



## CONCEPT NOTE

### **AN OPPORTUNITY TO PROMOTE A NEW NARRATIVE FROM AFRICA AND FOR AFRICA**

#### **CULTURAL IDENTITY AND OWNERSHIP: RESHAPING MINDSETS**

The Africa Dialogue Series (ADS) was launched by OSAA in 2018 as an interactive platform for policy and decision makers, civil society, experts and the academia to discuss and debate about challenges and opportunities for Africa. Ever since, the ADS has become an important platform for implementing OSAA's advocacy mandate. In order to ensure that the event serves to echo the priorities of the African Union and African Member States and highlight their interrelationship with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, each year's edition of the ADS focuses on the theme that the African Union adopts for the year and analyzes its interlinkages with various aspects of development. This way, it contributes to and enhances the visibility of the AU's efforts provides a platform to promote innovative ideas and recommendations related to each year's theme and underscores the interlinkages between the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

For 2021, the AU has chosen "Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want" as the theme of the year. It is a theme anchored in Aspiration 5 of Agenda 2063, which envisions an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics. Aspiration 5 is a call for an African cultural renaissance which inculcates the spirit of Pan Africanism, tapping into Africa's deep well of rich heritage and culture to ensure that the creative arts are major contributors to Africa's growth and transformation, and preserving and enriching Africa's cultural heritage, including its languages. It is a theme with a broad reach that can be approached from different angles: history, anthropology, sociology, economy, etcetera.

In this regard, the 2021 AU Theme of the Year is embedded in multiple Sustainable Development Goals. Culture and heritage are also highlighted in SDG 11's target 11.4 which calls for strengthening efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage as a way of making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. In this regard, SDG 11 addresses a key issue for Africa's reality: the interface between the continent's urbanization and the preservation of traditional culture and rural communities. The theme is also interrelated to SDGs 8 and 10, with regard to the opportunities to create decent works and reduce inequalities through the cultural industry; SDGs 4 and 16, regarding the promotion of a culture of peace and diversity; SDG 5, when we analyze how to promote gender equality through arts and culture, and SDG 17, since arts and culture provide plentiful opportunities to create multistakeholder partnerships and act as drivers for supporting the implementation of other SDGs.

At the same time, the 2021 AU Theme of the Year brings to the focus one of the areas that has been more affected by the COVID-19 pandemic: culture. The necessary measures imposed to prevent the expansion of COVID-19 have triggered a change in social behavior, affecting African traditional socio-cultural norms and values that revolve around communal living and social gatherings that enhance relationships and the sense of community. At the same time, the COVID-19 has created a number of ethical challenges, in particular regarding the protection of the most vulnerable. Furthermore, the pandemic has also led to the cancellation of many arts and cultural events, disrupting an already fragile economic sector. As Africa prepares for building forward better, strengthening the resilience of cultural industries and finding ways to maintain and promote cultural identity, values and ethics in changing circumstances should be a priority.

OSAA, as part of its mandate of coordinating global advocacy in support of Africa's development will approach the theme primarily from a sustainable development standpoint. In this regard, the ADS will provide an opportunity to address the role of culture, heritage and sociocultural values in building forward better. Furthermore, against the background of the decision endorsed by the African Group and the UN leadership to promote a new narrative for Africa and from Africa, OSAA will also embrace the theme as a unique opportunity for Africa to reflect deeply by drawing on its cultural roots and wealth of heritage and to reaffirm its identity and the ownership of its future.

OSAA will also make optimal use of the broad scope of this year's theme to further advance the recognition of the ADS as a major advocacy platform for Africa. To that effect, this year the ADS will have a broader programme that will feature variety of activities and events spread over about one month on various aspects of the theme, culminating in a three-day event focused on policy discussions among policy makers, researchers, civil society representatives, the UN and other stakeholders.

### **Strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics**

Aspiration 5 needs to be interpreted based on the common understanding that the African Union Agenda 2063 constitutes a shared strategic framework and a blueprint for inclusive growth and sustainable Development and the most complete reflection of Agenda 2030 to the realities of the African continent. In this regard, Aspiration 5 affirms that the strengthening of the African cultural identity, values and ethics is a critical factor for Africa's emergence on the global stage, which is strongly related to SDGs 11, 16 and 17. It also invites us to envision an Africa where work ethic is a key value (SDGs 8 and 10), where women play an important role (SDG 5), where the youth are perceived as the drivers of change (cross-cutting), and in which traditional and religious leaders are recognized (SDGs 11 and 16). It aims to imbue the African people with a sense of fundamental cultural unity within their diversity, a common destiny within an over-arching African identity and Pan-African consciousness, underscoring the main aim of the 2030 Agenda: building together a better tomorrow in which no-one is left behind.

With this in mind, it is proposed to structure the Africa Dialogue Series - 2021 around the following topics:

**Theme:** Cultural identity and ownership: reshaping mindsets.

**Sub-theme 1:** Sustainable peace for development: factoring in history

**Sub-theme 2:** Harnessing Culture and Heritage for economic transformation

**Sub-theme 3:** Human Capital: culture and heritage unleashing the potential.

## **ADS 2021: structure and way forward**

Under the new approach, the ADS will be divided into three main phases. The first three weeks of May will be focused on celebrating Africa's culture and history the cultural and artistic presentations, while preparing the public for the three-day policy debate. Events and activities during each week of this phase will include:

- A virtual exhibition on arts and handcrafts, innovation, arts and inclusion... and conversations with African artists.
- A documentary film about African history... and a conversation with African academics.
- The launch of one “data and advocacy brief” on one of the three sub-themes. The briefs will include key questions on the sub-theme, supported by data and evidence on the current status and its impact on Africa's sustainable development, and proposing an ideal end-state in a call for action.
- The launch of the Youth Stage on twitter.
- A virtual concert, to celebrate Africa's culture.

All the conversations and exchanges that will take place during these three weeks will feed into the three-day policy discussions. These sessions will allow for in-depth exchanges and debates aiming to produce forward looking and implementable ideas and recommendations to clear misperceptions and reinforce Africa's ownership of its destiny. The three-day forums will be organized around plenary meetings at a political level, which would provide an opportunity for Permanent Representatives and other key stakeholders to make interventions and share experiences, and other parallel sessions focused on substantive and technical discussions around the three sub-themes.

Data and advocacy briefs will be prepared to identify a number of key questions to help guide the discussions. These discussion sessions will aim to generate new ideas and proposals on the best ways to reach the desired end-state.

In June, a post-event reflection will provide the opportunity to discuss the findings, outcomes and recommendations made during the ADS session. Furthermore, a publication compiling all the contributions during the ADS, including results from the conversations, exhibitions, etcetera, will be issued. The post-event will also be an opportunity to lay the foundations for the establishment of partnerships aimed at moving forward in any of the identified areas of action.

## **Partnerships: advocating together for Africa**

The new approach to the ADS will provide an opportunity to increase the participation and visibility of OSAA's partners, most notably the African Group. Besides their

participation in the three-day main event, the three weeks of pre-events will feature different opportunities for African Permanent Representatives to contribute to the ADS by, for example, participating in the launch of the virtual exhibitions and in the different debates that will be organized.

 [Indicative timeline and programme](#) 

