



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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la science et la culture



World
Heritage
Convention

Convention du
Patrimoine
mondial



Sustainable
Development
Goals

Objectifs de
développement
durable



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for Sustainable Development
in Africa**

***Le Patrimoine mondial
pour un développement durable
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Heritage Guardians

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Introduction

South America, and indeed Colombia, has many cultural similarities with Africa – important biodiversity areas of the planet, diverse populations as a result of the integrations of indigenous, Africans and Europeans, and a rich cultural heritage. Despite this heritage, Colombia has suffered the longest internal war in the world, with the second highest number of internally displaced persons after Syria, and the third highest number of casualties from landmines. Sadly, the internal war has been one of the most fundamental causes of the social, economic and environmental difficulties in sustainable development.

In the heritage field, the Ministry of Culture of Colombia has promoted a programme called the 'Heritage Guardians'. This education programme has supported the protection, promotion and safeguarding of heritage, while contributing to the attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in the *Policy Document for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention*.¹

Heritage Guardians programme²

Colombian public heritage policy seeks to involve communities with their cultural heritage, since heritage, in addition to being the right of all citizens, is better protected and safeguarded through community involvement. The Heritage Guardians programme is a network of volunteers with Guardian groups organized according to

geographical location throughout Colombia. The programme, based on the Red Cross volunteers system, has promoted the identification, assessment, protection and recovery of cultural heritage in Colombia for over 15 years. It promotes active and voluntary citizen participation through actions focused on community memory, while fostering cultural democratic citizenship. It encompasses different views regarding the interaction of people with their territory, against a backdrop of coexistence, dialogue and recognition of the other. The programme thus shares with the community the joint responsibility of protecting the culture that defines Colombians, in a territory where multiple cultures, histories, traditions and rituals merge.

Its decentralized organizational structure allows group mobility, facilitates intercultural dialogue and provides insights into cultural diversity. There are currently 2,695 Heritage Guardians and 28 regional coordinators covering a total of 32 official regions of Colombia. The network coordination team consists of a national coordinator, from the Ministry of Culture, regional coordinators and the group coordinators. Each coordinator is elected annually at the national meeting. The national coordinator is responsible for organizing the elections to select regional coordinators. In this capacity, they receive the candidature of possible regional coordinators prior to the national meeting, and conduct the electoral process at the national meeting.

Membership of the Heritage Guardians is open to all Colombians irrespective of academic background, and takes into account gender balance within the groups. The sole requirement is to belong to a legally constituted public or

¹ *Policy Document for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention* is referred to throughout this paper as 'policy document'; the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is referred to throughout this paper as the 2030 Agenda.

² *Programa de Vigías del Patrimonio*

private entity wishing to work voluntarily to build a democratic and participatory nation through the development of projects related to the assessment, protection, conservation and promotion of the heritage in their territories. The interested entities are required to formulate a project in accordance with the programme objectives and can receive support from the Ministry and regional coordinator concerning the project design. Once the proposal is completed, and approved by the regional coordinator, it is submitted to the Heritage Office of the Ministry of Culture, along with a copy of the group coordinator's photo ID and a copy of the entity's official certificate of registration.

Once the Ministry of Culture approves the proposal, the Heritage Guardians receive a kit (vest and cap) and can participate in national Guardians meetings, regional meetings, training events and Ministry of Culture competitions for the best-developed project. The Guardians solemnly undertake to promote exchange and dialogue between individuals and society in order to promote heritage, defend threatened local and regional cultures, and fight against exclusion. In addition, they support and propose alternatives for change in order to incorporate heritage concerns into the economic and social development of the country. The heritage proposals are very diverse, focusing on areas such as inventories, design of heritage policies, heritage conservation and management practices, heritage promotion, safeguarding, research, capacity-building and even tourism. Nevertheless, as some of the proposed heritage activities require technical skills, the Ministry carries out a detailed evaluation of the group's skills in order to verify its capability to develop the proposed task.

In essence, this programme has strengthened the right of all citizens to participate in processes in which they are involved – communities interact daily with their own heritage, and are the main actors in its protection and safeguarding.

Cultural and Natural Heritage Box

Inspired by the UNESCO World Heritage Education programme,³ the Ministry of Education created the

Cultural and Natural Heritage Box⁴ in 2004. This pedagogical box contains materials and language suitable for young Colombians, in order to aid their comprehension of cultural and natural heritage. It seeks to incorporate the notion of heritage into the national school curriculum through its inclusion in the Institutional Educational Plan – PEI.⁵ Its aim is to strengthen notions of territory, community, memory and nation-building, in order to promote the importance of keeping cultural roots alive, and respect for others through tolerance of cultural differences. It fosters the recognition of tangible, intangible and natural heritage in Colombian schools, thus supporting heritage protection and advocating for sustainable development principles.

The box contains a teaching guide, four booklets on nation-building, territory, community and memory, an interactive CD, an educational video and various educational panels that serve to help teachers encourage students to learn about heritage. The box materials are available in printed and electronic (website) format.

In 2008, 1,289 teachers at Normal Superior Schools in Colombia received the printed box materials, while the digital materials offer a valuable low-cost dissemination option. These Normal Superior schools, managed by the Ministry of Education of Colombia, are run as teacher training colleges. This is how teachers and students – future teachers – are contributing to improve heritage knowledge across the regions, especially in very remote areas.

Heritage Guardians through the Cultural and Natural Heritage Box

The implementation of the Heritage Guardians programme started in 2009 through internships – mandatory social service for youth in their final year of high school – using the Cultural and Natural Heritage Box project. Since then, the notion of heritage as a driver of sustainable development has been strengthened considerably, even in those Colombian territories affected by armed conflict.

The monitoring and evaluation results of the Cultural and Natural Heritage Box in the Normal Superior Schools indicated that the best way to

³ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/educationkit/>

⁴ Biácora del Patrimonio Cultural y Natural

⁵ The Institutional Educational Plan is the general statement that sets out the fundamental institutional action plans, through which the short-, medium- and long-term mission is planned.

apply the heritage knowledge acquired from the box, and to make it useful to local communities, was through social services. The Ministry of Education conceived Resolution 4210 to require compulsory social service, as it contributes to the integral development of the student while responding to the needs of the local community. Social services, which must be incorporated into the curriculum, should respond to the identified needs within the area of influence of the educational establishment – mainly those related to education, culture, social themes and leisure. Thus, students in the last grades of high school – Grades 10 and 11 – are required to complete 80 hours of social service to obtain the diploma.

Through this educational ‘social service’ system, which operates in many countries in the world, students who receive training through the Cultural and Natural Heritage Box can implement these social services through the development of a project within the Heritage Guardians programme framework. In order to belong to the programme, the schools submit a proposal related to the community’s needs concerning heritage. The students are the Heritage Guardians, while the teacher in charge of the social service assumes the role of Group Coordinator. The coordinator is also responsible for keeping the regional and national coordinators updated with regard to possible modifications to the project and the proposed inclusion of new members.

In addition, the programme can be run at very low cost. The students develop their role as guardians while doing social service, the material can be downloaded digitally, the regional coordination is developed voluntarily, and the group’s coordinator role is a duty that is within teacher obligations. In this sense, the programme has a very good cost-benefit ratio.

The Cultural and Natural Heritage Box has been distributed to the Colombian territories in printed or digital format, while the Heritage Office of the Ministry of Culture has additionally encouraged its use for enrolment in the Heritage Guardians programme. As an example, one professor in Gigante City in the Huila Region was concerned that the oral traditions of his city were disappearing, and designed a project where students could collect oral traditions through stories told by the elders. The Gigante School has

already published booklets that detail the town’s traditions and stories, thus keeping its heritage alive in this region.

Special attention has also been focused on schools for indigenous ‘ethnic education’,⁶ taking into account their poor access, the weakness of safeguarding indigenous traditions and their tendency to be located in armed conflict areas. In this sense, it was important that the indigenous students were trained with the box material and organized into Heritage Guardians groups. For example, at the World Heritage site of the National Archeological Park of Tierradentro (inscribed in 1995), there is a population of over 100,000 indigenous Paeces people, one of the most homogeneous groups that still remain in the country. The Paeces students were trained using the box materials, and some of them took on the role of Heritage Guardians. One of the Heritage Guardian groups interprets the site values to the visitors, promoting the site and gaining additional economic benefit from the tourists.

In order to respond to the huge problems that internal war and natural disasters were causing to cultural and natural heritage, students were trained as emergency responders in their territory. For instance, at the World Heritage site of Mompox (inscribed in 1995), located close to a river, the long rainy season causes periodic flooding. With the support of firemen and some emergency organizations, 81 students from 5 schools were trained as the ‘First Responders’ for the site’s Natural and Cultural Heritage.

An example of heritage in an armed conflict situation is that of Placer town in the Putumayo region. The town had suffered a long period of violence caused by internal armed conflict. A priest led the local community to collect materials and images related to the town’s history of war. Unfortunately, much of the town’s population was displaced by the violence and a lot of the information collected was lost. However, the community is now starting to return, and the Heritage Guardians at its main school, ‘Jose Asuncion Silva’, are researching the remaining historical pieces and promoting the collection to visitors. For them, recreating the memory of the town is a way to promote reconciliation with the period of war, which forms a part of its history.

⁶ Education implemented by some schools in Colombia, where indigenous groups live. Many of the lessons are taught in traditional indigenous language and the indigenous traditions are often promoted.

The examples mentioned above reflect that this programme is closer to the social inclusion dimension of sustainable development, since it is developed by communities, and in particular by youth. Nevertheless, it also covers the environmental and economic dimensions – as some of the projects also contribute to environmental needs, the programme has become a strategy to increase the economic development of poor territories.

Heritage Guardians as a driver of sustainable development

The key reasons why the Heritage Guardians have become an important tool for driving sustainable development in Colombia are as follows:

- The non-discriminatory and inclusive nature of the Heritage Guardians programme, whose main actors are the local communities, ensures that the Guardians contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It also responds to: (i) the strategic objective of the World Heritage Convention as the fifth 'C' that seeks to enhance the role of communities in Convention implementation (Decision 31 COM 13B); (ii) the requirements of the World Heritage Committee's (Decision 35 COM 12E), 2030 SDG Agenda and UNESCO's policy document for effective and equitable involvement and participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in decision-making, monitoring and evaluation of World Heritage sites.
- The Heritage Guardians use of the Cultural and Natural Heritage Box to teach the principles proposed by UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development⁷ (ESD) also empowers the learners to take actions for sustainable development through social service. These principles lead to the inclusion of key sustainable development issues in teaching and learning. It also requires participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behaviours and take action for sustainable development.
- The Heritage Guardians respond to the policy document's general requirement for capacity-building by networking among practitioners and local communities.
- Through their 'First Aider' actions, Heritage Guardian Programmes contribute to improving resilience to natural hazards and climate change, thus responding to the requirements for environmental sustainability as framed in the policy document and the 2030 Agenda.
- The Programme also encourages the Guardians to generate economic projects in order to increase employment opportunities in their territories, thereby responding to the policy document's aim for inclusive economic development, which is mainly youth-oriented. It is also in concordance with Goal 8 of the 2030 Agenda concerning the promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, and specifically the reduction of the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.
- The Programme also contributes to post-conflict recovery efforts as 'First Responders' are involved in the process of asset recovery. Its projects also focus on promoting and safeguarding the cultural traditions that may have been disrupted by the conflict, thus supporting the policy document's premise of 'Fostering Peace and Security'.

The Heritage Guardians in the Africa context

Some suggestions are outlined below, with the aim of adapting the Heritage Guardians Programme to the African context, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of the region.

At the heart of the Heritage Guardians programme is the inclusion of the community in heritage processes. In this sense, the programme runs in accordance with the African Union's Agenda 2063, which considers the participation, inclusion and empowerment of citizens during the implementation, monitoring and evaluation arrangements as critical factors for success.

African heritage institutions could take advantage of UNESCO's Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet), a global network of 10,000 educational institutions in 181 countries, whose priority topics are culture and sustainable development. The Heritage Guardians programme could be established in those African schools identified as belonging to ASPnet.

⁷ <http://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development>

The Heritage Guardians programmes in Africa could also be linked with UNESCO's International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA). IICBA could train teachers through the African adaptation of the World Heritage in Young Hands, using digital materials. Using these materials, they could train the students and propose developing Heritage Guardians projects with them as part of social service, or by integrating them into existing national youth programmes.

Schools that are located close to the Biosphere Reserves belonging to the UNESCO African Network could be identified. In this way, students in these areas could focus their heritage projects on promoting the conservation of the reserves through their social service as Heritage Guardians.

The African Union's Agenda 2063 has agreed to create the Pan African Leadership Institute (PALI), which seeks to prepare young male and female leaders with an *esprit de corps* and the ideals of Pan Africanism. PALI could also serve to coordinate the Heritage Guardians programme throughout the continent, given that its mission coincides with the aims of Guardians. The Pan-African ideals should be mainstreamed in all school curricula in order to ensure the African cultural renaissance, and to contribute significantly to the GDP.

The African adaptation of World Heritage in Young Hands could be designed to include a section on 'cultural entrepreneurship through tourism' as a way of involving community-based initiatives in tourism development. This African adaptation could contribute to the Pan-African aspiration of an African cultural renaissance by including topics relating to African identity and common heritage, and embedding it in school curricula. Through economic and cultural projects, young Africans could both foster their cultural identity and increase GDP.

One of the aspirations of the African Union's Agenda 2063 is to promote youth volunteerism, something to which young African Heritage Guardians volunteers could contribute. Special attention is needed for post-conflict areas. Heritage Guardians programmes could be set up in schools that are close to post-conflict areas so that the volunteers can act as 'First Responders' to save cultural heritage.

In order to include the stakeholders and rights holders, including indigenous peoples and local communities, in the establishment of effective monitoring through continuity in data collection, Heritage Guardians could be required to periodically submit data relevant to the established indicators. This could be very useful, especially in remote areas.