

The Impact of Seoul Agenda in Arts Education in Africa

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“Seoul? Seoul Agenda? What’s that?” A number of teachers in or engaged with Arts Education (AE) expressed this view. They are not aware of the Seoul Agenda or that UNESCO is supposed to spearhead the agenda. They don’t know that AE is a key component of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The arts are left to whoever can apply them, as they see fit!

In such a situation, not every student has access to arts education. Also, no particular teachers are trained to handle AE. Always the more out-going, bubbly, ‘natural actors’, or ‘stubborn’ teachers are assigned the role. AE is engaged in as an ad hoc activity; as a hobby, to ‘kill time’ when pupils are tired of class work, or when the teachers are ‘busy’ marking end of term tests and don’t want to be disturbed. In boarding schools, performing groups or artists can then be allowed to perform for the pupils, at a fee. A few schools may also allow a seminar for the pupils but not necessarily in AE. Most day schools send pupils back home until the last day of school when they come back to pick their reports. At the university, AE is never nurtured due to the transient nature of university education and (un)practicalities of the semester system.

Education in much of Africa is privatized hence a lucrative business and highly competitive. AE is taken as a ‘luxury’ and ‘waster’ of time. Super grades mean more students hence more money. Also, the education system favours academic excellence to holistic learning. Government policy is ambivalent because more than 50% of national budgets are funded by donors who prioritize outright development projects. This environment edges out AE naturally.

Associations like IDEA and WAAE may supplement UNESCO’s efforts in AE through continued engagement and creating platforms like Open Learning Resources for AE which may be accessed at all levels in the formal and informal sectors.