolism through which could be defined morality, status, place, time and many other boundaries that govern human lives. In most climates, humans need to cover their bodies: that is survival. But the codes that govern who may or must wear which clothes, when and where – that is culture.

Most of our culture, most of the time, we take for granted. We put on the same clothes each morning, our minds on other things. Only when something interrupts the daily routine – a job interview or a social invitation – are we obliged to rethink how we dress and what signals that might give to others. This understanding of culture is often described as 'anthropological', an accurate term in itself, but one that can suggest the dangerous idea that culture is something that affects only others. The period of European colonisation depended on that belief, embodied in the distinction between art and ethnographic museums. Europeans saw their culture (it would be better to speak of *cultures*, but here, it is the common ground that matters) as normal, the summit and universal standard from which the cultures of other peoples deviated. Any value ascribed to those cultures was related to how closely they could be thought to approach the standards set by Europeans for their own culture. Colonial empires, so proud of their own civilisation, used that difference explicitly to justify domination.<sup>2</sup> There was a time – and perhaps it is not entirely past – when development made similar assumptions, even if unconsciously. Its aim was to get other countries to meet standards thought to be normal and universal.

Experience, theory and research have revealed the dangers of such thinking. Culture was initially seen as a potential barrier to the success of a development programme, and many failures were interpreted in that light. Today it is understood more positively as a resource, and local knowledge and traditions are treated with more respect than they once were. Culture, it transpires, can be an immense asset to develop-

ment, empowering people to tackle their own needs in their own way. Indeed, it could be said that this has been the role of culture throughout history.

And what of art? One of the things that makes discussion of culture in development tricky is the slippery elision between culture and art. The two words encompass vast, complex ideas and are rarely used by two people to mean the same thing. The problems began with the invention of the Fine Arts during the European Enlightenment, as philosophers such as Immanuel Kant sought to define a non-religious system of values. Those new ideas energised European art, making it the creative force it is today, but at the cost of establishing a hierarchy that reduced most forms of artistic expression to a lesser rank. In this world, classical music is considered art and worthy of public subsidy while pop, folk and world music are classed as culture, entertainment or, in a telling phrase, 'sub-cultures'.

In the context of development, such distinctions – to use Pierre Bourdieu's famous term<sup>3</sup> – are especially damaging. They risk perpetuating colonial prejudices, and missing what it is that makes culture a vital force in development. Rather than seeing culture as intrinsically good, in a hierarchy with European Fine Art as the summit, we could see it, like science, as a power – a set of skills and resources that enable people to understand their experience, imagine alternatives, find common ground and motivate others for change. Like all power, culture can be used for good or bad purposes (recognising that those terms are themselves shaped by culture). The goal of Switzerland's development policy must be to use that power in the service of its core democratic and constitutional values of common welfare, sustainable development, cohesion and cultural diversity.

Art – the self-conscious, self-critical practice of culture to create new meanings in a public or democratic space – has a key place in that process, alongside but distinct from the wider field of culture. It is the research and development branch of culture, the workshop in which new ideas, desires and narratives are forged, the forum in which human diversity can interact peacefully and creatively. Art's products – an evolving group that includes music, stories, performance and images, often in combination – fuel the modern economy because they make meaning. Speaking to the imagination, they help us understand ourselves and others, and shape how we see the world. In an increasingly globalised world, where artistic and cultural products cross borders as fast as money, who produces culture and who receives it has gained international importance. The global South is disadvantaged in many ways, but not in cultural resources. The development of its capacity for cultural, artistic and creative production and distribution is vital to its ability to resist domination and achieve more equitable relations with the world's rich nations.

This series of reflections on the place of culture in development was begun in the summer of 2019. It is completed with most of the world confined to the home – at least where people have one – in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. That, as many people have said, changes everything. Whatever world will emerge from this catastrophic health crisis, it will be one traumatised by grief and fear. It will be poorer and preoccupied by the effort of recovery and reconstruction. It might seem, after all, that this is not a time to talk about culture. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The pandemic was created by culture, from the sale of wildlife in Chinese food markets to the frequency of international travel for business and pleasure. It was experienced culturally, as people lost the pleasures of café and football match, but turned to books and films, internet conversations and singing to each other from their balconies. And the recovery will equally be defined by culture – by the science applied to understanding and overcoming the disease, by the stories that help people make sense of their experience, by the imagined futures that frighten them or give them hope.

The pandemic has been narrated largely from the perspective of the wealthy countries of the global North, where every policy measure is scrutinised and mapped against the progression of the disease. The death toll in India, where millions have neither a home in which to shelter nor the ability to secure food beyond their daily needs, may only be known through statistical analyses. There is a grave danger that the recent improvements in quality of life in the global South will be arrested or even reversed by this pandemic, and that the voices of the world's most vulnerable people will not be heard in debate about what happened or what could happen next. Culture cannot be a solution to these immense problems, but it is a territory where solutions can be found, where trauma can be acknowledged and healed, and where new ways of living will be imagined.

The texts in this booklet are intended as short introductions to some of the themes, policies and practices that currently link culture with development, rooted in the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation's long experience in this field. Such a brief text, with its focus on readers concerned with development but not necessarily expert in culture, has unavoidable limitations. References have been kept to a minimum because there is a wealth of online materials, not least SDC's own Culture Matters website. Above all, there are experts in the Global Cooperation Department to offer information and guidance, and people working in culture and development throughout the Swiss diplomatic service. All will be more than happy to talk about how and why Switzerland achieves its development goals by placing art and culture at the centre of its work.

François Matarasso

# CULTURAL RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS



Documentary art workshops with young people in San José de Chiquitos, September 2018, Bolivia.

Photo: Oscar Soza / ozZo ukumari

On the surface, cultural rights might seem secondary to human rights. After all, protection of a person's life and liberty must be more important than protection of their music, temples or traditions. The difficulty is that a person's culture can be used to justify inequality, oppression or even genocide. The suffering of the Rohingya people in Myanmar provides terrible recent evidence. So the authors of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were wise to include Article 27, which states that:

*Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.*

It is by participating in the cultural life of the community that people publicly express their identity and values. Denied that capacity, minorities struggle to defend other human rights.

One reason why culture is often seen as a secondary concern in Western policy, is a tendency to focus on its products rather than its purposes. During the European Enlightenment, culture was elevated above everyday concerns (which paradoxically increased its economic value). The creation of cultural artefacts was imagined as a pure activity that depends on other needs already being met. Thus, in Maslow's influential hierarchy of needs, culture is seen as an aspect of self-actualisation, at the apex – but also last.

But this idea of culture does not correspond to what people actually do, either in Europe or anywhere else. They make culture by meeting their needs, not afterwards on a symbolic day of rest. The purpose of culture is not the creation of artefacts: it is the creation of values. It enables people to speak for themselves and not only be spoken about. It is through cultural and artistic expression that human beings build meaning, identity and community. If they cannot do that, they are denied agency and the ability to repre-

sent themselves publicly. They become the subjects of others' representation only – and that is disempowering and dangerous.

The cultural aspect of development has become better understood in recent decades, partly as a result of failed initiatives and hard lessons learned. This is vital, both in terms of efficacy and rights. But the importance of culture goes beyond sensitivity to social structures, customs and beliefs. The distinction between art and culture is useful because it highlights the conscious and unconscious dimension of human meaning-making. Recognition of this conscious activity, which modernity has called art, now brings an empowering dimension to development. Creating and sharing art is central to how people participate in the cultural life of the community, and SDC allocates funding to support that right in its programmes.

*The teacher promised us beatings if he heard us speaking in Chiquitano, he was educating us, being Indian was bad, we had to be citizens and being an Indian was not being a citizen in that time.*

The indigenous people in Bolivia held onto their culture through centuries of repression. Today, the 'Chiquitanía Viva' project celebrates their neglected art, documenting sculpture, music, textiles and stories in digital form. It creates connections between, generations, technologies and places, bringing disregarded voices into the public space of Bolivian culture through exhibitions, online platforms and events. 'Chiquitanía Viva' is supported in Phase II of the Swiss Cultural Programme (2016–19), alongside 30 other artistic initiatives in every region of the country.

## 2 ARTISTS AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

These highlight diverse concerns such as domestic violence, water contamination, people trafficking, deaf culture and post-industrial decline. Prioritising the creative work of young people and women, they have supported education, social cohesion and community development, and established sustainable networks and facilities. Above all, they have enabled marginalised groups to participate in the cultural life of the community and to have their values and identities recognised. In doing that, they not only defend their own human rights, they enrich Bolivian culture and help society to grow.

The Fribourg Declaration on Cultural Rights (2007) brings together in a single document a series of rights already recognised in international instruments. It is an important statement,

and has been influential in some territories, notably France, where it has influenced the law. But in seeming to distinguish between cultural rights and human rights, does the Fribourg Declaration risk reinforcing the idea that culture is a secondary matter? Human rights are cultural – a statement of values about how things should be. They cannot be separated from culture, which governs how they are interpreted, negotiated and developed.

Cultural rights are the human rights that tell us we are human. And one day, perhaps, the culture of Chiquitano people will join the Jesuit Missions of the region on UNESCO's list of world heritage.



'Phaedra' Ilkhom Theatre. Photo: Anatoliy Kim

*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.*

Article 19, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

In the age of social media, when anyone with a smart phone can tweet their opinions to the world, freedom of expression might seem safe. In reality, the new information and communication technologies have created as many threats as opportunities. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights speaks of 'frontiers' because of the Iron Curtain. In 1948, freedom of expression was a matter of state policy. Radio was the principal means of broadcasting and governments were largely able to police what was published within their territories. In the Soviet

Union, the manuscripts of dissidents such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn passed dangerously from hand to hand. The West protested, but enforced its own values through censorship and self-censorship of publishing, theatre, film and TV. In Britain all plays had to be approved by the Lord Chancellor's office until 1968, while Hollywood film studios drew up their own production code to define not only what must not appear but to promote traditional values. The social revolution of the 1960s made such restrictions increasingly unenforceable (though BBC radio is still accused of banning certain records). In recent decades, democratic nations have gradually liberalised artistic expression, accepting that tolerance of once-marginalised voices can strengthen democratic life.

The more recent digital revolution inherited those liberal values, but in today's globalising world it opens new ideological divisions. Artists expressing alternative ideas are again at risk – and so is the idea of free speech itself. With no frontiers, the Internet has become the territory on which ideological battles are now fought, with their consequences played out in everyday life. When Pussy Riot performances went online, the group's art activism became a global issue for the Russian government. The conviction of two members for 'hooliganism' was an equally public response.

Threats to freedom of expression now come from at least three directions: states, corporations and citizens. Authoritarian governments try to extend control of established platforms like publishing, cinema and theatre, to citizens' use of the Internet. The dispute over censorship between Google and the Chinese government is a conventional instance, but the accusation of 'fake news' may be more dangerous because it undermines confidence in truth itself. From Fox to Facebook, corporations decide what can be said on their platforms, but with little reference to cultural or legal norms in different countries. Nudity and copyright material are quickly removed, while Holocaust denial stays in the name of free speech. Perhaps the most chaotic threat comes from loose networks formed around radical ideologies, who recognise only their right to free expression. Online hate speech and incitements to violence have led to murder, most notoriously in the case of *Charlie Hebdo* in 2015.

Democracy needs freedom of expression but its defence is more complex now than it was during the Cold War. Art is a vital resource in this struggle, partly because the artistic imagination resists the control of power, and partly because art's ambiguity is protective. With its metaphors, symbolism and ritual, its emotional connection and its imagery, art enables deniable speech in public space. It can be very difficult to prove meanings or intentions that audiences nevertheless understand perfectly, and that uncertainty can give some shelter to artists brave enough to say unpopular things. The creative work of artists is not always obvious but its emotional and experiential power can resonate for years in people's imagination.

In the republics of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, SDC's Regional Arts and Culture Programme helps safeguard space for independent creative expression. By financing theatre, jazz and film festivals, contemporary art and cultural education, it enables local artists to contribute to social development in their own countries. This is especially important – and difficult – in Uzbekistan, where cultural policy explicitly promotes a conservative, nationalist ideology. All state theatres must conform to this programme, while amateur and commercial theatres survive on popular entertainment. Only Ilkhom in Tashkent is tolerated as an independent space for creation, but it treads a dangerous line. Its founder, Mark Weil, was murdered in 2007, and the theatre itself has experienced unexplained fires and thefts. Accountable to the Ministry of Justice, not Culture, Ilkhom has an ambiguous status. Some believe it is used by the state to foster an illusion of tolerance, but for others it is a vital space for free thinking and the creative imagination. The work produced by Ilkhom is not obviously political: it operates on the edge of what is permissible. Nevertheless, in protecting alternative ideas and forms of expression, it helps maintain acceptance of different voices and the legitimacy of their expression.

Independent theatre is a minority interest in Uzbekistan but it nourishes the imaginations and critical thinking of people who play a vital role in the intellectual and political life of a modern country. SDC's recognition is vital, but delicate. The visibility it brings can offer artists some protection or increase the dangers they face from state and non-state actors. This is a difficult border and SDC must trust the artists it supports to judge what can be expressed and how. The efforts of some governments, including Uzbekistan, to control or prevent external funding of independent artistic work shows how seriously they take such work. Ilkhom means 'inspiration' and that is exactly what it provides to young artists in a country where freedom of expression is rare and precious.

SDC's cultural projects are part of a struggle for hearts and minds. Against those who seek to control freedom of expression, whether for reasons of ideology, power or profit, SDC aims just to keep open the principle of free speech for all. It can seem a difficult, even unproductive task, but it is vital in the campaign for tolerance and democracy at a time when they are increasingly threatened.

## CULTURE AS A ROUTE FOR DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

Democracy made great strides during the 20th century, sweeping away empires, monarchies and dictatorships. The ideal of self-government, rooted in human rights and the rule of law, became the norm, even if practice often fell short of promise. At the turn of Millennium, there were more democratic states than ever, and many people saw this as a permanent achievement. Twenty years on, that optimism looks misplaced. Democracy is on the back foot, no longer advancing its values, but defending them.

Discussion after Annie Gisler's film 'The Little Death' Cinema Amirani. Photo: Gori Photographers Club



The principle of democratic participation is at the heart of development, ensuring that its benefits are effective, sustained and fairly distributed. It is mainly advanced through political, legal and civil society programmes but art and culture can enhance their effectiveness in several ways. First, culture creates space for alternative and silenced voices, as described in the chapter on freedom of expression. Art touches people emotionally as well as intellectually. Its images, sounds and ideas resonate with audiences long after they have been experienced.

Secondly, artistic events enable a community-level discourse about issues that matter to them. Talking about cultural expressions can mean talking about political ideas, but without the appearance of doing so. If art is seen as unimportant, it can pass unchallenged, when more overtly political manifestations are denied.

Thirdly, cultural activity supports a small but important part of civil society, because independent cultural organisations offer people the structures and resources to engage in democratic life. They are especially valuable to the talented, engaged young people whose ideas and energy will influence the future of their society.

Since gaining independence in the 1990s, former Soviet republics have undergone massive socio-economic change. Some have also seen war and territorial disputes, and frozen conflicts make democracy especially fragile. In the South Caucasus, SDC supports two organisations using documentary film and photography to foster public discussion of sensitive issues. Both Noosfera Foundation (specialising in documentary film) and the [Tbilisi Photography and Multimedia Museum](#) work across borders in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, in peripheral cities and in rural areas. Film screenings and exhibitions attract large, often young audiences. People here can be wary of speaking in public, but the

facilitated discussions that follow each event build confidence. They encourage everyone to take part and enact democratic practices of open-minded thinking, listening and speaking. It is easier to talk about contentious issues and history when conversation is framed by shared experience of an art work. When that work has high artistic standards, it brings a seriousness that distances it from narrow political argument. Such exchanges are taken for granted in more open societies. In making them an everyday experience here, SDC nurtures the habit of democratic debate.

That debate is not always local. Film can reach large audiences online and off. In Moldova, SDC supported the production of *Plus Minus Unu*, a 30-minute drama about corruption in public health services. The quality of scenario, cinematography and performances make it a compelling story, and bring a human dimension to sensitive issues. By framing corruption as a moral dilemma faced by ordinary people, it avoids the simplifications of populists. In October 2018, the film won the People's Choice Award at the RAVAC International Film Festival in Chisinau and generated a lot of positive discussion on social media.

Like democracy, a success such as *Plus Minus Unu* needs deep roots that connect every part of society. Post-show discussions in small towns are one part of that cultural ecology. Another is SDC's support for training of young artists – the people who can create the films and photographs people want to talk about. SDC funds training programmes for young filmmakers by [CinéDOC-Tbilisi](#) in Georgia, and by [Didor International Film Festival](#) in Tajikistan. In Moldova, SDC has supported training and commissions through the National Film Centre and AltFilm, including a competition for scenarios on environmental and human rights themes. The Photography Hub for Education and Innovation runs

a mentor programme for women photographers from the South Caucasus. Another Moldovan project, AltFilm's [CineHub](#), is an online showcase for a new generation. These opportunities help nourish and diversify the pool of young artists able to tell the stories that matter to their communities.

Cultural organisations such as these can play a disproportionately important role in civil society. They tend to be established by educated, skilled and committed young people, and attract similarly engaged members. Because they are not overtly political, they address sensitive issues through art. But they are vulnerable, if the young activists on whom they depend give up or leave the country in the face of obstacles: CineHub is now in stasis for just that reason. So SDC support is vital because it builds their capacity, as they learn to manage projects, raise finance, comply with the law, work with partners and make international contacts. They professionalise their services and in doing so become stronger actors in civil society.

In making space for public debate, supporting new voices, and strengthening the cultural pillars of civil society, SDC's cultural investment nurtures the conditions of democratic participation. It supports other democracy programmes through relatively low-cost and low-risk actions that engage different, often marginalised groups. The value of cultural programmes lies in helping citizens develop the confidence and resources to participate in the first place. It lies in allowing difficult and complex things to be said, feelings to be shared, and understanding to develop. Art is how we express the things we find difficult to put into words. It is the beating heart of a genuinely democratic society.

The figure of the migrant is emblematic of our age. It is global, from the Mexican border to the Indian Ocean. It is ambiguous, a symbol of both vulnerability and threat. It is politicised, exploited and simplified. In all these ways, migration is continually discussed, but in the eye of the storm, the people concerned are silent, without a story.

In such a context, it is hard to form an accurate idea of migration, or how best to meet its challenges. People leave their homes in search of safety, protection or work, but no one does it easily. They cross oceans and borders, but also move within their own country. Although widely represented as a Western problem, migration weighs heaviest on poorer countries. Syrian refugees are mostly in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, not Europe: there are 6.1 million internally displaced people in Syria itself.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, more than 80% of African migration is within

*CISP's 'Art for Inclusion' project in Somalia. Photo: CISP*



the continent, where just five countries host 21% of all the world's refugees.<sup>5</sup> More people are displaced by natural disasters than conflict, though their situation often gets less attention. But whatever the cause, and wherever they arrive, their presence is a strain on social inclusion.

Statistics are important but they reinforce a tendency to see migration as a mass phenomenon, submerging individuals in an undifferentiated sea of otherness. In doing so, they obscure the humanity of the people involved. Who can empathise with a crowd? But migration is lived at a human scale, in individual decisions to go and the effects that has on other lives, including those left behind. In host communities, reception is also shaped by individual perceptions, culture and values. Integration and social cohesion are about local living conditions and how different people can accept one another as members of a community.

Art can play a valuable role here. It can help refugees recover from trauma and regain confidence within the security of familiar cultural practices. It can help migrants find dignity through telling their stories. And it can create welcoming spaces that enable people from different cultures to meet. Such work is growing in Europe, where there is cultural infrastructure and resources. Theatres and museums are learning how to involve new arrivals in creative work. The Finnish National Theatre in Helsinki is one of several to have produced plays with and about refugees. *L'atelier des Artistes en Exil* in Paris and *Counterpoint Arts* in London help migrant artists to establish themselves in their new countries. *Fada Theatre*, in the Netherlands, was formed by Syrian asylum seekers hoping to connect with Dutch audiences.

SDC supports projects working towards similar outcomes in other parts of the world. The Somali Civil War has created more than two million internally displaced people in this north-east African country. About 400,000 have moved to Mogadishu, where they are often seen as outsiders, people from different clans and cultures who disrupt local life. Evicted from the city centre, many have settled in peripheral districts, socially and geographically marginalised in their own capital. SDC supports the work of an international agency, *CISP*, to build bridges between residents and new arrivals, against a background of terrorist attacks. A recent project, *'Art for Inclusion'*, used participatory photography to bring these communities together. Over several weeks, ten internally-displaced people explored inclusion and exclusion in public space through workshops using PhotoVoice methodology. Thirty images were selected for an exhibition installed in Mogadishu's largest park, the Peace Garden, for three weeks in December 2018. The photos were accompanied by texts in Somali and English which spoke about people's feelings about belonging. Over a thousand people visited the exhibition, and many more saw the work through social media. The material created will be used in *CISP*'s education programme, so that the young generation grow up with a better understanding of their city and all its inhabitants.

*There are many people who come to the garden. They see many other people here and they mingle and get to know each other. They sit down together and have conversations. That is social inclusion for me.*

*Mustaf, from Las Anod, Somaliland*

Malaysia attracts workers from its poorer neighbours, but they often face exploitation and insecurity. The Bangladeshi photographer Shahidul Alam spent a year meeting his fellow countrymen and women, hearing their stories and documenting their lives in portraits. The outcome, supported by SDC, is *The Best Years of My Life* an exhibition and a book about painful choices and hardship, but also courage, resilience and achievement. Shown at the *Global Forum on Migration and Development* in Dhaka in 2016 and Berlin in 2017, the work gives those most affected by migration a voice in the forums where they are the objects of policy debate. The photographer turns statistics into people struggling to do the best for their parents or their children. Political questions arise but they are made concrete by lived experience. Above all, Alam's direct, unsentimental photographs connect their subject with the viewer emotionally, opening a possibility of empathy and understanding. The true contribution that migrant workers make to development in Malaysia and in Bangladesh is revealed in this art.

In important ways, this is a shared project. The people featured have received copies of the book, and organised a crowdfunding campaign to translate and publish the book in Bengali. As a result, the new edition will be printed to a higher standard than the original. The work continues to be exhibited locally, and Alam plans to publish the work as a newspaper that is affordable for everyone.

Artistic projects like these allow people from different groups to find common ground in experiences that are often seen – or presented – as divisive. They create a constructive, self-reflective atmosphere and build mutual confidence. Exhibitions and performances create shared memories of time spent with others in public space.

Artistic creation allows migrants to gain recognition for their talents as well as their needs, and creates natural opportunities for integration. When people tell their own stories, they reclaim the dignity denied them by the empty figure of the migrant. They become individuals in all their complex integrity and they begin to take their place among their neighbours, in society.



Performance at the Ubumuntu Arts Festival 2019.  
Photo: Ubumuntu Arts Festival

Can art really have a role in peacebuilding? To many people engaged in post-conflict reconstruction, that might seem counter-intuitive. A ceasefire creates urgent needs, from shelter and health care to disarmament and justice. Surely cultural issues must wait until these have been resolved.

But culture is there before conflict. In fact, its differences of belief, language and values can be used as an overt rationale for war, while its resources are not protected from exploitation as

propaganda. At the same time, culture is often a target, a proxy for the enemy. The shelling of the National Library during the siege of Sarajevo and the destruction of Palmyra by Daesh were global statements and attacks on morale. History may be written by the winners, but while war continues, all sides struggle to dominate its narrative. Art is one of the means they use.

And culture is there after conflict too, inscribed by suffering with new layers of meaning. Sometimes it is all that people have left to tell them who they are. It is one of their principal resources for making sense of what they have been through, and how that is done will shape the nature and endurance of the peace that follows.

Artists have always been present in conflict, and not only in admirable roles, simply because they are in every group and nation. What is new, in historical terms, is the direct engagement of artists in healing and reconstruction projects. Some are trained in the use of participatory theatre, music or visual art in post-conflict situations. Some specialise in supporting post-traumatic recovery through use of artistic processes. This happens not only after wars: artists have worked with communities in Sri Lanka after the tsunami and in South Australia after bush fires. The engagement of artists and creative organisations in reconstruction work has grown enormously in the past 30 years. Light on their feet, they often go where larger programmes do not.

[In Place of War](#) (IPOW) is a network of 84 creative activists in 24 countries, working to give young people alternatives to conflict. They help local artists to equip and manage spaces where young creatives can make music and art, developing skills and market potential through training and mentoring. In Soweto, IPOW supports [Trackside Studios](#) with donated equipment and training. The facilities are used by a hundred young musicians, DJs and artists in a sustainable, independent business. Being part of an

international network gives them access to support, visibility and markets. While a professional career is the dream of many, *In Place of War's* real value is in giving vulnerable young people a safe place to grow up away from conflict.

In Rwanda, SDC has supported two projects that use culture in the process of reconstruction in the years since the 1994 genocide. The Iriba Centre for Multimedia Heritage collects audio-visual documents of Rwanda's past, including the heritage of colonialism. It aims to make this archive available to all, for reflection and dialogue, and so help citizens regain the capacity for a certain kind of public speech. The work begins with safeguarding oral testimony in a country where literacy, though growing, is still an issue, and where neglect or misuse of such archival material is a real danger: digital technology has made manipulating evidence frighteningly easy. Iriba's second aim is to use its multimedia resources to support dialogue between social groups and generations, through the creation of new films, exhibitions and performances. The centre is independent, and has no government support. Without international donors, including SDC, its unique mission in social reconstruction would be lost.

Also in Rwanda is the [Ubumuntu Arts Festival](#) which uses contemporary performing arts, literature and the spoken word to promote shared humanity between people. Established in 2015, it runs for three days, in the amphitheatre of the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre, opening at the end of the annual 100 day period of commemoration. In this sensitive context, the festival directly engages the nation's legacy in productions like *Africa's Hope*, which drew on the testimonies of young survivors. It also presents international artists dealing with similar themes, with performers from Iraq, South Africa and Nigeria. The festival's founder, Hope Azeda, explains why art can be so important in healing and reconciliation:

## 6 ART AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PROSPECTS

*The beauty of art lies in its ability to deal with the unspeakable. Art can revisit traumatic scenarios and horrific moments in human history on an emotional level that few other methods can accomplish. [...] Above all, we encourage communities to fight hatred, dogmatism, and toxic ideas, all behaviors that precede deadly violence. Now, our mission is gradually unfolding into reality.*

Hope Azeda, *TIME*, 24 October 2018

In 1994, the UNDP published a landmark report arguing that freedom from want is as important to human security as freedom from fear. This broader vision of peace, encompassing people's economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security, has become a vital – albeit contested – basis of development. In its ambition, it also demonstrates how far the world still has to go to achieve not just the negative peace of ending war but the positive peace that can support human development.

Central to this concept of human security is its recognition of the role of citizens in establishing and building peace. Conflict may end – as it begins – through state action but lasting peace is in the hands of civil society. From small scale projects in refugee camps to memorials and international festivals, art can play a vital role in healing and reconstruction. The experience of SDC in Rwanda and elsewhere demonstrates its potential in human security.

*States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.*

Article 31.1 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

In general, humans are living longer, and many countries have ageing populations. Not in the Global South, though, where the young still far outnumber the old. Just 26% of Europeans are under 25, but in Latin America and the Caribbean the corresponding figure is 47%; in Africa it is 60%.<sup>6</sup> These young people will define the future of their countries, but only if they are able to reach adulthood in safety and security, only if they have access to education, training and pathways into productive work.

*Literary Reading Project in times of crisis, implemented by Fundación Libros para Niños, with the support of Swiss Cooperation in Central America. Photo: Fundación Libros Para Niños*



International donors have a vital part to play, both in services for young people and in improving the situation of women on whom they most depend. They naturally prioritise health, education and protection but, as the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises, creative play is central to children's development. Access to art and culture offers young people a uniquely exciting, yet safe territory for play and development. Through art, they can engage with the world in more and more sophisticated ways by:

- › **Discovering** their feelings and ideas, especially the obscure and incomprehensible aspects of their experience, and seeing how others encounter the world, through stories, games, images, music and performances;
- › **Processing** experience through playing with it artistically – deconstructing what they have been through before creatively rebuilding it at a manageable scale, and leaving traces of their imaginative journey for their future selves;
- › **Learning** what they like, believe, desire and care about, through art that holds feelings and ideas, as well as moral, philosophical, even political positions against which they can work out who they – and others – are or want to be;
- › **Organising** the great tide of childhood experience, so that they come to terms with their own imagination and its relationship with reality; and
- › **Sharing** their evolving sense-making safely with others, testing their own perceptions and positions, influencing the people around them and discovering more about themselves in the world.<sup>7</sup>

All these things happen through young people's engagement with art. They happen easily and happily, in contexts that empower and give voice to those often not considered by adults. It is one reason why young people are often so passionate about and committed to creative work. At an age where they are mostly *taught*, art allows them to learn for themselves. It gives them some power in a daunting world.

This is why SDC programmes that support young people's engagement with art can be so important. ¡Libros para Niños! is a small NGO in Nicaragua that celebrates reading as a creative act. Through reading stations, pop-up festivals, travelling libraries and other innovative means, the organisation gives children in the poorest neighbourhoods access to imaginative literature and the tools to explore what it offers. The scale is impressive: in 2015, ¡Libros para Niños!, worked with 44,000 children in 42 spaces, lending tens of thousands of books.

But the aim is much more than literacy: it is to help children living in dangerous circumstances learn to relax, to dream and to explore their feelings in security and intimacy. At a time of political violence in Nicaragua, with hundreds of people killed and injured, children are the forgotten witnesses. Many now live in fragmented families with fathers and brothers in exile. With SDC support ¡Libros para Niños! created a programme of therapeutic reading festivals in 18 neighbourhoods most affected by social violence since 2018. In doing so, they quietly give children of all ages the vital space in which to process traumatic experiences and discover imaginatively alternative visions of life.

*What you do is very valuable. Children need these spaces to be distracted, forget the sadness. I know my daughter will get ahead and her smile is my greatest joy.*

The Nicaraguan project is unusual because many of the beneficiaries are so young. SDC more often funds projects for teenagers and young adults. So, in Bolivia, it has supported film, theatre and visual art projects about sexuality, human trafficking, indigenous rights and ecological protection. These programmes attract enthusiastic participation because they give young people an outlet for their creativity where their ideas are taken seriously. They are also informal but intense training grounds for a wide range of transferable skills, from teamwork and planning to production and marketing. At a time of rapidly changing employment, it is especially important for young people to develop flexible, creative skills that will equip them for tomorrow's world.

The social, educational and economic importance of culture has grown immensely in recent decades. Art and culture offers young people in developing countries accessible routes to participate in that growth its benefits. It is a vital resource in their own journey to adulthood, helping them learn who they are and who they want to be. From reading other people's stories to creating their own, they grow to discover their capacities and desires. SDC's support for youth art projects, protects spaces in which children can be children, and helps teenagers and young adults contribute to the life of their communities with the creative resources that are at their command. It is a vital – and much too rare – investment in young people's future.

## 7 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND URBANISATION



'The Sea is Ours' project in Az-Zawayda/Gaza Strip.  
Photo: Ziad Dahlan, AMQF/SDC

*Sustainable development depends increasingly on the successful management of urban growth, especially in low-income and lower-middle-income countries where the most rapid urbanization is expected between now and 2050.*

United Nations, 2019<sup>8</sup>

Humanity's future is urban. In 1950, 30% of us lived in cities; in 2018, that figure was 55% and it is expected to be 68% by 2050. History suggests that is broadly a good thing: cities normally raise prosperity and living standards. Compared to people in rural areas, city residents tend to have access to better education, jobs, housing and services, although they face sharp inequalities too. Almost a billion of them live in

slum conditions, especially in parts of Asia and Africa, despite real success in reducing this insecurity in the past 15 years.

Urbanisation is fastest in the global south, where 27 of the world's 33 megacities are located. These metropolises of over 10 million are important but untypical. Nearly half of city dwellers (26.5% of the world population) live in places with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants.<sup>9</sup> They are dealing with technical challenges similar to those faced by European cities during the industrial revolution – the provision of the sanitation, power and transport systems that make it possible for large numbers to live in close proximity. At the same time, they are creating the social, political and administrative fabric that enables people to cooperate and live together well.

The theory of community development was a key tool during the era of reconstruction and decolonisation that followed the Second World War. In 1953, a year after the Indian Congress Party made it official policy, the United Nations defined community development as:

*a movement to promote better living for the whole community with active participation and if possible on the initiative of the community.<sup>10</sup>*

Views of community development have fluctuated widely in subsequent decades, especially as its potential for exploitation and manipulation became clearer, but it remains a powerful practice, even if it is not always named. At its best, it uses people's existing expertise to nurture experiential learning, organisational capacity and social capital, thus helping them gain power over their own situation. Part of its strength lies in its versatility, which has allowed it to be used in agriculture, health promotion, local economies – and culture. SDC's arts and culture programmes typically support community development to advance social goals, including addressing the challenges of urbanisation.

In the occupied Palestinian Territories (West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem) SDC has supported a valuable arts-led programme that has mobilised local people to tackle some of the urban problems they face. Working in partnership with the *A.M. Qattan Foundation*, SDC has supported 30 projects in 15 Palestinian municipalities since 2016. Whether they begin as artistic commissions or through community organisations, they address concrete problems: inadequate housing, drainage, sanitation and urban renewal.

In Qatanna, a West Bank town of 7,500 people, two artists worked with local young people to map the key issues and present them to the council. While the authorities considered, they organised work to repair and paint walls, plant flowers and place benches. Political graffiti on a large mosque was overpainted by embroidery patterns, with materials donated by local businesses. The old part of the town, which had been used as an unofficial landfill, was cleared by the municipality which set up regular garbage collection. In all 300 residents took part and the young people have now formed two organisations to continue social and urban improvements.

In 2019, a group of artists led an environmental campaign in the Gaza town of Az-Zawayda, to renew the relationship of the inhabitants with their beach. In the frame of 'The Sea is Ours' they worked with residents to clean the area and build a stage with seating and shade areas, all with recycled materials. They made the beach safe and attractive to families, offering a programme of theatre, comedy, music and storytelling, with games for children. The community regained the use of its greatest natural asset, and the newly clean beach drew visitors from across Gaza.

## 8 DEVELOPMENT AND THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Artists from Tulkarm worked with people in nearby Deir al-Ghusun to preserve old buildings threatened with demolition. One, originally an oil press, has been restored as a visitor attraction, while social and cultural uses have been found for others. This recognition of local heritage has brought new interest in traditional farming and the natural environment. Six derelict houses in a remote area have been transformed into a Wildlife Museum, in a cleaned and restored landscape with information signs, benches and art works.

The obvious benefits of these projects are better public spaces and facilities, but the community development outcomes are equally important. The projects have been able to give a central place to women and so challenge patriarchal social traditions. They have led to the creation of new NGOs and brought distant municipalities into partnership with them. They have given people confidence in their right and capacity to shape the places where they live. According to one person: *'If we are doing something together, we still feel we're living people'*.

The speed and scale of urbanisation can seem overwhelming, almost like a force of nature, producing massive needs. Cultural projects, including those supported by SDC in Palestine, show that cities have assets too, and never more than in the creativity of their citizens. Art can be a powerful route to community development and harnessing citizen's talents and commitment to their common future.

The term 'creative industries' was coined in the 1990s to group economic sectors where creativity is the defining resource: advertising, architecture, art, craft, design, fashion, film, music, performance, publishing, radio and TV, software, toys and games. But such a list raises obvious

problems. For instance, does an artisan sector like craft really have much in common with the film industry? And is there any connection between the values of novelists and advertising copywriters? Instead of solving such tensions, the alternative, 'cultural industries', adds further confusion for outsiders wondering what is the difference.

*Project for the creation of a semi-industrial textile and clothing unit in Koudougou, which has been supported by the Burkina Cultural and Tourist Development Fund, an SDC partner for the promotion of the cultural sector in Burkina Faso. Project implemented by Grand Surface Distribution.  
Photo: Burkina Cultural and Tourist Development Fund*



This is also a sector undergoing rapid transformation. The usual economic distinction between goods and services breaks down when news or music are sold as subscriptions rather than physical products. Artificial intelligence is redefining established concepts of authorship, further weakening the place of artists in a market dominated by huge corporations. It is no surprise that many policy-makers approach this field with caution.

But if there is uncertainty about the nature of the creative industries, there is none about their economic value, or their disruptive power. In 2002, the global market for creative goods was \$208 billion. By 2015, it had grown to \$509 billion, despite the 2008 financial crisis.<sup>11</sup> In Europe the creative industries grew at an average of 5.5% annually, twice as fast as the economy as a whole. In China, they increased five-fold in the same period. The sector is growing very fast in developing economies, perhaps against expectation. Switzerland is the world's sixth largest creative goods exporter, so creativity naturally has an important part in its international development policy. Although rich and modernising economies have dominated the field up to now, there are compelling reasons why no developing country can afford to neglect its creative and cultural industries in future.

To deal with the negative reasons first, developing countries are sharply exposed to the global power of the creative industries. At a basic level, most poorer countries are net importers of creative products and services. Since these sectors have both a commercial and a cultural value, importing countries find themselves conforming in multiple ways to other norms. Culture can exert immense soft power, and never more than when it is freely bought. The normative influence of television can shape the imagination and desires of a generation.

Developing countries can be affected in other ways too. 'Fast fashion' has grown on very cheap labour and unsustainable use of resources and waste production. The fun is had in Geneva or Berlin; the cost is paid in Dhaka and Hanoi. Artists' intellectual property is harder to protect in weak or corrupt states, resulting in widespread piracy of digital products such as music and film. The latest territory where these inequalities of power are played out is artificial intelligence, whose algorithms perpetuate the biases of coders in rich countries at the expense of other perspectives, places and values. In effect, developing countries that do not build their creative industries risk being locked into a permanently subordinate position.

Happily though, creativity is a universally distributed resource. A Caribbean island can become a global force in music, as Jamaica did through reggae. Their cultural distinctiveness can give artists anywhere a rewarding advantage: authenticity is a powerful resource in a globalising world. In Nepal, SDC has supported the training of a new generation of young Maithili women to produce art through the Janakpur Women's Development Centre, developing new contemporary product designs. Of the 19 women who received training, 10 are now employed at the centre, earning between 8000 and 10000 NPR a month. Such initiatives are small, but empowering for the people involved and they strengthen the local creative economy. The growth of e-commerce, though still small in developing countries, has the potential to allow artists everywhere to reach new buyers, especially among western consumers seeking alternatives to the corporations that now dominate the creative industries.

Governments in the Global South increasingly recognise this potential. In Rwanda, a creative industries mapping project, co-financed by SDC, identified 10,311 artists and art organisations, mostly young and working freelance, with performing art the strongest sector. Without training and support, they struggle to build sustainable careers, so the project recommends far-reaching changes in the nation's approach to cultural policy, management and training, with the intention of transforming the life chances of young creative people and the communities where they live.

In 2019 Burkina Faso adopted a national strategy to promote 'dynamic and competitive creative industries that generate wealth and jobs and promote Burkinabe culture'. This is to be achieved by strengthening governance, building the productive capacity of cultural entrepreneurs, better marketing and access to finance. Switzerland has been a key partner in this work for over 10 years, prioritising capacity-building and creative production in theatre and cinema. In the latest phase, 1,823 artists received training and 125 new works were produced, reaching a combined audience of six million, many of them in rural areas. Through its local partners, SDC helps artists develop business skills, promotion, access to markets, networks and all the soft infrastructure that supports creative industry development in richer countries. Its support is vital because it is long term, strategic and backed by deep expertise.

Cultural actors in both of these African nations prioritise the protection of cultural heritage and distinctiveness, a concern that reflects a vulnerability in the face of international cultural flows. Their concept of the work and value of creative industries is broad, with a concern not only for jobs and wealth creation, but for education, social cohesion, good governance and community development. It is a mature vision of the creative industries that recognises their economic, social and cultural value in the process of development.



Theatre performance for students as part of a campaign to empower adolescent girls. Photo: National Museum of Tanzania

Culture is intrinsic to education. Through its forms and processes young people learn about themselves, the world and their community's values. Culture shapes our identity and worldview although – or because – it is often unnoticed and unquestioned. Art, in contrast, wants to be noticed and often asks questions, including about cultural values and identity. It seeks to communicate and influence and, because it is critical, and touches feelings as much as ideas, it can be an empowering pathway to personal learning and development.

Art has been widely used as an education resource in fields as different as farming, women's rights and health. Social forms like theatre and music can raise questions and make a space for talking about answers. Mass media can bring these art forms to millions, making them a welcome part of everyday life. The world's longest running radio drama, the BBC's *The Archers*, began in 1951 as a vehicle to communicate modern farming methods. It has inspired many imitators with their own educational purposes. In Afghanistan, the BBC has broadcast *New*

*Home, New Life* since 1993, with financial support from Switzerland among others. It is stories that make the radio serial popular, but the information it dramatizes has also helped reduce listeners' injuries from land mines.<sup>12</sup>

In sub-Saharan Africa, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has achieved similarly positive results by aligning its cultural and development goals. In 2018, SDC funded five Tanzanian art projects about teenage pregnancy, which can affect young mothers' health, interrupt their education and bring social stigmatisation. The projects included music, visual art, drama, puppet shows, comics and radio plays. The accessible forms and popular styles engaged young people in artistic creation, which they shared through [community radio](#), TV, and web platforms such as [YouTube](#). They made innovative use of social media, with short, entertaining videos shared on WhatsApp and Instagram. The combined reach of this creative production is estimated at between 3 and 5 million people.

That was effective in raising awareness, but it is discussion of the artwork by young people in schools and community spaces that fosters learning that can change attitudes and behaviour. By working with the Ministry of Health and other state actors, and bringing public officials together with artists in seminars, SDC built support for creative approaches to health education. The impact cannot always be shown as clearly as with *New Home, New Life*, but art allowed girls to talk about sensitive issues, helping them gain understanding and control in their lives.

In Southern Africa, HIV remains an urgent priority with infection rates rising in the 9 to 15 age group, though they are falling among older people. Education is vital in preventing the spread of the disease and SDC has used the arts to support its work of health care. 'Drama for Life' was a three year partnership between the University of Witwatersrand and artists from across the region who were trained and supported to use applied theatre to raise HIV and LGBTI issues with communities. The programme involved theatre performance, workshops, radio plays and art designed for social media, and reached across South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Lesotho and Mozambique.

It was followed by 'Safeguarding Young People', which brought appropriate sex education and health services to young people through art, and aimed to influence the relevant cultural and legal frameworks. It trained 5,000 young leaders in Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights and Youth Development, and created a [web resource](#) to support their work, with country-specific guidance in several languages. In both programmes, drama has proved vital to sex education in communities where conservative cultural values make conventional approaches unacceptable. As one person working for SDC in the region explains:

*The arts and culture are core, and they are very fundamental to the way our society functions in Africa, particularly when you come to Southern Africa. Arts express certain issues that many people cannot express verbally.*

## 10 THE ADDED VALUE OF SWITZERLAND'S SUPPORT IN ART AND CULTURE

SDC's experience proves art's value in health education but its potential reaches far wider than that. Health, once seen merely as the absence of disease, is now understood positively as physical and mental health wellbeing, shaped by what the WHO terms the social determinants of health.<sup>13</sup> Policymakers, supported by a growing body of research, are starting to value cultural participation in mental health and wellbeing<sup>14</sup>. Many developed countries now finance participatory art as a health promotion measure.<sup>15</sup> In this context, it is reasonable to expect that other SDC cultural development programmes – from youth theatre in Bolivia to traditional culture in Kyrgyzstan – produce real if undocumented health benefits for the thousands who take part. These benefits may be secondary when set against the projects' original aims, but they are nonetheless a valuable contribution to development goals.

*There is a substantial body of evidence on the health benefits of the arts. [...] The arts hold promise in tackling difficult or complex problems for which there are not currently adequate solutions.*

Health Evidence Network synthesis report 67,  
World Health Organisation 2019<sup>16</sup>

Development involves simultaneous action on multiple fronts, taking account of the cultural complexities of different communities and ensuring that initiatives are mutually supportive. SDC's experience in arts and health shows that a programme can achieve health outcomes, support young artists, build creative businesses, improve social interaction and empower young people all at the same time. It is by valuing the richness of such varied results that culture projects reach their strongest impact.

The social, economic and political importance of culture has grown hugely in recent decades. The single fact that in 2012 China opened 451 new museums is a telling indicator of this changing reality.<sup>17</sup> Culture is central to a world that increasingly defines – and divides – itself

through the language of values. The idea that developing countries should not invest in culture until their other needs have been met is out of date and condescending. Culture is a universally distributed resource: the poorest countries have creative assets with global potential. They will escape subordination to other centres of cultural power only if they can develop their cultural assets alongside their other development priorities.

*Performance 'KIRINA' by Serge Aimé Coulibaly.  
Photo: Institut Imagine – Partner organization in the framework of the SDC's cultural commitment in Burkina Faso*



Switzerland has a leading place in the field of culture and development. That, at least, is how it is seen by artists, audiences, NGOs and even state actors in the countries where its international aid programmes are most strongly embedded. From Bolivia to Burkina Faso, Haiti to Ukraine, SDC's support for local cultural life is a visible and admired dimension of Switzerland's presence. It is seen not just as a supporter of art and culture, but one that brings expertise and sensitivity to cultural diversity.

The commitment to make one per cent of its budget available for cultural programmes is distinctive because *it integrates culture as a facet of development*. Donor nations often separate international aid from cultural cooperation, which they relate to cultural diplomacy and the projection of soft power.<sup>18</sup> That is a legitimate objective, and Switzerland too promotes its artists and artistic exchange internationally, through Pro Helvetia. SDC's approach is different, because it invests in the artists and cultures of partner countries, recognising them as intrinsic to a sustainable process of development. Rather than exercise its own cultural power, Switzerland helps partner nations cultivate their own. It seeks, in effect, to redress the balance.

Development follows its own principles, whether its focus is education, social cohesion or governance. Its processes of capacity building and empowerment can be supported in most fields of human activity, but in culture, the language of human values, development can engage in the fundamental questions of how people live and work together. The protection of cultural diversity is understood by Swiss citizens as a fundamental principle for mutual respect and cohabitation. It is a primary aim of the constitution of the Swiss Confederation, to 'promote the common welfare, sustainable development, internal cohesion and cultural diversity of the country'.<sup>19</sup> This respect for the cultural distinc-

tiveness of every Canton defines and underpins culture promotion in Switzerland today, with financial and other support being principally at municipal level, supported by the Cantons. In this way the character and autonomy of cultural expression in Switzerland is promoted.

It is natural that this understanding and sensitivity was translated into Swiss international development cooperation strategies. As early as 1976, the Swiss law for development cooperation states as its approach the mediation of knowledge and experience to enable people to shape their economic, social and cultural development.<sup>20</sup> This is why culture has been integral to more recent strategies of Swiss development cooperation. The participation of artists and cultural actors is recognised as vital in any democratic system; their work is a cornerstone of civil society.

This is not always obvious, especially if people are far from the terrain. Investing in clean water, food security or peacebuilding are self-evident goods. Art, in contrast, can seem much less vital – something to be addressed once life-threatening challenges have been overcome. But development is not a linear process, especially in fragile contexts. Take the struggle against violent extremism. One way of reducing the attraction of radicalism is to ensure that young people have possibilities for work, social recognition and a voice in their community. In Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia, SDC supports creative industries programmes that transform individual lives and diversify local economies. They also provide vital alternatives for young people in search of a place in life.

The very small proportion of SDC resources assigned to culture achieves results that cannot be secured in other ways. Among other things, cultural programmes:

- › Support development outcomes in areas such as social inclusion, human rights, education, civil society, economic development and democratic participation;
- › Explore sensitive social or political issues through the language of art, creating space for dialogue and building tolerance;
- › Connect SDC with a different range of civil society actors, creative people and citizens from those involved with other development programmes;
- › Test new ideas safely, because artistic failure is disappointing not dangerous, and so pilot new partnerships and innovative projects;
- › And, therefore, add to the range of tools at the disposal of SDC staff by using unconventional means to advance key development objectives.

SDC achieves disproportionate value from the one hundredth of its budget that goes to culture. These funds would make no discernible difference if they were reallocated to the rest of its work. It is too small a proportion of the budget to change the outcomes of those programmes. But the effect on Switzerland's partners in developing countries would be devastating because they lack other sources of finance. Irreplaceable cultural organisations are currently being supported in several ways, and the prospects of thousands of individual artists brightened. Social progress, which everywhere includes cultural life, is being advanced, and Swiss development projects gain a vital creative dimension. The image of Switzerland as a trust-

ed, generous and – as one person put it – an elegant partner in development achieves higher visibility with the cultural engagement. The frequency with which public authorities and business adopt models tested in SDC programmes is evidence of how much they are valued within partner countries.

In times and situations where there is often little scope for joy, art and culture projects bring colour, energy and happiness. They reach millions who are otherwise untouched by SDC's work and demonstrate the immense creativity of human beings everywhere. They are, for so many of those involved, what makes life worthwhile – the definition of value, not added, but intrinsic to development.

## Endnotes

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## **Imprint**

Editor:

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

**Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC**

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Cover photograph:

'Symphony', Ilkhom Theatre (Photo: Elyor Nemat)

Layout:

Mark Manion, Communication Arts

Orders:

This publication is also available in German, French, Italian and Spanish. It can be downloaded from [www.sdc.admin.ch](http://www.sdc.admin.ch) (heading "Publications").

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