10th Africa Young Graduates and Scholars (AYGS) Conference 2016

The Africa We Want

14 to 17 March 2016
University of Limpopo
South Africa

Call for Abstracts
THE AFRICA WE WANT
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The Africa Young Graduates and Scholars (AYGS) conference organised annually since its conception in 2005 aims to build a body of knowledge and project African voices in various disciplines and discourses about the continent and the diaspora. The conference intends to bridge existing gaps in African knowledge production by assisting in the capacity building of young academics on the continent.

The 10th edition of the AYGS conference will be held at the University of Limpopo from the 14th to the 17th of March 2016 under the theme The Africa we want. It will focus on culture with its many aspects and dimensions, and the role that culture plays in sustainable development, peace and good governance, as well as integration on the continent.

Culture is a very complex notion with multiple definitions and various approaches. Several levels (individual and collective), aspects (static and dynamic) and properties (e.g. contextual – ecological, economical, sociopolitical; perceptual and material elements) of culture can be distinguished, which makes the term elusive to the point where it is used differently in varied contexts.

Culture has been acknowledged in the development agenda only recently. It was neither included in the three-pillar sustainable development paradigm, as described in the Brundtland Report (1987), nor was it clearly present in the Millennium Development Goals (2000). The close relationship between culture and development has been emphasised by policy makers only in the last decade, when it was recognised that culture was not ‘decorative’ or secondary to sustainable development, but constituted a crucial element of the latter. Consequently, the newest post-2015 sustainable development UN agenda (SDGs) places culture at the center of context-based approaches to sustainable development and improved governance, and calls to respect cultural diversity. This new perspective, with the motto ‘one size does not fit all’ is human-centered, as it takes into account local contexts in designing development strategies.

The new paradigm that intends to mainstream culture in development has been defined in multiple reports and regulations issued by the international community. Among the most important are:

• Culture and Development – UN General Assembly Resolution (2010)
• Policy Statement on Culture as the Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development – World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders (2010)
• The Future We Want for All – Report to the Secretary General – Outcome Document of the Rio+20 Conference (2012)
• The Hangzhou Declaration on Placing Culture at the Heart of Sustainable Development Policies – outcome document of the UNESCO International Congress ‘Culture: Key to Sustainable Development’ (2013)

In Africa, three major documents addressing the issue have been prepared by the African Union (AU) since 2006:

• Charter for African Cultural Renaissance (2006)
• Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want (2013)

The most recent one, Agenda 2063 that was prepared as a vision for Africa for the next 50 years lists political, economic, social and environmental aspirations of the continent as seen by its people. Summarized in seven goals, the aspirations of Agenda 2063 revolve broadly around shared prosperity and socio-economic well-being, unity and integration, self-determination and freedom of Africa. They describe the Africa we want to live in by 2063:

1) A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development
2) An integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideal of Pan Africanism and the vision of Africa’s Renaissance
3) An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law
4) A peaceful and secure Africa
5) An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics
6) An Africa where development is people-driven, unleashing the potential of women and youth
7) Africa as a strong, united and influential global player and partner.

The seven points address various issues and challenges of the continent. Aspiration no. 5 speaks to the issue of culture directly. Yet, it is quite clear that culture indirectly transpires through all of the goals. For can development be truthfully sustainable if it does not consider culture? Can we speak of Africa’s Renaissance without reference to the plurality of cultures on the continent? Can human rights be rightly called human and universal if they do not account for the cultural rights of indigenous people and cultural minorities? Can we even dream of a peaceful, strong and united Africa if we do not tackle the politicisation of cultural differences? Finally, will reducing an individual to their social role, forgetting about their cultural identity, be enough for the development of Africa to be considered people-driven?

South Africa declared its readiness to play a part in the realisation of the Agenda 2063 vision and, in line with it, launched the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance in May 2015. Thus far, only 8 other African countries ratified the Charter which recognises the contribution of cultural diversity to the expression of national and regional identities. The launch of the Charter in South Africa was accompanied by the announcement of a festival of music, dance, film, crafts, and food culture planned for the month of May that is traditionally celebrated as the Africa month.

But shouldn’t every month in Africa be Africa month? Shouldn’t Africans recognise every day their own identity, language, heritage… and celebrate them. Culture is much more than a demonstration of difference. We live our culture every day – through the language we speak, the values we live by, the community we belong to. Identity, belonging, nation-building and Pan Africanism inform the way in which we live and relate to others. What about the indigenous knowledge that is slowly being lost, what about cultural practices and the African ethics system (Ubuntu/Botho) that seems to be a mere slogan nowadays. How should we go about preserving culture and history – their value and meaning – and respecting pluralism on this very culturally diverse continent, while simultaneously keeping in mind the dangers of cultural essentialism?

The socio-economic transformation within the continent, and more broadly the transformation of global relations, should begin with changing the way in which we perceive our cultural background, our heritage – as assets not liabilities – in order to bring about a better understanding of what culture is – a component of our identity and a tenet of sustainable development. For culture does not only carry a potential as a driver of sustainable development. It must be understood in more than just economic terms… culture is a precept of sustainable development. For as ECOSOC in Agenda 21 recognised – ‘a three-pillar paradigm fails because it lacks a soul, the values, practices and expressions providing coherence and meaning to development in cities, nations and in our existence as human beings: culture’.

**Guidelines for the submission of abstracts**

We invite abstracts that speak to the main topic of the conference and consider the role of culture in sustainable development and good governance under the following sub-themes – Africa’s aspirations defined in AU Agenda 2063:

1) A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development
2) An integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideal of Pan Africanism and the vision of Africa’s Renaissance
3) An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law
4) A peaceful and secure Africa
5) An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics
6) An Africa where development is people-driven, unleashing the potential of women and youth
7) Africa as a strong, united and influential global player and partner.
To submit your abstract, send it as an attachment (Word file) via email to Olga Bialostocka (OBialostocka@hsrc.ac.za), indicating the selected sub-theme (from the list above) in the subject line of your email. Abstracts should be no longer than 300 words. Additionally, attach to your message a short bio of no more than 100 words (Word file) stating your qualifications, present status/position, as well as research interests. When submitting both your abstract and the short bio include your full names, affiliation(s), telephone number and email address as well as your country of nationality and country of domicile in your email message. Do not include any personal information in the attached abstract (abstracts will undergo a blind peer review).

The 10th AYGS conference will include:
- Paper presentations
- Poster sessions

Indicate in your email your preferred way of presenting your research. Please note that the Scientific Committee reserves the right to decide whether the abstract submitted is accepted as a paper or poster presentation. Outstanding papers presented at the conference will be considered for publication.

For all the queries concerning the submissions, please contact Olga Bialostocka (OBialostocka@hsrc.ac.za; +27123169706). For other information about the conference, enquire with Ithuteng Nkhereanye (INkhereanye@hsrc.ac.za; +27123169763 or +27724607524).

Deadline for submission of abstracts: **11 September 2015**
Notification of accepted abstracts: **5 October 2015**
Submission of full papers: **4 December 2015**