**CASE STUDY 37**

Civil society engagement in the policy-making process: Experience of the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda

#### **Background**

Uganda, with 38 million people and 65 ethnic groups, is very culturally diverse. The Constitution of Uganda recognizes this diversity and acknowledges cultural heritage as an important aspect of social development and people’s identity. It highlights the need to preserve and promote this heritage through cultural institutions chosen by their respective communities. The Government of Uganda has ratified a number of related international instruments, including the UNESCO 2003 Convention, and more recently the 2005 Convention.

The National Culture Policy (2006) elaborates the notion of cultural heritage, making a distinction between intangible and tangible heritage resources. It underlines the need to preserve and promote heritage, giving the responsibility to two different government departments in two different ministries. Intangible cultural heritage is placed under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (in the Department of Culture and Family Affairs), while tangible heritage is placed under the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities (in the Department of Museums and Monuments).

There is no specific ICH policy, structure, plan or budget allocation but rather general allocations to the two departments responsible for cultural heritage. Together, they attract less than 0.003% of the national budget. The two departments have competing interests and priorities in respect to tourism, cultural industries and cultural institutions. Without a centralized Ministry of Culture, coordination is difficult and challenges sometimes arise as to which department is fully responsible for what aspect of heritage.

Selected community and civil society representatives are occasionally invited to participate in the development or revision of national policies and development plans by the responsible state authority. A draft document, which could be a result of a commissioned study or internally generated by civil servants in the ministries, usually forms the basis for such consultation. The selection of community or civil society representatives to participate in these processes may stem from the trust and confidence that diverse stakeholders have in them, from their institutional positioning and organizational credibility, and from their demonstrated practice that reflects an appreciation of culture informed by mutual respect.

Civil society organizations are therefore often involved in the policy-making process by invitation from the State through the relevant line ministry. In this brief, we share the experience of the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda in national policy-making processes, how it has supported the involvement of communities in this arena and a few lessons and insights that arise from this experience.

The Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU), a not-for-profit NGO established in 2006, is dedicated to promoting the recognition of culture as vital for human development that responds to Uganda’s national identity and diversity. CCFU is premised on the conviction that culture is at the centre of sustainable development and that positive aspects of culture, if harnessed, can make a significant contribution to social and economic transformation. The ‘Culture in Development’ approach employed by CCFU is however relatively new on the development scene in Uganda, and CCFU has found limited points of reference and experiences from which it could draw lessons, as well as scarce initial financial support.

Over the past 9 years, there has however been an increased international and national interest and support for cultural heritage, especially where this is linked to sustainable development. This has resulted in greater visibility and overall growth of the culture sector in the country.

#### **Institutional preparedness and positioning**

Building confidence and credibility are important considerations for organizations that participate in policy formulation and review processes. CCFU started by building its internal competence through research, the documentation of the relevance of culture in development, and studying the local cultural context. Through its work on heritage education, cultural rights and support to community museums, CCFU also accumulated experience and established a network of partners involved in heritage promotion. In addition, CCFU has over the years nurtured a critical mass of heritage supporters who act as a sounding board and collectively advocate for different heritage related concerns. These interventions have enhanced our credibility, the trust of communities as well as that of government authorities, and enabled the Foundation to be perceived as an appropriate partner in policy deliberations.

At an organizational level, CCFU has taken deliberate steps to ensure that it is informed and receives policy advice from credible institutions. The CCFU’s seven-member Board of Trustees consists of a representative from the UNESCO National Commission, a line ministry, a reputable university, a cultural institution and a civil society organization. At international level, CCFU is accredited as an NGO under the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and is a member of two other international heritage organizations. This position exposes the CCFU staff to heritage policy concerns and implementation at international and national levels. By working ‘in the field’ through a series of partnerships with community-rooted organizations and district-level government departments, CCFU has also been exposed to a diversity of community experiences in relation to ICH promotion.

CCFU’s strategies and approaches reflect respect for culture and knowledge bearers and recognize the dynamism of culture, which requires regular and objective reviews. This is especially important because CCFU sees itself as playing a catalytic role; facilitating spaces for reflection and learning amongst a variety of stakeholders at all levels; and providing technical support, building the capacity and linking communities to supportive institutions. In addition, through the provision of relevant materials, CCFU ensures that the communities it works with have access to relevant information and are equipped to engage in policy advocacy themselves.

As a result, to date, CCFU has been invited to participate in national policy formulation and review processes which have included commenting on Uganda’s draft National Culture Policy, the Family Policy, the Heritage Policy, the Museums and Monuments Policy and three cycles of National Development Plans. CCFU has also participated in technical committees for national studies on national cultural values, a biospheres’ study and a study on cultural industries in Uganda, some of which have informed national policies. CCFU has also contributed to the culture working group on the 1976 Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Human Rights Commission.

#### **Supporting community involvement in policy-making**

Community representatives, as with civil society organization staff, are involved in policy processes by invitation from the State. Because of short notice periods and lack of sufficient information, community representatives however often tend to be poorly prepared to take full advantage of these opportunities to demand that their concerns be comprehensively addressed.

CCFU recognizes the pivotal role of communities in cultural heritage matters and as custodians of heritage resources. CCFU has therefore engaged in development processes that enhance the capacity of community members to engage effectively in policy work. Working with five ethnic minority groups (the Benet, the Ik, the Babwisi, Bamba and Bavanoma), CCFU has for instance supported reflection events on the relevance of culture in development. It has run ‘write-shops’ to develop researched and documented policy briefs that outline specific cultural concerns, and to identify mitigation measures and stakeholders that could help address these minorities’ concerns.

Guided by similar principles, CCFU has supported 26 representatives of cultural institutions to produce a document outlining their aspirations and expectations that may be used to prompt policy changes by the state and other development partners. Where necessary or requested, CCFU may accompany its partners to present their concerns to relevant authorities but it does not speak on their behalf.

#### **Participating in the policy-making process – a few lessons**

Over the past years, CCFU has drawn a number of lessons and insights from its involvement in policy-making processes.

The first concerns the value of synergy and of the involvement of diverse stakeholders who bring not only their expertise, but also good relations with other institutions and individuals of influence. We however noted that differences in organizational cultures and approaches may present challenges where for instance some partners may be process-oriented while others may place more emphasis on results. Adherence to deadlines and outputs may then become an issue, besides expectations of remuneration that require constant negotiation and compromise.

Second, policy processes can be lengthy ventures which require resilience, creativity and resources, all of which may not always be readily available. Civil society interventions tend to be donor supported and time bound which may affect their consistency, thus requiring the integration of policy advocacy in the strategic plans of a range of organizations and institutions. While much value is attached to national and international policies, a challenge also lies in supporting their implementation in a sustainable fashion and, in the case of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention, in post-inscription monitoring and support.

Third, the lack of a centralized government structure for culture (as is the case in Uganda) may result in poor coordination of communication and management of cultural affairs, while heightening competition for very scarce resources.

Fourth, Uganda’s traditional cultural institutions, such as Kingdoms and Chiefdoms, are considered ‘cultural’ bodies by the State. Their leaders are not only custodians of cultural heritage, however, but are also often perceived as potential political representatives of ‘their’ communities. This ambivalent status compromises their engagement in policy processes when they are drawn into managing power relations with the State and other political actors.

Finally, as a developing country, with widespread poverty and high levels of unemployment, heritage preservation – and indeed ICH safeguarding – must be linked to sustainable development to comprehensively address the needs of both current and future generations.