

THE PRESERVATION OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN KENYA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The intangible cultural heritage refers to the non-physical components of a people's culture, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, cosmology and traditional craftsmanship. The preservation of this type of heritage is much more challenging than that of the physical heritage. In fact, in countries such as Kenya, there is as yet no legislation that addresses this problem.

This paper will address both the prospects and the challenges of preserving the intangible heritage in Kenya. The prospects have to do with those factors that are conducive to the preservation of that heritage. These include such things as the use of indigenous languages in the school curricula, the use of Kiswahili as the country's national language, the re-enactment of traditional ceremonies and festivals in modern drama, and the continued use of certain traditional artifacts. On the other hand, the challenges have to do with the threats to the preservation of the heritage. These include westernization, development projects, lack of legal framework, the deterioration in the use of indigenous languages in everyday conversations, destruction of sacred sites, the use of factory artefacts instead of the traditional ones, and the lack of interest in the intangible heritage on the part of the institutions charged with the responsibility of preserving the cultural heritage in the country. The paper argues for urgent measures to be put in place to take advantage of the prospects whilst at the same time addressing the challenges. These measures are legal, institutional and administrative.