

**Note: This cultural policy was taken from**  
**<http://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/fact%20file/a-z/culture.htm>**

## **The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Cultural Policy**

### **Introduction**

In accordance with the agreement reached by the General Assembly of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation held in Mexico City in 1982, culture is defined as a concept which incorporates all intellectual, ethical, physical, technical and other activities that characterise humankind as a rational being. It also involves the ability of man to learn and train himself in moral, technical and other spheres of knowledge. Culture is a wide concept which includes the modes of life, beliefs, traditions and the whole set of the material and spiritual wealth which characterise a certain society as distinct from others.

In the context of the cultures of the peoples of the various nations, nationalities, and peoples of Ethiopia, this definition could be used to incorporate their varied social, economic, political, administrative, moral, religious and psychological conditions. The languages, history, oral traditions, housing, instruments of production, food preparation, eating habits, costumes, ornamentation, aesthetic values and appreciation, beliefs and religious practices are also components of their cultures.

The ritual ceremonies related to birth, wedding and death, principles of mutual co-operation and communal concerns that emanate from kinship, neighbourhood and other types of relationships, as well as traditional ways of social governance, traditional health care practices and many other related aspects of their respective communities are also included. As the concept of culture encompasses varied aspects of wider scope, it plays a major role in the national development process. Nowadays it has become a global conviction that any development program that does not pay attention to culture cannot bear fruit. However, neither the past regimes nor the member of the ruling class were able to accept this reality; and there was never a time when a development policy that considered the culture of the people was put into effect. On the contrary, they promoted policies designed to consolidate political systems that ensured the continuation of their personal powers and welfare. To this effect, they followed a discriminatory policy by seeding enmity among peoples and promoting the domination of the culture of one nation or nationality at the expense of others.

Even though some governmental measures were recently been taken to promote the cultural sector, they fell short of creating a proper understanding of the concept of culture. Instead, these measures were limited to organising a few narrowly envisaged cultural establishments. In relation to the modern political, economic and social establishments and enterprises created in the country, these cultural establishments came very late and this indicates the low consideration that was given to the sector. This low consideration hindered the sector from contributing its part in development programs of the country.

Today due consideration is given to basing every developmental activity on the peoples culture. Therefore, the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), which is making efforts to give solutions to the complex problems of the cultural sector has issued

proclamation No. 4/1995 to restructure the office in charge of cultural affairs, so that its operation shall be commensurate with a democratic system. However, structural change alone would not bring about the development of the sector. Therefore, it is imperative to have a popular cultural policy that would set the direction of the sector's development. It is also important to note that the sector was denied due attention by the government and the people, who are directly concerned by it, and yet are denied of the right to actively participate in the development of the sector.

Cognisant of the fact it is high time the heritage history, fine arts, handicrafts and folk art (tales, proverbs, popular poetry, dance, songs, etc.) of the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia are collected, registered, analysed and preserved from any form of adulteration, and that these are given equal recognition and right to develop.

Cognisant of the need to abolish step by step the deep rooted causes of poverty, indolence, misconduct, prejudice against women, chauvinism and problems related to family planning and reproductive health, backward traditions that are popularly known as 'harmful culture' and are a deterrent to development and progress, practices that violate human rights and harmful traditional practices causing physical, psychological and moral damage; all practices that defy social values and norms as well as artistic performances, cinema shows and other media productions such as books and press outputs that negatively affect the welfare of the youth and withstand all forms of acculturation.

Instead it is important to create favourable situations that would enable all citizens to participate in cultural and creative activities and fulfil their spiritual needs; to inculcate equality of the sexes, companionship and industriousness, to respect for mankind and work and an initiation into; development and progress; and to promote national, continental and international co-operation on the basis of the equality of all Cultures and mutual benefit.

Considering the necessity of putting into effect the constitutional rights of the peoples of Ethiopia that guarantee equal recognition and respect to the cultures of nations, nationalities and peoples; of bringing about the practical application of article 9/4 of the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia that reads: 'All international agreements ratified by Ethiopia are an integral part of the law of the land', and article 39/2 that reads, 'Every nation, nationality and people in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and to develop its own language; to express, to develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history'. Determined to take advantage of the conducive conditions created for the development of culture by the democratic and federal system of administration that the country chose to follow and, according to which the opening of central and regional offices to carry out cultural activities is made possible, as well as the decentralisation of trained manpower and finance.

Article 51/3 of the constitution states the federal government 'shall establish and implement national standards and basic policy criteria for public health, education, science and technology as well as for the protection and preservation of cultural and historical legacies.'

This cultural policy is endorsed by the Council of Ministers of FDRE on October 1997 and is put into effect.

## **CULTURAL POLICY**

### **The Necessity of Having the Policy**

1. In recognition of the positive or negative role that culture could play in the relationship of peoples; with the realisation of the fact that culture is itself the mark of the identity of humankind and the foundation of all human rights; and believing that it is appropriate to ensure that the cultures of the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia receive equal recognition, respect, and the chance to develop;
2. In recognition of the fact that culture is closely related to the daily life and psychological states of people, and that it has a decisive role in facilitating development programs to meet their goal.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY**

- 1.To enable the languages, heritage history, handicraft, fine arts, oral literature, traditional lore, beliefs and other cultural features of the various nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia to receive equal recognition and respect; to preserve and conserve these and pass them over to future generations;
- 2.To create conducive conditions to carryout scientific research on the languages, heritage history, handicrafts, fine arts, oral literature, traditional lore, beliefs and other cultural features, which as they are constitute the identity of the peoples of the various nations and nationalities; to ensure the prosperity of these cultural elements and to enhance their role in development;
- 3.To ensure that all citizens can freely, equally and democratically participate in all cultural activities and to enable them to benefit from the sector;
- 4.To create situations favourable to creative artists and researchers working in the cultural sector;
- 5.To promote the culture of the different nations, nationalities and peoples, and to develop these in harmony with modern education, science, and technology; and to create culture conscious citizens that are proud of their culture and identity and are determined to preserve these;
- 6.To create situations that would favour the development of skilled manpower in various capacities in the cultural sector;
- 7.To abolish step-by-step traditional harmful practices;
- 8.To enable cultural establishments to play a significant role in the country's programme to bring in peace, development and democracy;
- 9.To establish cultural co-operation on national, continental and international levels on the basis of the equality of cultures and mutual benefit;

### **CONTENTS OF THE POLICY**

- 1.Ensuring that the languages, heritage history, fine arts, handicrafts, oral literature, customs, beliefs and other cultural elements of the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia receive equal recognition, respect and chance of development;
- 2.Creating a favourable situation to carry out scientific research and inventory on the languages, heritage history, fine arts, handicrafts, oral literature, customs and other cultural elements of the nations nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia and to make them useful in development endeavour;
- 3.Creating a favourable situation whereby citizens can equally, freely and democratically participate in all cultural activities and receive the benefits thereof;
- 4.Introducing the fact that culture is the basis of all kinds of development;
- 5.Creating a favourable situation to the development of the culture of the various nations, nationalities and peoples in line with modern education, science and technology;

6. Creating awareness that the conservation and preservation of cultural, historical and natural heritage's are the duties and responsibilities of governmental and non-governmental organisations, religious institutions and all Ethiopian nationals;
7. Facilitating the necessary conditions to conserve and preserve the heritage of the country; to protect these from illicit trafficking and extortion, and to set up a standard that would enable to effect control over the expatriation of heritage;
8. Making arrangements for the return of all Ethiopian heritage which have been expatriated in various ways;
9. Providing the necessary professional assistance to the various nations, nationalities and peoples while making their choice of language;
10. Creating situations whereby creative artists get a conducive atmosphere to the promotion of their career;
11. Ensuring the opening of cultural establishments and their development;
12. Creating the necessary situations for the development of skilled man power in various capacities in the sector and to introduce modern methods and applications;
13. Warding off all cultural activities that could negatively affect the physical, psychological, and moral well being of the youth as well as the dignity and democratic rights of citizens;
14. Ensuring women's active participation in all cultural activities and guaranteeing them equal right to the benefits thereof;
15. Enabling cultural establishments to play an active role in all the activities being carried out to fend off harmful traditional practices and attitudes such as indolence, chauvinism, narrow mindedness; prejudice, etc, and to step-by-step eliminate the prevalent prejudice against women and their professions;
16. Promoting national, continental and international cultural co-operation on the basis of the equality of people's culture and their mutual benefit;

## **GENERAL STRATEGIES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY**

### **1. With Regard to Inventory and Standardisation**

- 1.1 A scientific inventory shall be carried out on the national cultural, historical and natural heritage's found in and out of the country;
- 1.2 Appropriate measures shall be taken to standardise the country's cultural heritage and archaeological as well as existing libraries, other institutions of art and those yet to be established in such a way that it enables to put an order of priority for the research and preservation of heritage into effect;
- 1.3 A scientific inventory shall be carried out on the oral literature of various nations, nationalities and people of Ethiopia and proper care shall be taken to maintain their historical and cultural values;
- 1.4 All the languages and dialects of the country shall be identified, inventoried and classified in accordance with their geographical distribution and standards;
- 1.5 Traditional and modern arts as well as handicrafts shall be inventoried in their original and unadulterated state so that they can be handed down to posterity unaltered; these shall also be audio-visually recorded and stored;

### **2. With Regard to Study, Research and Development:**

- 2.1 Scientific and technological materials and knowledge that can assist the activities of the various fields of culture shall be introduced;
- 2.2 Standard study and research shall be carried out in the fields of archaeology, palaeontology, paleo anthropology, and cultural anthropology;
- 2.3 A scientific study shall be carried out on all kinds of the country's heritage;
- 2.4 An archive appraisal shall be conducted to properly identify the historical value of documents found in the possession of the state, organisations and individuals in and outside the country;
- 2.5 Large scale research shall be carried out into methods and means of using traditional art and handicraft as the basis for modern creative activities;
- 2.6 Scientific study and analysis shall be made of the oral literature of the various nations, nationalities and peoples of the country;
- 2.7 Phonological, orthographic, syntactic and socio-linguistic studies and researches shall be carried out into the languages of the various nations, nationalities and peoples of the country;
- 2.8 Multilateral studies and research shall be conducted into the dying and endangered languages of the country and the records thereof shall be preserved;
- 2.9 A thorough and comprehensive research shall be carried out into the ancient (classic) languages of the country so as to use them as a resource for the development of literature, the study of history and for various researches as well as for the development of new terminologies;
- 2.10 Arts will play an active role in the effort to change the erroneous conception about women which is prevalent in the country and so abolish all sorts of harmful traditional practices they are suffering from;
- 2.11 An appropriate supervision shall be put into effect to safeguard the youth from films, books, journals and such productions that could negatively affect their, psychological and moral wellbeing;
- 2.12 Handicraft products shall be developed in harmony with modern technology so that these become a strong source of income;
- 2.13 Research shall be carried out to study and identify the types, degree of exercise and geographical distribution of the prevailing erroneous conceptions about women and the harmful traditional practices that they are caused to bear. In this regard, appropriate strategies shall be put into effect to bring about a change of attitude;
- 2.14 Studies shall be made to seek the means and methods of creating an integrated working relationship among the different governmental and non-governmental organisations as well as religious institutions and individuals dealing with the various cultural activities; and measures shall be taken to put this into practice;
- 2.15 In general, all studies and research activities in the cultural sector shall be directed to suit the country's development endeavours and will be supervised to make sure that they are carried out in accordance with professional ethics;
- 2.16 Cultural establishments shall be directed in such a manner as to foster the physical and moral well-being of the youth and the development programs of the country;

### **3. With Regard to the Establishment and Expansion of Cultural Institutions**

- 3.1 Museums, theatres, cinema halls, galleries, other institutions that would fulfil the artistic needs of children and the youth, cultural centres, mobile libraries, libraries, archives, record and documentation centres, fine arts and handicraft training centres, and institutions for language studies of various levels and capacities shall be established in the capital city of the Federal

Government as well as in different towns of the Regional National States; those already existing institutions shall also be properly organised and strengthened;

3.2 A film institute that could foster the fine arts of the country and generate income shall be encouraged;

3.3 A Central Conservation Laboratory where the heritage of the country can be studied and preserved shall be established;

3.4 An archives training centre that can provide service to the country on a central level shall be established;

3.5 A translation centre that can promote cultural exchanges and the transference of knowledge between local and foreign languages shall be established;

3.6 A national prize trust that could encourage outstanding professionals in the arts and other fields of culture shall be established;

#### **4. With Regard to the Conservation, Preservation and Inspection of Heritage**

4.1 A national heritage map that exhibits the distribution of the sites of the country's historical, cultural and natural heritage shall be prepared;

4.2 The sites of the country's historical and natural heritage shall be preserved;

4.3 Measures shall be taken to protect heritage from theft, illicit trafficking and illegal exchanges, expatriation and from all sorts of illegal merchandise;

4.4 An appropriate precondition shall be arranged to protect sites of heritage from damages caused by construction works and other development activities;

4.5 The heritages of the country shall be conserved and preserved in the manner that they retain their original state and artistic quality;

4.6 Heritages shall be collected and organised in museums, libraries and archives that may be established at different levels and these shall be conserved and preserved;

#### **5. With Regard to the Repatriation and Restitution of Heritages:**

5.1 Heritages that have been expatriated in various ways shall be returned through purchase, donation and exchange;

5.2 Diplomatic campaigns shall be made at national, continental and international levels for the return of heritage pillaged and expatriated at different historical events;

#### **6. With Regard to Developing Languages and Providing Professional Assistance While Determining the Language for Use:**

6.1 A language distribution map of the country shall be prepared;

6.2 Alphabets shall be developed for those languages that do not have a script and these will be put into service, taking into account the psychological attitude of the speakers;

6.3 Up-grading measures shall be taken to solve the problems of written languages in accordance with the principles and methods of the science of orthography;

6.4 In order to promote the literary tradition of the peoples of the country, an enabling environment shall be created for the preparation of dictionaries, encyclopaedias and grammar texts in the languages of the various nations and nationalities;

6.5 The peoples of the country shall be provided with professional assistance in deciding the languages of instruction, mass communication for official use at the Federal, Regional, Zonal and when necessary, at district levels;

6.6 Scientific and technological terminologies that could help in promoting the capacity of the languages of the country shall be developed; translation works that could assist in sharing the experience and knowledge of the world shall be widely practised;

#### **7. With Regard to Initiating and Encouraging Creative Artists & Other Professionals:**

7.1 Material and moral support shall be rendered to individuals engaged in the various sectors of art and who have scored outstanding results;

7.2 The necessary support and incentive shall be rendered to professionals that score outstanding results and make important contributions in cultural research activities;

7.3 Due incentive shall be accorded to encourage and motivate professionals working in the various fields of culture;

#### **8. With Regard to Protecting the Right of Property to Creative Works and Other Related Rights:**

8.1 Existing laws of the country dealing with copy-right and other related rights shall be amended and new laws pursuant to the advancing technology shall be effected;

8.2 Necessary measures shall be taken to ensure that the right of property to creative works is properly observed;

8.3 The rights of individuals, groups and organisation who entrust archives and other moveable heritage to the national and regional archives and museums shall be protected;

8.4 The right of ownership of the people concerned shall be protected while traditional fine art works of the different nations and nationalities are variously put into use;

8.5 Professionals working in the cultural sector shall be encouraged to form their free professional associations;

#### **9. With Regard to the Spread of Cultural Knowledge**

9.1 Cultural themes shall be included into the educational curricula with the aim of integrating education with culture and thereby to shape the youth with a sense of cultural identity;

9.2 Educational programs reflecting the various cultures of the country shall be transmitted by the mass media institutions in order to promote the cultural knowledge of the peoples of Ethiopia;

#### **10. With Regard to Personnel Training and the Modernisation of Work Mechanisms:**

10.1 Professionals working at different capacities in the cultural sector shall be provided with long-term and short-term training in and outside the country so that they can develop their professional competence;

10.2 A training program in the arts shall be devised to recruit more amateur artists and to develop their creative competence; a series of such training shall be put into effect at the centre and in the different regional states;

10.3 Modern methods and application that could assist in the development of the sector shall be put into practice;

#### **11. With Regard to Popular Participation:**

11.1 A favourable situation shall be created that will enable private investors to open theatre, cinema halls and galleries as well as to organise libraries and to import and distribute books;

11.2 An all rounded support and co-operation shall be offered to Ethiopians and foreign nationals who, by their own will and initiative engage themselves in a legally recognised activities of collection of fine arts and handicraft productions, ancient parchment, books and archives to those vendors and trusting who would transfer these to the government's safe keeping, as well as to those who make valuable contributions in the other fields of the culture;

11.3 Associations and organisations in the various fields of culture, where citizens could make their contribution at their own will shall be encouraged;

11.4 The peoples of the country shall be encouraged to participate in artistic and other cultural programs of dramatic nature;

11.5 Women's participation in the activities of the sector and their right to equally share the benefit thereof shall be promoted;

## **12. With Regard to Cultural Exchanges and Relationships:**

12.1 A national information system and network for information exchange shall be organised;

12.2 New findings obtained by researchers in the cultural sector as a whole shall be made public so that they can be employed as the basis of planning in the country's development undertakings;

12.3 Strong national, continental and international relationships shall be established on the basis of the equality of cultures and mutual benefit, and this shall be done with the aim of consolidating the sectors that the policy comprehends and widely introduce the cultures of the peoples of Ethiopia to the rest of the world;

12.4 Attention shall be made to ensure all continental and international conventions that the country has signed and would sign with regard to culture are adequately observed;

## **13. Financial sources:**

The expense necessary to run the activities of the cultural sector shall be raised by the state, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, and from aid assistance and contributions made by individuals and the public;

## **14. Executing Bodies of the Policy:**

The executing bodies of the policy shall be government offices already operating at different levels of hierarchy and those yet to be opened, professional associations of the sector, governmental and non-governmental organisations as well as public organisations and individuals;

## **15. Implementation of the policy:**

Laws and regulations necessary to implement the policy shall be decreed.