

Using art to drive Africa's economic agenda

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia - The African Union is looking to identify ways in which African artists and the African Union, through the Citizen's Diaspora Directorate's facilitation, can collaborate and add value to ongoing continental initiatives.



Image by 123RF

The Citizen's Diaspora Directorate (CIDO) of the African Union Commission under the leadership of Ahmed El-Bashir, acting director of CIDO received a delegation from ASIKO International Arts School.

This delegation was led by Bisi Silva, the founder of ASIKO and Dr Desta Meghoo, CEO of DYMDC Creative Consultancy and liaison officer to the African Diaspora Forum.

The group of artists, drawn from 12 countries got an overview of CIDO's objectives and activities particularly the revival of Encyclopaedia Africana which aims to provide knowledge about the history, cultures, and social institutions of African people and people of African descent. They also received an in-depth presentation of the AU's flagship development agenda: Agenda 2063, particularly on free movement within the continent and integration, a culturally strong continent and economic development.

The CIDO department's director challenged the delegation of artists to look for ways in which they can help disseminate key messages using their respective art of choice regarding issues of health, economy and education, among others, on the continent. CIDO recognised the power of the Arts as a medium of communication and a driver of development on the

continent, calling art “the Africa Union’s fifth language”.

The discussion also touched on how African artists can look at the value chains of the arts and get involved in other related fields like policies, laws and trade through arts. Of note, the artists wanted to know the frameworks put in place by the AU to ensure that AU member states were motivated to ratify the Charter for Cultural Renaissance and how they could get financial help from the AU.

The delegation of artists were advised to organise themselves into registered CSOs to make it easy to partner and collaborate with Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) and CIDO; facilitate the tapping into financial grants; and track implementation of policies that deal with the arts within the AU. They were also encouraged to engage with local governments in their respective artistry so as to strengthen Aspiration no. 5 of Agenda 2063 which seeks to see “an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics”.

This meeting in part, set the ball rolling for the next Workshop to be facilitated by CIDO in conjunction with DYMDC and Diaspora African Forum, slated for September.

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