

UNESCO for Haiti

Making Culture a Motor for Reconstruction

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Context: Why culture in Haiti?

Haiti is characterized by a rich and diversified heritage and a wealth of cultural expressions. This culture plays a central role in the lives of its people. We saw this the very day after the earthquake, when paintings and handicrafts were being sold in the devastated, debris-filled streets. Culture also plays an important role in the collective memory of the people. It is a fundamental element of the country's social cohesion; such as at the time of Carnival, a genuine moment of joy, music, dance, celebration, costumes and fantastic masks, reflecting the country's rich and colourful handicrafts. The cultural sector, notably crafts, literature and music, is central to the country's economic development, with artisans representing 10% of the active population, approximately 400,000 people. Haiti also has important cultural and natural heritage sites. The National History Park, Citadel, Sans Souci, Ramiers, which has been recognized as a World Heritage property (1982), is the first to have been built by black slaves who had regained their freedom; and the historic centre of Jacmel was placed on the Tentative List (2004), indicating the government's intent to propose the property for inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Therefore, the Haitian authorities have included an entire chapter on Culture in the "Action Plan for National Recovery and Development of Haiti" within the section on social reconstruction, thus considering this sector as a true priority in the country's recovery.

2. The National Plan

The "Action Plan for National Recovery and Development of Haiti" proposed by the Haitian government in March 2010 gives priority to Culture and is both a national strategy driven by political will and an appeal to international cooperation.

The main elements included in the recovery strategy in the area of culture are:

- Establishing a system of cultural management that, on the one hand allows the State to exercise its functions of observation, monitoring and regulation; and on the other hand that allows everyone to have access to the means of production and to cultural goods.
- Ensuring the development of cultural industries through developing financing mechanisms and an appropriate legal framework.
- Ensuring the promotion of Haitian heritage and encouraging international cooperation through introducing cultural education programmes in schools.

3. UNESCO's initiatives

When the earthquake hit Haiti on 12 January 2010, UNESCO acted immediately to provide assistance to the Haitian people and their government. UNESCO believes that culture is essential, not only because it contributes to economic development, but also because it gives meaning and value to identity and to the continuity of human societies. This is particularly important in a post-disaster context, such as the one that Haiti has been in since January 2010.

This is why UNESCO has advocated from the beginning for including culture, as a fundamental source of renewal and social cohesion, in reconstruction strategies. Indeed, in post-conflict or post-disaster situations, recognizing the heritage and creative components of cultural diversity is a positive force that supports dialogue, mutual understanding, reconciliation, social stability and reconstruction.

Challenges that must be addressed for the cultural sector in Haiti :

- At the institutional level, improving the policy and legal frameworks and developing policy that encourages capacity building and interministerial cooperation, notably for the implementation of the conventions.
- At the local level, the sector primarily managed by civil society and the private sector, needs better coordination with public institutions.
- Culture is truly "of the people": it manifests itself, among other things, through art, music, painting; and the access to museums, libraries and other cultural institutions should be encouraged.

This is why UNESCO has given priority to structural actions in order to organise the cultural sector and to maximize its contribution to national development. UNESCO has already funded a series of actions that strengthen governance and the contribution to institutional development, which are closely linked to the country's economic and social revival.

At the same time, the Organisation has given its support to cultural initiatives able to bring joy and comfort to suffering populations, such as the theatre project by the Haitian company Zhovie in the camps for displaced people. UNESCO has also provided educational and artistic activities for children, notably through the DREAM Centre (Dance, Read, Art, Express and Music) in Pétionville. The Centre provides children with opportunities to learn new skills and express inspiration and creativity, which are the best tools to help them imagine their futures.

The objective of the UNESCO-supported theatre project with the Haitian street theatre company Zhovie, is to bring a moment of joy and comfort to the displaced people of Port-au-Prince, who have in many cases lost everything in the 12 January earthquake, and to help them to give them some respite from their anguish. It has been recognized that in the midst of humanitarian efforts, the population also needed food for its soul.

4. International coordination for the Safeguarding of Haitian Cultural Heritage

In order to enhance international coordination in the field of culture, UNESCO's Executive Board established the International Coordination Committee (ICC) for the Safeguarding of Haitian Cultural Heritage in April 2010, in line with the Action Plan for National Recovery and Development of Haiti.

The ICC is comprised of 10 independent experts, including 3 Haitian members. Its mission is to coordinate the ensemble of interventions in the area of culture in Haiti and to mobilize the necessary resources. It has thereby developed a "roadmap" that advises, *inter alia*, updating the law on the protection of national heritage; beginning the inventory of the built heritage in Port-au-Prince; making an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage present in Haiti and identifying the most endangered intangible cultural expressions; organizing the protection and conservation of archives, books and other movable cultural property; collecting data and elaborating methodological tools in the sector of cultural industries.

5. Proposed programmes for action

UNESCO will continue advocating for the importance of culture as a motor of reconstruction in Haiti and will present the projects submitted for funding.

The proposed interventions focus on all areas of UNESCO's expertise (Built Heritage, Intangible Heritage, movable heritage (museums, archives and libraries), Cultural Industries, and Cultural Policies), grouped around five pillars:

- **Policy development and related institutional capacity building**
- **Rebuilding the culture sector in Port-au-Prince and contributing to the return of the displaced communities to their neighbourhoods**
- **Safeguarding the cultural heritage of Jacmel and fostering creativity for its economic and social revival**
- **Developing the area of Léogâne into a pilot model for the safeguarding of Haiti's valuable intangible cultural heritage**
- **Protecting the National History Park – Citadel, Sans Souci, Ramiers, World Heritage property and enabling socio-economic development for the local communities**

The common denominator of these areas is the adoption of better economic governance and the institutional development necessary to restart Haiti's economy and society and to improve Haitians' living conditions.

Substantial improvement in financial management, better linkages and coordination of external funding coupled with a greater effectiveness of the actors involved, will have a lasting impact on the level of the country's human development and will reinforce the legitimacy of the State in the public domain. Moreover, true efforts of local development and active participation will contribute to strengthening Haitians' confidence.

List of proposed projects:

Project 1 : Building strong institutions

Module 1: Towards a revised cultural policy framework for Haiti

Module 2: Strengthening institutional capacities

Module 3: Revising the built heritage policies

Module 4: Elaboration of a national plan for the museum sector

Project 2: Port-au-Prince: Towards an integrated approach to culture

Module 1: *Retour aux Quartiers*

Module 2: Collecting the memory of Haiti in its archives

Module 3: Rebuilding the library sector

Module 4: Recovery of movable collections

Module 5: Rehabilitation plans for museums and cultural institutions

Project 3: Jacmel: Restoring memory, encouraging creativity

Module 1: Revitalizing the historic centre of Jacmel

Module 2: Rebuilding confidence: Crafts for Development

Module 3: Fostering creativity through arts

Project 4: Léogâne: Safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage of Haiti

Module 1: Inventory of Intangible Heritage in Léogâne

Module 2: Safeguarding the Rara tradition

Project 5: National History Park - Citadel, Sans Souci, Ramiers: Protecting Haiti's World Heritage

Module 1: Heritage preservation and integrated socio-economic development for the World Heritage property