



Conference Proceedings of The Kabarak University International Conference on Refocusing Music and Other Performing Arts for Sustainable Development. Edited by Christopher M. Maghanga and Mellitus Wanyama. 17th-18th October 2019 Nakuru, Kenya.



Conference Proceedings

Kabarak University International Conference on
'Refocusing Music and Other Performing Arts for
Sustainable Development'

17th -18th October 2019

KLAW Conference Center, Kabarak University,
Kenya

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Social cohesion and national integration: the role of the arts

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(Invited Talk)

Introduction

The Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Henry Kiplangat; Deputy Vice-Chancellors Prof. John N. Ochola and Prof. Chepkilot; the Provost Rev. Prof. Jacob Kibor; the Dean for School of Music and Performing Arts, Prof. Mellitus N. Wanyama; Associate Dean and Conference Chair Dr. Wilson Shitandi; Deans of Faculties, other Heads of Departments, Teaching Staff, Students, invited guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great honor and privilege to stand before you and to give the Keynote Address at this important and honorable forum. First of all, I would like to congratulate Kabarak University, and in particular the School of Music and Performing Arts for the excellent organization of this conference and for the wonderful hospitality. I trust all the participants are enjoying their stay at Kabarak. Allow me to acknowledge my dear wife and son, who braved through the night as they escorted me here. Thank you!

Africa contends with factors of racial, cultural, religious, class, gender and age differences. These factors, if not addressed in an intentional manner, can have an impact on the unity of members of society and their ability to work together towards the wellbeing of all its members; as well as the development of a common identity, commonly referred to as National Integration.

As former Pasmae President for the last several years, I have been fortunate enough to travel widely in executing Pasmae, ISME and *Music in Africa* foundation work. I say fortunate because I always make a conscious decision to observe how foreign cultures structure their societies as well as define their interactions. I make this kind of decision in order to draw parallels regarding my own society, and this experience has allowed me to step back and analyze my society and the structure within which we live.

East Africa is one of the most beautiful regions in the world. That said, it's extremely hard to ignore the fact that we have some complex communities as well, communities that are plagued by structural inequality and various kinds of discrimination. I have kept thinking about some of the underlying drivers behind these realities and how we can find a middle ground on re-engaging in dialogue on how to take our societies forward.

My conclusion has been that there are vast disparities that we cannot overcome without increased interaction and integration across the various cultural, political, economic and racial divides.



This is where I believe most importantly that the arts and especially music could and should play a paramount role in unifying our peoples, communities and nations at large, solely because music is a great way to foster social cohesion and nation building. This is not to say that it is the only right direction, however, it is a starting point towards moving in the right direction.

The right direction being, producing people that respect and understand one another by accepting each other. The end goal should be the use of the performing arts as culture and a platform to ensure inclusiveness and dialogue around the underlying conditions that plague our communities. We need a population that understands the cultural subtleties that underlie the way in which they interact with each other.

The structure of my address will start with a brief description of the key words for this year's theme. I then would like to look at how a socially cohesive society behaves, illuminating various examples of non-socially cohesive communities on domestic and regional levels, drawing examples from various African countries. I will then look at the interventions of international organizations including UNESCO, the African Union (AU), the East African Federation (EAF), artists and arts educators, particularly in the domestic context using Southern Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Nigeria as examples. I will discuss the element of the strength of the performing arts as culture, before linking all these topics back to the broader issue of how we can refocus the potential of the performing arts to the enhancement of social cohesion and national integration.

Social cohesion and National Integration

Social cohesion is defined as the willingness of members of a society to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper. Willingness to cooperate means they freely choose to form partnerships and have a reasonable chance of realizing goals, because others are willing to cooperate and share the fruits of their endeavours equitably (Stanley, 2003)

National integration is the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. It means that though we belong to different castes, religions and regions and speak different languages we recognize the fact that we are all one. This kind of integration is very important in the building of a strong and prosperous nation. Unity in diversity.

The creative and performing arts

The creative and performing arts denote activities that enhance imaginative creation and expression such as music, art, drama and creative movement. Creative arts engage our senses, body and mind causing them to observe, listen and discuss, and consequently move to solve problems using multiple modes of thought and self-expression.



Performing arts are considered a social relationship and have been proved to be an agent of life transformation as a result of their effectiveness in communication transmission. They fuel cognitive capabilities and resources like literacy, numeracy and science, and they further intersect with cultural and social boundaries.

What is a socially cohesive society?

A socially cohesive society is one which works towards the wellbeing of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility (Australia, 2015).

For us to be converging here this morning to discuss social cohesion for national integration, alludes to the fact that we still need to conform to this order as described above. So, the debate at this conference is indeed timely because it's time... it's time to seize the opportunity to explore the role of the performing arts in nurturing unity, inclusiveness, conflict prevention and promoting human security for all.

I have witnessed situations where culture is used as a means of perpetuating discrimination tendencies, and where tensions between cultural rights and social best practices of non-sexist and non-racist societies, is evident.

If we take an example of the Baganda of Uganda, culturally, I feel that women should not play the *embuutu*...the *embuutu* is the main drum in the Bakisimba set of 4 drums. The *embuutu* is a huge drum and traditionally played by only men because women are not allowed. But while that is what traditions and norms prescribe, deep down in our hearts we know that women too would love to play the *embuutu*, and denying them the opportunity to play the *embuutu*, violates their artistic rights and the dignity.

Another example is in a school I have been to, where there are two kinds of persons....all Heads of Departments are one colour, and all cleaners are another colour. In this very school there is an orchestra and all players are from one race and those who set up and clear up the performance stage are of a different race from the players. These examples are confirmations that amidst our environment there are serious issues of communities and homogenous groups that practice cultural and artistic norms and traditions, which violate the rights, dignity and privacy of others.

While the national constitution of Uganda is clear of the mainstream human rights of individuals, it is not clear about the claims of communities like the Baganda and other cultural groups that wish to adhere to practices preserved over many years as a way to promote social probity.

Those of you that have children will agree with me that our current young people are not only consuming loads of foreign music but are also very much assimilating cultural values based on gender divisions. If you for example take the genre of hip-hop you find that there are



multitudes of images that display the male with guns fighting for wealth and prestige; and on the other hand, they portray females as sexual objects, mainly referred to as “bitches”. But who consumes hip-hop the most? It is indeed our African communities that mostly consume hip-hop. This kind of consumption of foreign capitalist and sexist musical forms does not help but prevent our native and indigenous musical forms from flourishing. It indeed makes it hard for indigenous artists to confront and address societal problems, especially those related to gender disparities.

The extent to which of cultural globalization has spread, is taking new ideas and images to every corner of the globe. The fact that international corporations purpose to market these ideas and images as well as reproduce them in distant cultures either physically or digitally, has significantly reduced traditional barriers including time and space. The magnitude of dramatic increase regarding the volume of cultural exchange is surely going to have a big impact on the social realms of our societies. This exchange has created two varying modes of production of globalization.

Globalised localism and the localized globalism

The first globalization of music is referred to as “*globalized localism*”. Globalized localism causes impacts as assimilation, adaptation by societies and resistance. The impact caused by globalized localism is referred to as the “*localized globalism*”. The main actors controlling the globalized localism of music at the macro-level are multinational corporations that distribute music. They purposefully distort the meaning of music genres, and intentionally sexualize the female body even further in order to suit as well as attract a uniform global audience in music videos. By doing this, they gender the globalized music at its core and as a consequence its racial, class values and gender are mirrored at the local level. On the other hand, there are a larger variety of actors at the micro-level, either resisting or recreating the globalised localism. And whatever form the localized globalism takes, there are negative repercussions created in gender relations. Many of these are done with a view of empowering women. However, many cases reveal that the localized globalism has not yielded the empowerment of women. On the contrary, it continually perpetuates gender hierarchies by reinforcing the linkage between women and body, instead of promoting the linkage between women and subjectivity.

It is important to note that although the arts bring to public discussion issues of gender inequalities, it's the actors in big business who own the power to control the impacts. Therefore, gender emancipation depends a lot on how much the ruling class, at the local level or for that matter the rich capitalist class at the global level, are willing to change their views on gender. Performing arts and especially music has enormous potential as a vehicle for change in gender relations. However, in a globalized world, it is being rather misused.

Another scenario is of our performing artists from Africa that have migrated and still migrate to developed countries in pursuit of opportunities to execute their artistic talents and other jobs that the native whites find unattractive. This prevailing climate of change also creates



new challenges to our ongoing pursuit of social development and universal human rights. The reason is because, developed nations, expect the African immigrant communities to embrace whatever prevailing social and cultural practices prescribed. The conflict potential between the social and cultural claims of the immigrants and the natives' expectations are at the heart of numerous tensions our people who migrate abroad in pursuit of "greener pastures", unknowingly confront the social disparities by adhering to unwanted practices.

Here in East Africa as well as the Southern Africa region, the same challenges are felt and that's one of the reasons why xenophobia keeps happening..... There are many other social disparities and human rights that are being violated both unknowingly and knowingly. But the question is ... at what point does the doctrine of cultural diversity and indeed social inclusiveness have to submit to the demands of the norms of a host country as well as the doctrine of universal rights? We ought to be careful, that our artistic expression rights may not be used at the expense or destruction of one another, an aspect we should bear in mind as we forge ahead.

One of the positives has been that in the wake of a global transition, fuelled by the international community, there are new social cohesion developments and indeed valid signs of national integration that have been created. Peoples previously isolated have been brought together voluntarily and involuntary by programs including the emergence of new regional political alliances like the East African Federation, the integration of markets, and the advances in technology and mobility of transport.

In the wake of these positive changes, the performing arts have become central in many contemporary discourses and debates on social identity, social cohesion and development. Because of this centrality, the relationship between the public sphere and the performing arts as culture has become the source of many dialogues and debates to the extent that there is a strong need to enact policies on the development of societies and culture management by international bodies including UNESCO, the African Union, the East African Federation and many more.

What interventions have been recorded

UNESCO intervention

UNESCO has demonstrated its commitment to champion initiatives to draw on the vast potential of Africa's arts and cultural heritage to use it for poverty reduction, social cohesion and as a driver for sustainable development and innovation. According to UNESCO, culture, including the performing arts, continues to evolve as a factor in development, dealing with material and emotional features of a society. Culture in this case encompasses ways of living together, lifestyles, traditions, value systems and beliefs. UNESCO is responding to this evolution accordingly as shown in the way it has tweaked its approach to arts and culture in various documents including declarations on performing arts and cultural policies.



Because of the shift in the role of the performing arts and culture, in several of these policy documents, UNESCO does not only propose a cultural dimension to social development but highlights the relationships and inclusivity of performing arts and culture, and other areas of science, democracy, communication and education.

Various African countries have already benefitted from UNESCO's policy and commitment to poverty reduction and social cohesion. Some of these countries include Southern Sudan in 2016, and Zambia in 2016 too. Since the 2003 Convention was ratified in May 2006, Zambia has benefitted from the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund on two occasions including Inventorying of the music and dance of the Lozi and Nkoya people of Kaoma District, and Promoting social cohesion through the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in the Kaoma District of Zambia

African Union (AU) intervention

In 1963, Africa was already thinking of cohesion and unity in diversity when it formed the Organization of African Unity (OAU), an international organization made up of African states. It was in 2001 that the Organization of African Unity turned into the African Union.

The AU has 14 objectives and the first objective is to achieve greater unity, cohesion and solidarity amongst the African states. The second objective is to encourage international cooperation among African nations.

In its Charter for African Cultural Renaissance, the African Union recognizes the role of performing arts in political emancipation and in economic and social development. The African Union considers the fact that cultural exchanges and initiatives contribute towards mutual understanding between human beings, mutual enrichment, and to peace amongst states.

The Charter's social obligations are to foster the development of the African arts and cultural values, and universal principles of human rights in education. It undertakes to create access to education and arts as culture across all people. It guarantees equal gender access to cultural expression, decision-making, art and cultural professions.

The charter undertakes to protect and promote the freedom of all artists, intellectuals and men and women of culture. It further recognises the performing arts and cultural expressions by the youth by according them their true value and responding to their aspirations. It emphasises that specialist training for creative artists should be provided in national, sub-regional and regional training institutions which should be established by Africans, and the official recognition of elders and traditional leaders.

Lastly it undertakes to implement the Social Cohesion Strategy championed by the national Departments of Arts and Culture, and establish inter-African cultural co-operation.



The East African Community (EAC)

The East African Community (EAC), is a regional inter-governmental organization of 6 countries comprises of Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, and the United Republic of Tanzania, with its headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania. Here in East Africa, inequality, poverty, migration and political unrest have continuously threatened [social cohesion](#) and unity. However, the region of East Africa has proved remarkably resilient to these challenges and significant strides have been made in relation to proposals and conceptual analyses on the role of the performing arts in social development. This has been documented through arts and cultural policies of the 6 countries.

The economic and social progress made in Eastern Africa over the last 10 to 15 years is enormous. Subsequently, the progress of the creative arts as a social development factor has escalated to levels that have caused nations to form government departments to regulate the arts. A good example is the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports in Uganda, a government department set up to regulate youth, sports, arts and culture.

Artists and arts educators

D’banj and Nneka are two West African Musicians who sing for gender equality and women’s empowerment specifically. These two artists, specialized in different music genres but have one thing in common... they are advocates for women’s empowerment and they have written and performed songs that inspire... These successful artists are using their voices to give the voiceless a voice!

Nneka says that she “grew up in Nigeria where women don’t have much freedom on many different levels”. “I was raised in a system where you respect the system through fear”. D’banj who is well aware of the economic challenges in his birth place says “I believe we can have a world free from poverty, but to do so we must tackle the root causes and start addressing key issues like gender equality and agriculture”. In order to eradicate poverty, you have to have equality. What’s good for he, is good for she.”

With the support of governments, performing arts educators have over the years established an accumulated base of knowledge and experiences that have been shared with us through many artistic forms. As performing arts educators, we operate like a human family that no part of the family should claim to be the exclusive repository of this knowledge, wisdom and experience.



We all have learnt from others and we recognize the fact that we are all one. Through the enrichment by such interaction with amongst each other, we have built the capacity necessary to teach others to enhance the enrichment caused by such exchanges that will in turn spur development.

Where we are now, it so happens that all of us, regardless of race, culture, ethnicity, religion and other identity groups, have the right to all sorts of expression including the right to enjoy and develop artistic and social identity. All these interventions allude to the fact that the performing arts as part of culture are impactful and can be used as drivers for various missions. Currently, there are immense artistic inferences linked to the national politics in most African countries. Music is being used to rally people by carrying important information, sensitizing the masses.

Music as a performing art has not only been used for civil rights movements in Africa alone but also in other countries including the United States where we read about the adoption of the usage of musical arts in the name of freedom songs, to spread messages of hope through choruses like, “We Shall Overcome”. If you have lived in Africa, and especially this part of Africa, you will agree with me that the arts are so effective in many ways in deciding what is indigenous and what is foreign, what should be accepted and what must be rejected, who should be and who shouldn’t be, and so on. This kind of power shift has influenced the enactment of various laws and law reforms, and it will continue to sway the outcomes of various elections in many nations.

What more can we do to refocus the arts to enhance social cohesion and national integration?

Through the performing arts it is possible to re-enact social constructions in various spaces and even those regarding inequality behaviors and roles, as well as maintain traditions.

The main players here include 1) the government in partnerships with international bodies, 2) the artists and arts educators, and 3) the wider community.

Governments and International Partners

a) International Bodies and Government Policies

The national arts and cultural policy within the vision and mission of government ought to be designed to enhance the inclusiveness and integration, with strategies including advocacy for the arts, ensuring research and documentation, ensuring capacity building, promotion of collaborations with stakeholders and mobilizing resources for the arts in education. I believe that the existence of a formidable national arts and cultural policy should account for the cross-cutting character of performing arts as well as enhance cohesion and integration that



affect various spheres of national activity including trade, finance, environment, education, tourism, recreation and communication.

b) Platform to promote artistic work

In order to achieve the goal of development and promotion of the arts for social cohesion and national integration, the government must create a **platform to promote performing artistic work** through allowing artists to play a major role during the official and national celebrations and events including the 12th December Jamhuri Day, Womens' Day, Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, Liberation Day, Labour Day, Youth Day and the Human Rights Day. This will enhance the development and promotion of the performing arts and mainstream its role in social cohesion and job creation.

Artists and arts educators

a) As the arts education family, we ought to lead by example in setting the pace for social cohesion and national integration! We must accept each other socially and otherwise, and above all we **MUST** stop working against each other but rather learn to work together in order to become even stronger that is what social cohesion is about.

b) Secondly, we need to press on and move forward practical actions and concrete programs that legitimize and make the theoretical, political and practical grounds of these relationships tangible. Arts programs have the capability to promote cognitive development as well as interpersonal communication skills and adaptability. Being part of a collective and inclusive society helps in identity formation and understanding their position in society.

c) Help every child to have equal opportunity to performing arts education at those institutions where the arts are taught. Programs with artistic significance as music, dance, painting, and theatre enable individuals to express their feelings and emotions. And recent studies show that the arts and culture add to the job market, job creation and therefore promote economic growth.

Our quality of life is improved greatly through the general improvement of our well-being which ultimately is enhanced by social inclusiveness and general social cohesion. An emphasis on creative and performing arts as part of culture has the potential to do just that: improve social and psychological well-being.

d) Another way we could promote social inclusion and cohesion is by sharing information relating to social space for all. This could be done by developing arts



practitioners Webpage and Data-Base. The database would provide a network to share information such as available training programs, workshops, marketing, local and international events.

The wider Community

e) We should stop lamenting. As Africans, we all belong to ethnically and culturally diverse communities and societies despite the fact that we belong to a single shared national identity. We are a collection of cohesive societies that live together in harmony. Even though there exist territorial boundaries and divisions that were imposed to us by the colonial masters, we invented and discovered ways of working together.

East Africa (including Southern Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania) has been victim of aggression from the colonial racist masters who dominated our territories back in the day. But that era ended as a result of a struggle, a unified struggle by our grand fathers and fathers, and this unity in the adversity of struggle, was in many cases sealed with blood. We lost our people, our fathers, our grand fathers, uncles and aunties, and many others. The blood of martyrs of all our people from all the six countries has stood the test of time, and the united and collective struggle pursued by our countries of the East African region was born out of the recognition that none of those countries, acting alone could succeed. Now as East Africans we should not look back and lament about the past, we all must let go of the past and build a future based on the wealth of talent, knowledge and experience embedded within us.

Conclusion

As I conclude, I must mention that currently we face new enemies posing a threat to pursuit of social cohesiveness and national integration as well as our survival as a region. Our fresh enemies are mainly under-development and poverty. As we brace ourselves to tackle the current enemies, we should revive our spirit of solidarity and unity, that has seen us through thirty years of liberation struggles and wars in our region as East Africa. Appreciation and recognition of specific cultural contexts should serve to facilitate observance and respect for human rights and general inclusiveness.

The future must be built on social cohesiveness as an aspect of human rights, cultural pluralism and non-discrimination. We therefore must move cautiously and sensitively as we negotiate social cohesiveness as an aspect of human rights, cultural pluralism and non-discrimination, in a way that does not threaten the cultural rights of our individual people, our nations, our communities and our groups.



Charter of the United Nations

Finally, we ought to remember that the United Nations Charter and several other international instruments of human rights and international law, nations, communities and societies are all obliged to respect and promote inclusiveness and human rights regardless of diverse cultural perspectives. No single individual, country, state or government of any sort, is exempt from this obligation. On the contrary, the legal obligation for all of us, wherever we are, at Kabarak, Makerere, in the government, Church, etc is to promote "universal respect and observance, as well as protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all".

Social cohesion is about cooperation, harmony and mutual confidence that should exist within our societies. Inclusion, through a more equitable distribution of arts skills, the benefits of arts economic activity, and access to appropriate opportunities in arts education and employment will enhance social cohesion and national integration.

I hope I was able to show you some of the key strategic factors in considering the **creative arts as drivers of social cohesion and national integration in the current global context**. Indeed, the challenges are big, but at the same time, it is not something we can afford to delay.

As creative and performing arts will need to play an important role in our nations' future social cohesion and national development process, we believe the key issues will need to be integrated in our subsequent socioeconomic development plans. This would necessitate the strategies and assistance to emphasize ownership, alignment, and harmonization at all levels. How this process will be supported through a careful sustainable strategy will indeed be a key.

Thank you very much for your kind attention and I hope the conference will be a great success.

Thank you!