

# The Cultural Rights of Young People Matter – a Call for Collective Action

Cultural rights are a dimension of human rights seldom mentioned by activists or policy makers. Yet, culture – as the “being” (identity) and “doing” (way of life) of a people – places cultural rights as arguably the foundation for all other rights.

## What are cultural rights?

Cultural rights can be defined as “human rights that aim at ensuring the enjoyment of culture and its components, in conditions of equality, human dignity and non-discrimination”. They include the rights to access, to express and to enjoy one’s culture with the support (and without interference) from the State.

## What does the law say?

As the world marks the International Human Rights Day, we note that the Constitution of Uganda does not provide a direct and detailed reference to cultural rights (apart from Article 37 which vaguely refers to “the right to culture and similar rights”).

Yet the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1987 International Convention for Economic Social and Cultural Rights provide for the right of everyone to freely participate in the cultural life of the community. The Convention encourages State parties to develop steps to achieve the full realisation of this right, including the conservation, the development and the diffusion of science and culture.



*Young people learn about culture*

In Uganda, the 2006 National Culture Policy (currently under review), the 2016 Museums and Monuments Policy and the 1967 Historical Monuments Act partly provide for cultural rights.

## Why focus on young people?

Despite the fact that young people constitute more than 70% of Uganda’s population, they are not sufficiently supported to enjoy, express and access their cultural heritage. The current formal education system provides young people with only a limited opportunity to speak their mother tongues, and culture is almost absent from the secondary school curriculum.

## What needs to be done to promote cultural rights among young people in Uganda?

1. Educational institutions should promote young people’s understanding of culture through co-curricular activities which utilise mother tongues.

2. Government should facilitate the development of orthographies of local languages where they do not exist and of instructional materials focused on culture.
3. Government should take deliberate steps to include heritage education as part of the mainstream primary and secondary schools’, and tertiary institutions’ curricula, for example by mainstreaming cultural knowledge, skills and values in all subjects taught.
4. Government should domesticate and implement the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and all international legal instruments that provide for the protection and promotion of cultural rights.
5. Government should allocate at least 1% of the national budget to promote cultural activities that guarantee access, expression and enjoyment of cultural rights. A separate, well-resourced Ministry for Culture is preferable for managing Uganda’s tangible and intangible elements of culture, developing and implement relevant plans, policies and other legislation in support of cultural rights.
6. Government should facilitate the Uganda National Culture Centre, establish functional infrastructure in all parts of Uganda to enable young people enjoy their cultural rights by appreciating and participating in cultural activities of their choice.

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