



POLICY BRIEF

CULTURAL DIVERSITY RECOGNITION AND EMBRACEMENT

FACILITATOR:

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Solidarity

Equality

Sustainability

ORGANIZATIONS

Edu Blockers
Xam Khwa Khwe Royal Kingdom
Afrikan Young Indigenous Leaders
Yzerbeck Korana Royal house
KOGWA
SANERELA+
Free State Rainbow Seeds
African Diaspora Workers Network (ADWN)/ Pan-Afrikan
Solidarity Collective for Artisanal Miners (PASCAM)
Shatera Consulting
Intsika Zomzontsundu NPO
CAMP
Hessequa Royal Kingdom
Manala mbuduma traditional counsel
Africa Creative Art Foundation
Ratlou FM
Khomanani Sawutini Youth Development
God's Emotional Healing Centre
Women in Logistics & Transport
Masivuke Community Development
African Rubies
First Indigenous Manufacturing and events Hub
Shandong Knowledge Economy Association
Contralesa
African royalties network
Isandla Sepumelelo Foundation
Interim Traditional Health Practitioners Council of South Africa
Puisano Yaka Le Wena Holdings
Marishane Youth Hub
Sakhimfundo Youth Program
CAMSA
Blindsa
Mmino Wa Clap N Tap Awards
The indigenous laws forum
Albinism Society of South Africa
mPower Consulting Services
C20 South Africa Organisation
AYIL
SA Chamber of Arts

iNkosingiphile Foundation
Kgalahadi Nkopane Tikoloho
Edward Mogotsi
BRICS UNIVERSE
Young Creative Minds
Tshwane Traditional Healers Form
KS projects
Royal AmaMpembe Kingdom
Foundation of African Royalty
Alkebulan Patriotic People's Assembly
Africa Renaissance for Development
Uludwala Investment Consultants
Karts Foundation.
OUT LGBT WELLBEING
Foundation for African Royals
Awetu Africa
DSR
Grind SA
TGG Studio
JCI QUEENS SA
Siphamandla Nzuza
Mrs Curve Globe 23
Amboseli Tsavo Group Ranches
Conservation Association
Ahmed Kathrada Foundation
Traditional Healers Organisation
TPACEW/ SWAHILI AFRIKA
Tassie Foundation
Umnquma Liyeza laKwantu
Batshweneng Foundation
Lindelani Vinoliah Tshifhango
Lesaka la moetlo
Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham
Youth on the move
African Sustainable Tourism Organization
PTY Ltd.
Initiate Wellness
Buhlebenkosi
Ubuntu Culture & Heritage

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cultural rights remain under-protected, with governance gaps that allow heritage destruction, inequitable economies, and exclusionary education systems. Cultural diversity remains marginalized in global governance, with indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and heritage under threat from extractive industries, market commodification, and systemic neglect.

For the G20, cultural diversity is not peripheral but central to inclusive development, conflict prevention, and innovation. Recognizing cultural rights strengthens democracy, safeguards heritage, and fosters equitable economies.

CORE RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Governance Reform:** The G20 should require Cultural Impact Assessments (CIAs) for projects; legally recognize communal land rights; and ensure indigenous representation in policymaking.
- **Investment Priorities:** The G20 should fund community-owned cultural enterprises, language preservation, and support women as knowledge keepers.
- **Legal & Policy Instruments:** The G20 should ratify and implement UNESCO and AU cultural conventions; establish intercultural competence frameworks; and safeguard digital heritage. As highlighted in Article 1(c) of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005), the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions is an essential condition for sustainable development and human dignity.
- **Programmatic Actions:** The G20 should launch cultural exchange platforms; integrate indigenous knowledge into curricula; support grassroots-led policy innovation; and link cultural protection to climate adaptation.
- Support and fund local, culturally competent LGBTQ + movements that's are leading legal reform and challenging harmful narratives from within their own cultural contexts.

This Policy Brief outlines six thematic priorities:

1. Protection and Restitution of Cultural Heritage
2. Recognition and Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and Traditional Authorities
3. Promotion of Intercultural Dialogues
4. Support for Language Diversity and Revitalization
5. Cultural Sustainability and Climate Change
6. Practicalizing Cultural Embracement by Advancing Indigenous Knowledge Systems as Wellbeing Economies.

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Together, these themes provide a roadmap for embedding cultural diversity into G20 policymaking, aligned with **UNESCO MONDIACULT 2022**, the **Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001)**, **UNDRIP**, and the **African Union Agenda 2063**

The Working Group calls on G20 leaders to recognize culture as a standalone pillar in global frameworks, establish a G20 Cultural Diversity Forum, and ensure that Indigenous voices shape collective solutions to global challenges. Embedding cultural diversity in G20 policy is an act of justice and resilience, positioning culture as a driver of peace, equity, and sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

Culture is the soul of human dignity, the foundation of identity, and a driver of inclusive economies. Yet, cultural diversity faces systemic marginalization across governance, education and development frameworks. In many Global South contexts, colonial legacies disrupted indigenous governance systems, suppressed languages, and commodified heritage, reducing culture to a resource for exploitation rather than empowerment. The UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights stresses that participation in cultural life is a fundamental human right, central to reducing inequalities and fostering justice.

As reaffirmed in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), 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. This article also guarantees the rights of national minorities to preserve and develop their cultural identity. International frameworks provide clear recognition of cultural rights. The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) affirms cultural diversity as “the common heritage of humanity.” As recognised in Article 1 (c) of the UNESCO Constitution, states are reminded of the necessity of engagement in “dialogue among cultures with a view to ensuring wider and balanced cultural exchange in the world in favour of intercultural respect and a culture of peace” (UNESCO 1945).

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, Article 15) guarantees participation in cultural life. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) upholds rights to self-determination, heritage, and land. Regionally, the African Union Charter for African Cultural Renaissance (2006) calls for revitalization of indigenous knowledge and languages. Similarly, Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees 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,” and to “protection of the moral and material interest resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author” (UN, 1948)

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South Africa's Constitution further enshrines protection for cultural, religious, and linguistic rights. Despite these commitments, implementation lags. In the Global South, cultural erasure is tied to poverty, inequality, and climate vulnerability. Languages disappear, indigenous economies are side-lined, and cultural sites face destruction from extractive projects. Yet, culture is a powerful tool for resilience. For example, African community-led heritage conservation preserves sacred forests and rock art while enhancing climate adaptation. Similarly, indigenous languages like Kiswahili and Amharic, if elevated, can serve as vehicles of innovation, unity, and economic transformation.

For the G20, centering cultural diversity is both a moral and strategic imperative. It advances the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Culture must not be seen as decorative but as a political economy issue: who benefits, who is excluded, and how justice can be restored.

This brief calls for a paradigm shift: from rhetoric to enforceable rights, from top-down policies to community-led solutions, and from extractive development to cultural justice.

THEMATIC PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. PROTECTION AND RESTITUTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Colonialism, conflict, and exploitation displaced countless artifacts, ancestral remains, and knowledge systems. Restitution is a question of justice, sovereignty, and healing. The Benin Artefacts Campaign promoted the Benin Cultural Heritage in the diaspora and advocated for the return of Benin Artefacts. In 2022, Bronzes from the Smithsonian National Museum in United States were returned to Benin, Nigeria. Like many other Kingdoms in Africa, Benin Kingdom did not have the full capacity to store the returned artefacts from different colonial states. Therefore, funding must be made available to build museums and create jobs and learning areas for the African History.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Urge G20 states to domesticate and implement the UNESCO 1970 Convention on illicit trafficking of cultural property.
2. Establish binding frameworks for repatriation of artefacts, remains, and sacred objects, in consultation with source communities.
3. Empower communities through funding, training, and decision-making roles in heritage preservation.
4. Invest in digital archives, 3D scans, and block chain for provenance tracking and accessible online heritage repositories.
5. Strengthen legal frameworks to recognize cultural sovereignty and penalize illicit trade.
6. Promote co-curation between museums and traditional custodians to redefine narratives while preserving our cultural heritage
7. Support libraries, museums, and archives in Africa and the Diaspora to facilitate restitution and conservation, through funding and promotions of African history and decolonization of the education system.
8. Challenge the 'un-African' narrative by funding research, public education, and cultural programs that document and celebrate the historical existence and acceptance of diverse SOGIESC in pre-colonial African societies.

2. RECOGNITION AND INCLUSION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES

Indigenous peoples and traditional leaders hold legitimacy but face systemic exclusion. Their recognition is key to self-determination, justice, and inclusive governance

There is a significant policy gap between the stated commitment to cultural rights in international declarations and their implementation at the international and national level. Legal frameworks often fail to recognize indigenous knowledge systems, communal land rights, and traditional forms of governance, leading to a disconnect that enables the exploitation of natural resources and cultural heritage.

The G20's focus on infrastructure development often overlooks cultural impact. The construction of a major dam in a G20 country, for instance, may displace indigenous communities and submerge sacred sites. The commercialisation of national parks without the consent of the custodians of the land continues to undermine the importance of culture and its connection to those sacred sites.

We propose mandatory cultural impact assessments (CIAs) for all G20 funded projects to mitigate such damage and ensure the protection of cultural heritage, land and its resources, leading to fair beneficiation. Indigenous people mainly in Kenya, Tanzania, Brazil, Amazon Forests face challenges of displacement and violation of their human rights, through deforestation of rain forests and indigenous forests that these people have been living and using for nature conservation and their spiritual rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure **full participation of Indigenous peoples** in land, resource, and cultural decision-making (aligned with UNDRIP).
2. Protect **customary law, Indigenous governance, and community-based justice systems** through constitutional frameworks.
3. Institutionalize **inclusive platforms** for intercultural governance (elders, spiritual leaders, women, youth, people with disability and the LGBTQ+)
4. **Legal Recognition of Communal Land Rights:** Promote legal and policy instruments that recognize and protect the communal land rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, linking land ownership to cultural identity and traditional land management.
5. **Indigenous Representation in Policy Making:** Establish formal mechanisms for the participation of indigenous and traditional leaders in national and regional policy-making bodies that impact cultural heritage and natural resources.
6. **Strengthening Anti-Appropriation Legislation:** Develop and enforce stronger intellectual property laws and cultural heritage protection acts to prevent the commercial appropriation of indigenous knowledge, symbols, and artistic expressions, including protecting LGBTIQ+ cultural expressions and symbols from appropriation and misuse.
7. **Integration of Traditional Justice Systems:** Explore the integration of traditional and customary justice systems into national legal frameworks, particularly in matters of land disputes, resource management, and cultural heritage.
8. Facilitate **Indigenous representation in climate negotiations, education reform, and G20 cultural policy bodies.**

3. PROMOTION OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUES

In an era of polarization, dialogue across cultures is vital for peace, tolerance, and social cohesion. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, Southern African Women in Dialogue and other organizations are instrumental in promoting dialogues for peacebuilding, women security, and conflict resolutions. Intergenerational dialogues impact knowledge through storytelling and promote oral traditions and history where knowledge is passed from elders to the younger generation. Funding must be made available by the G20 member states to preserve our cultural heritage and resolve disputes through dialogues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Institutionalize **national and local intercultural platforms**, especially in post-conflict societies to restore peace and resolve conflicts between ethnic groups.
2. **Establish G20 Cultural Exchange Platforms:** Create fully inclusive G20-sponsored cultural exchange platforms and forums that facilitate direct dialogue and collaboration between artists, scholars, and cultural practitioners from G20 and Global South nations.
3. **Community-led Policy Innovation:** Support programmatic actions that empower grassroots cultural movements to act as agents of policy innovation, using their lived experiences to shape effective and context-specific cultural policies.
4. **Interconnected Crises and Cultural Resilience:** Launch programmes that highlight how cultural erasure intersects with other crises, such as xenophobic wars within our continent, conflict, forced migration, and inequality, and position cultural resilience as a critical component of peacebuilding, within the G20 and beyond.
5. **Include Cultural Rights in Human Rights Reporting:** Encourage G20 and Global South nations to include a dedicated section on the protection and promotion of cultural rights in their national human rights reports and submissions to international bodies.
6. **Embracing LGBTQ+ rights in cultural laws:** By recognizing and protecting the diverse identities and relationships within the LGBTQ+ community, ensuring their inclusion and equal participation without discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.
7. We call on governments to explicitly call for the repeal of colonial-era sodomy and public order laws that criminalize LGBTQ+ people, as a primary step towards inclusion.
8. **Develop Intercultural Competence Frameworks:** Mandate the development and integration of intercultural competence frameworks into all public service training programmes, particularly for sectors like education, law enforcement, and health.
9. **Cross-border Indigenous Rights Networks:** Support and fund the creation of cross-regional networks of indigenous and cultural rights activists to foster global solidarity and shared advocacy strategies
10. **Fund Community-Owned Cultural Enterprises, like community media, arts, and diaspora initiatives;** direct a significant portion of development and cultural funding towards community-owned and -operated cultural centres, crafts and skills exchange programmes targeting youth, women and people with disabilities.

4. SUPPORT FOR LANGUAGE DIVERSITY AND REVITALIZATION

Languages are worldviews. Their extinction erodes identity and knowledge. Protecting linguistic diversity strengthens cultural resilience and civic participation. It has been asserted that Swahili supports decolonizing education and aid the integration under the AfCFTA. Advocating for Swahili in the education system can promote trade and solidarity in Africa as it is the most spoken language in East Africa and Central Africa. G20 must accelerate inclusion of Swahili in education system, and make it mandatory for all countries to speak Swahili, invest in the language development and revitalization of other indigenous languages as restoration of identity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Embed Indigenous languages into national education, legal, and science systems.
2. Allocate funds for preservation, revitalization, and digitization of endangered languages, the sign language.
3. Guarantee multilingual education from early childhood through higher education.
4. Adopt national language policies ensuring access in courts, government services, and media.
5. Technology for Cultural Protection: Pilot and scale up programmes that use digital tools, such as mobile apps for language preservation, easily available translations or virtual reality to document arts and cultural heritage, ensuring these technologies are accessible and community-controlled as well as the use of tourist attractions to project cultural traits of African origin, linked to Pan Africanism. Use same to create an economic vehicle that will ensure Africans are fully participating in the economic landscape of the continent and globally

5. CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Indigenous peoples, while comprising less than 5% of the global population, are estimated to safeguard between 50 -80% of global biodiversity on 22 % of Earth's land, according to various studies, yet receive less than 1% of climate finance directly (IPBES, 2019; Maffi, 2005; UNFCCC, 2023). This disparity does not reflect oversight but rather systematic exclusion rooted in colonial structures that persist through modern institutions. Culture and environment are intertwined. Indigenous ecological knowledge provides strategies for **climate adaptation and biodiversity protection**. In parts of Africa, community-led heritage conservation projects have successfully protected ancient rock art and sacred forests from extractive industries. These initiatives, often led by women as knowledge keepers, demonstrate the power of grassroots movements in resisting corporate encroachment and safeguarding cultural assets. They also link cultural heritage protection with climate adaptation, as traditional land management practices are often more sustainable. This plays a big role in our fight to protect our environments from climate related changes.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Integrate Indigenous knowledge and rituals into climate policies.
2. Protect sacred natural sites as environmental zones under traditional custodianship.
3. Fund community-led conservation and ecological restoration programs.
4. Recognize intangible cultural heritage at risk from climate change in monitoring frameworks.
5. Include Indigenous ecological knowledge in COP and G20 environmental platforms.

6. PRACTICALIZING THE EMBRACEMENT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN THE MODERN CONTEXT

Symbolic recognition is not enough. **Indigenous peoples must participate fully** in modern systems without losing cultural identity. For indigenous people, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) underpin wellbeing in people, planet and futures. This includes, primary healthcare, food security, biodiversity stewardship, climate resilience, and regenerative economic practices, sustaining livelihoods of many, particularly in the Global South. Despite their societal, economic and environmental value, IKS remains underinvested, undervalued, and structurally excluded from global markets, governance and innovation ecosystems. The policy brief is calling for a shift in global policy to fully recognize and invest in indigenous Knowledge as a vital component in addressing the world's most pressing challenges, with a focus on wellbeing. This is not just about measuring wellbeing alongside traditional economic indicators. It is about rethinking what our economies are for, shifting from profit and growth as the main goals to system that genuinely support the wellbeing of people, communities, and the planet.

Countries like New Zealand, Bhutan, Scotland, Finland and Costa Rica provide evidence that such approaches are feasible: New Zealand's wellbeing budget prioritizes social, environmental, and cultural outcomes alongside economic decisions; Bhutan measures development using the Gross National Happiness Index; Scotland evaluates policies against national wellbeing outcomes; Finland integrates social and ecological wellbeing into budgeting; and Costa Rica aligns environmental conservation with economic and social goals.

To enable this shift we are calling on the G20 leaders to establish a G20 IKS Compact anchored by a US\$5 billion fund headquartered in South Africa as a permanent legacy of Africa's G20 presidency.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Promote Indigenous-led innovation and entrepreneurship, especially for youth, women, and marginalized groups.
2. Build IKS-driven village ecosystems combining health, entrepreneurship, culture, and circular economies.
3. Institutionalize rights-based policies embedding Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into health, education, environment, and economic planning.
4. Expand digital access, healthcare, and education without requiring assimilation.
5. Develop equitable financing frameworks (blended finance, social impact funds) to scale Indigenous economies.
6. Strengthen training in STEM, policy, and innovation for Indigenous youth.
7. Integrate Indigenous research into national innovation systems for epistemic justice.
8. Establish infrastructure for IP protection and ethical commercialization of Indigenous products.
9. Scale regenerative Indigenous practices for food sovereignty, biodiversity, and climate resilience.
10. Create culturally grounded leadership programs rooted in Indigenous values.

CONCLUSION


Culture is not peripheral; it is the foundation of human dignity, justice, and sustainability. The time for symbolic gestures is over. Africa's cultural wealth, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), and creative industries can no longer remain on the margins of policy.

We call on global leaders to act decisively:

- Establish a Global Fund for IKS and Cultural Industries to secure financing for African innovation and heritage protection.
- Commit to legacy projects that build Creative and Cultural STEAM Hubs in rural communities, leaving lasting infrastructure for innovation, education, and cultural revival.
- Adopt the IKS Economies Compact, ensuring cultural wealth is transformed into wellbeing economies that uplift youth, women, and rural communities.
- Recognize culture as a standalone pillar of global governance, anchored by a Cultural Diversity Forum to track progress.
- Guarantee Indigenous voices a central role in shaping education, climate, technology, trade, and governance policies.

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This is not a plea for charity; it is a demand for justice, recognition, and equal partnership. Cultural diversity is not optional; it is a strategic necessity for peace, prosperity, and sustainability in an age of ecological, technological, and political upheavals.

The world has the resources, the influence, and the responsibility to act. Let culture lead the way, because without culture, there is no justice; without recognition, there is no peace; and without IKS economies, there is no sustainable future. The time to act is now.

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