**Contribution: cultural dimension of the right to education**

**Introduction**

IIMA (lstituto lnternazionale Maria Ausiliatrice) is a civil society association that promotes and defends human rights, especially those of children, young people and women.

Education, understood as integral development, is at the center of our commitment, and we believe that our total dedication to children and young people is the best gift we can give to humanity.

#### IIMA works in 1455 centers in 94 countries on 5 continents in order to promote the right to education and Human Rights Education for all, prioritizing preventive intervention in urgent situations and the sharing of best practices.

We truly believe that the right to education is the vehicle to implement all other rights: receiving adequate education empowers people, and by developing their potential, enables them to build a dignified life.

The answers that follow will pertain the 26 African countries where IIMA is presently at work, and they are: Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea Equatorial, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Zambia.

The answers have been gathered from views and testimonies shared during meetings held at the continental level. They are proposals, suggestions and recommendations that African educators (both teachers and parents) and pupils/students have discussed together for the last six years: all of them are members of IIMA Schools and Vocational Training Centres.

**1. Please provide information on how, in your country, the issue of respect for cultural diversity and the cultural rights of each person is reflected in school curricula (legislative, institutional and policy framework, and implementation):** //

**2. Please provide information on how, in your country, the issue of respect for cultural diversity and the cultural rights of each person is taken into account in the organization of the school system and schools (legislative, institutional and policy framework, and implementation):**

The analysis of educational projects in the school systems of the African countries where IIMA works, shows the growing and constant concern to put the person at the centre of the educational action. In some parts, however, the excessive number of students does not facilitate the implementation of personalization processes which are the expression of an authentic education.

Although there is an educational push that leads the educational communities to take an interest in the weakest and most difficult categories in particular, it must be noted that on this point Vocational Training is much more successful than the School in reaching these children and teenagers.

Despite the commitment to build positive relationships, it must nevertheless be recognized that there is a danger of excessive bureaucratization and formalities in relationships. Sometimes the best energies of educators, educators and managers are spent in fulfilling bureaucratic practices and not in paying attention to the processes of accompanying people, groups and the community.

**3. Please clarify to what extent the measures described above relate not only to the issue of languages in education (in this regard, please briefly explain the context and provide details on the State language policy), but also to the arts, heritage, science, history, values and religions, or world views and ways of life, in all their diversity:**

We have found that postmodern thought in Africa recognizes that every culture is rich in humanity, has its own dignity, is never self-referential (different cultures are never ‘closed universes’) and says that it is right to give voice, protect all those minority ethnic cultures that, in contact with urban cultures, risk extinction or homologation.

When African school systems – both in the Bantu sub-Saharan culture and in the Arabic culture of northern Africa - promote an inculturated education, they propose the enhancement of the culture in which they live, knowing that this, being a human product, must always be improved in its resources. Referring to the African context, enhancing the characteristics of this culture means leveraging on the great welcoming capacity that people show they have, on resilience, on willingness to listen, on the symbolic richness of rites, myths, languages, methods of greeting, expressions of party, and at the same time, help to overcome inertia, passivity, the inability to go beyond the immediate, the sometimes evident lack of planning, the rigid rules of the clan and of ethnicity.

Formal education must be conceived and managed as a living part of a community, and therefore in dialogue with the local social, cultural and political fabric. Openness and confrontation are indispensable for the process of inculturation of the vision of life and guarantee the progressive knowledge of the values ​​and limits of the contextual culture in which IIMA educators operate. This journey requires long times, availability and tenacity. Proposing an inculturated education today in a context characterized by globalization means concretely educating the young generations to the world, to democratic coexistence, to human rights.

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The reflection on globalization in the African continent takes place in an increasingly multi-ethnic and multicultural historical context, and in a social, political, economic environment characterized by complexity, a weak rationality, pluralism, interdependence, but also by new forms of nationalism, wars ethnic, regionalisms, economic neo-colonialism.

Intercultural illiteracy can be fought by leveraging both cognitive, rational, objectively observable and measurable processes and deeply involving processes, such as emotional ones, which are more difficult to observe objectively. The red thread that can constitute a link between the disciplines of a curriculum can be the concept of diversity, seen and studied in all its possible manifestations in the context of the design of different disciplines.

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Global education refers to the “pedagogy of deconstruction” that IIMA uses in its educational environments, that is, the pedagogical reflection that accepts to question the culture of belonging: languages, knowledge, tools and institutions.

Deconstruction is a process of historicization and therefore of relativization of knowledge, in fact it is a hermeneutic work that affects the levels of understanding and above all the pre-understanding of reality. In the perspective of the “pedagogy of deconstruction” used by IIMA in the African context, four levels can be highlighted:

* linguistic - conceptual deconstruction;
* psychological deconstruction (attitudes, relationship patterns, prejudices ...);
* instrumental deconstruction (cultural and educational means);
* structural deconstruction (institutions, mechanisms, laws).

In African Schools and Vocational Training Centres it is certainly appropriate to work on the deconstruction of ethnocentric and prejudicial attitudes. In practice, IIMA tries to work on the deconstruction of four forms of attitudes:

* Attitude of centrism and superiority: for which the upper/lower dialectic applies, whenever we refer to other ethnic groups, peoples, nations, cultures, religions. This attitude leads to hierarchical differences, to create rankings and rankings on the basis of evident ethnocentric criteria.
* Friendship/enmity attitude: makes humanity divide into friends/enemies; it underlies the so-called ‘ideology of the enemy’.
* Competition attitude: relationships with others are commanded by the win/lose dialectic; the objectives of the relationship are never cooperative or supportive, what matters is to prevail.
* Attitudes of conformity: it is the typical uncritical alignment with the judgment of authority; it is passive obedience to dogmatism.

**4. Please specify the specific and particular difficulties encountered in ensuring an inclusive and quality education that allows cultural diversity and the cultural rights of each person to flourish at the same time:**

 IIMA educators are aware that an inculturated education and an integral human formation aimed at improving the life of the social community in the context in which a school operates, goes hand in hand, in Africa, with the struggle to defeat the innumerable motivations that hold the boys and even more girls far from education.

Experience has shown that an inclusive and quality education in Schools and Vocational Training Centres involves long times, patience, respectful waiting, intelligent and pertinent awareness. Above all, it requires a communicative ability that day after day is able to awaken in children, adults, young people the awareness of their dignity and the will to fight to improve the quality of their life and that of the community.

In some contexts, a rather topical division of roles and tasks still exists which contrasts with the path taken by the country for the exercise of active citizenship.

Even the climate of competitiveness that schools often face at the public level risks pushing towards selectivity in order to guarantee excellent results that allow them to support the comparison with other institutions in the area. Effective co-responsibility in educational communities still remains a challenge to be faced in different regions.

**5. Have specific mechanisms been established to consult and ensure the participation of stakeholders, in particular the populations concerned and parents, for a better understanding and effectiveness of the right to education, including its cultural dimension? What place is given in this context to the voice of children?** //

**6. What recommendations should be provided to States and other stakeholders on these issues?**

1. An interesting reflection could be made about the deconstruction of tools, cultural and educational aids that are used in schools. It is a question of unmasking unidirectional school books (always on the winning side); pedagogy or philosophy texts with ethnocentric historiographic models; religion texts built according to the truth/non-truth, heresy/orthodoxy scheme; history books which attribute no importance to the role of women and minorities in the historical development of humanity. As a concrete example of deconstruction of the instruments, the “Mercatone geographical map” and the “Peters map” could be compared. The use of a pedagogy of deconstruction helps to remember that school and vocational training in a democratic and pluralistic society have the function of educating the younger generations in critical, creative and divergent thinking.
2. A true formation for democratic citizenship requires some conditions:

• take democratic values ​​as the foundation of coexistence in the school and consider it as an environment of participation and cooperation;

• promote the recognition of people as subjects of rights and duties that favor the expression of differences (cultural, generational, gender ...);

• activate processes for the shared construction of the rules of coexistence;

• integrate formal spaces with other social spaces in such a way that the contents on participation and common work have concrete vital references;

• facilitate meaningful learning with reference to human rights, the history of one's culture, justice, social responsibility, the maturation of faith, interreligious encounter. This implies implementing curricular proposals that have as reference content the reality of children and adults, the critical reading of events, information on what happens and the analysis of social conflicts;

• strengthen the associative processes, through the creation of networks of movements of public, local, regional opinion that conceive politics as the construction of rights, responsibilities and mutual enhancement and empowerment.

Wanting to gather the elements of this reflection in a concluding summary, we IIMA could say that in the multiple educational scenarios of the African countries where we work and live, the great challenge of educating the generations of the future through some common lines is at stake:

* educate to live in change. Cultural change is very difficult to manage, as it is global and not local. What you can do is educate and educate yourself to live in change, to seek in it not only the dangers, but the challenges and possibilities of new human forces. The main challenge of this present of ours is given by the multiculturalism deriving from migrations and contacts between different cultures. Perhaps it is the time when it is urgent to see ‘positive signs of contradiction’ with respect to today's society enchanted by economy and technology.
* Educate to look ahead and foresee. An education in this sense is not easy, since it requires a careful examination of the past, the present and an acceptance of the risk, which must be assessed on the basis of knowledge. In the context of working with the poorest, resilience, correctly understood as the ability to grow balanced in the adversities of life, is an incentive to have confidence in the resistance to destruction of people and groups and, even more, to support the ability to rebuild even in dramatically adverse situations, such as violence, wars, hunger. This attitude must be seen and cultivated in young people, even if the social context seems unfavourable and if the situation is at risk of failure. Looking to the future, in these terms, is constructive; we need to educate in the long term, even one or more generations, we must rebuild trust in one's dignity and ability.
* Educate to hope and not to defeat, to find the small signs of utopia that are in everyday life and that, often, are not found in elaborate analyses or in illuminating theories, but in small gestures, in small solidarity, in unspoken requests for help.
* Educate to find the best in yourself and in others, since there is always a seed of goodness in the depths of everyone. This is not an easy task as we are immersed in the noise, in the logic of globalization, of the market, of the material economy. But, perhaps, it is precisely in the noise that we can look for that small hidden ray in every man and woman, which the educational process has the possibility and the duty to discover as such, in an act of hope and faith.
* Educate to responsibility since each person is called to answer for their talents, their originality, to seek paths of authenticity. However, this answer cannot be given except in the perspective of the relationship with others. It is in this direction that responsible citizenship must be placed. It cannot be thought outside the other, it cannot be conquered by thinking only of one's own inclusion. Citizenship includes both the rights to have and to act, and the commitment to work for the inclusion of the others.

Concretely, School and Vocational Training in African countries today are called to propose a socio-political education in which critical ability and creativity come into play.

There could be three nuclei of objectives on which to set the educational-didactic modules:

1. To train the ability to identify, interpret and evaluate socio-political problems in a society where information is manipulated in multiple ways by different agents. In this light, it is important to underline the need for serious scientific and cultural training, which preserves pupils from simplistically-made reasons or dogmatism.
2. To train, in the responsibility for participation, in building the common good. It is necessary to motivate the socio-political commitment of young people, so that they can overcome individualism and come to commit themselves to the integral promotion of the good of others. The goal of service to others is part of socio-political education.
3. Educate utopian ability. This is the place of creativity that takes concrete form in the development of the ability to elaborate, taking into account the real potentials and limitations of the present, wide-ranging projects whose aim is social change. In this nucleus it is appropriate to use group dynamics techniques, decision making and adequate use of language.

Encouraging participation, the protagonism of the younger generations is the key to the formation of independent, competent, independent people; for a socio-political education destined to bear the fruits of an active citizenship aimed at building the common good.

The protagonism of the younger generations can be considered as a real pedagogical method in Africa, based on a set of practices and experiences that aim to encourage in growing subjects the learning of the meaning of building themselves in personal, cultural and social terms.