

Randi K. Bendiksen
Senior Advisor
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Oslo, Norway

STRATEGIES FOR CULTURE AS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN DEVELOPMENT WORK

Presentation at the IMC World Forum on Music, Beijing, 12 October, 2007

In the last decade, there has been a growing awareness of the role of culture in international relations, emphasizing the political, economic, social and – of course – the cultural impact of sharing artistic expressions and exchanging ideas across established borders.

In Norway, this renewed interest in foreign cultural policy has been reflected in a series of public reports, action plans and strategies on cultural co-operation, corresponding media debates and an increase in the number of international projects within arts and culture receiving financial support from the Norwegian Foreign Ministry.

The Ministry of foreign affair's most recent strategy document in the foreign cultural field is the 2005 *Strategy for Norway's culture and sports co-operation with countries in the South*. It is based on the fundamental premise that cultural rights belong to the universal human rights, as set out in the UN Declaration of Human Rights and several other UN Covenants. This implies recognition of the principle that all people have the right to develop and nurture their own culture.

Culture and value systems are closely linked to the sense of identity of individuals, groups and society at large, and have an intrinsic value that must be respected and protected in order to secure diversity – both locally and globally. The limitations here are set by the human rights. The strategy states that in the cultural field, as in all fields of society, basic human rights must be respected.

Globalisation and technological advances have created new and exciting opportunities for mutual contact and inspiration across established border(line)s. But globalisation is also putting pressure on many cultures – often to the detriment of local and traditional expressions. Thus, cultural globalisation is often associated with the risk of homogenisation and commercialisation.

In order to meet these and other highly complex challenges, Norway's foreign cultural policy (in/towards countries in the South) aims at improving the framework conditions for cultural participation, production, consumption and preservation in partner countries. The strategy states that a dynamic cultural sector based on broad popular participation is a

prerequisite for an open civil society, with diverse arenas for critical debate and independent professional actors to take active part in the exchange of ideas and the promotion of cultural expressions in general.

Given this, the strategy states that support for culture (through development co-operation) should promote human rights in general and freedom of expression in particular, through exchange activities and support for developing institutions necessary for a free and varied cultural life – be it public administrative bodies, academic institutions or professional organisations; concert facilities, film festivals or theatres; museums, galleries or libraries. Exchange activities, essential for developing vibrant cultural institutions, are considered as vital.

The strategy covers artistic and intellectual activity, cultural heritage, media development and sports. Although the support for cultural co-operation with non-western countries is primarily directed towards strengthening the cultural sector as such, some measures are linked directly to other policy areas, such as peace and reconciliation, good governance and human rights in general. The government also aims at facilitating co-ordination of efforts in the different areas by focusing on certain thematic priority areas – such as culture and peacemaking activities, cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue as well as cultural rights, freedom of expression and intellectual property rights.

One of the basic principles in (of) Norway's foreign cultural policy is that all projects should be based on direct co-operation between professional actors in the countries involved – and conducted according to prevailing expertise. In order to ensure high professional standards, cost-effective use of resources and sustainable activities in the long turn, it is essential that the institutions involved are as sound or stable as possible. Thus, the Ministry's most important partners are national and local institutions within the arts and the cultural sector in general – whether public and private. Direct contact between cultural institutions, artists and other professionals is considered a guarantee for high quality and is essential in facilitating network and competence building.

This means that formal government-agreements and the traditional culture-agreements, which were previously widespread, are today avoided. The objective is that the institutions in question should be able to take care of the planning and implementation of individual projects on their own. This will in turn promote the overall objective: to strengthen the cultural sector in the countries involved, by improving the framework conditions for cultural participation, production, consumption and preservation.