



CONCEPT NOTE

#Africanness: Embracing our African Heritage

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1. Context

The African continent is endowed with immense natural and human resources. With 16% of the world's population, it ranks highly in the quantity of world reserves of minerals like bauxite, cobalt, industrial diamond, phosphate rock and platinum group metals, and globally has 60% of unutilised farming land. Its population, the fastest growing in the world, is expected to increase from 1.2 billion people today to over 2.5 billion people by 2050 when it will continue to be the youngest in the world.

In spite of this, however, evidence indicates that major investments in post-independent Africa have failed to transform this immense potential into sustainable development that meets the socio-economic needs of its growing population. Whilst the proportion of people living in extreme poverty has declined from 54% to 41%, the absolute number of people living in poverty has increased over the past 25 years. Also, for example, 40 of the 46 Sub-Saharan African countries are net importers of food.

A radical shift is required in order to shape policy and practice on governance, economic development and the evolution of African institutions for the continent to realise its full potential for the benefit of its people.

Africa Day is the annual commemoration on May 25 of the 1963 founding of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). On this day, leaders of 30 of the 32 independent African states, at the time, signed a founding charter of the OAU in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. In 2002 the OAU established its own successor, the African Union (AU). The African Union theme for 2020 is '*Silencing the guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development.*'

In commemorating Africa Day this year, MINDS is convening Africa's youth and brains to discuss our heritage and how we can use our own culture and way of being to pursue our own development. How can Africans and African institutions realise their full potential when we have no idea who we are and what our own nature is? The webinar is aimed to zoom the lens on what African being is, what are we aside from the narrative shared post colonialism and how can we tap into our own essence to take Africa forward? Such a convening is crucial and timely based on the current disarray and unprecedented times we are living in with crippled economies, pandemics such as COVID19, disasters arising from climate change and increased poverty and hunger in a continent with abundant land and natural resources conducive to feed the world.

2. About MINDS

The Mandela Institute for Development Studies (MINDS) was established in 2010 as an Africa-wide think tank. Its founding was based on the hypothesis that effective and sustainable development of the African continent can only be achieved if development policies and practices are founded on the cultural heritage, value and knowledge systems and institutions of the people who are the subjects or beneficiaries of the development interventions.

Informed by this conviction, MINDS bases its approach and philosophy on the concept of 'Africanness' as it seeks to bring change in the way Africans tackle the social, economic and political challenges facing them today and in the future. In this regard, MINDS provides a forum for dialogue, information dissemination and networking, underpinned by rigorous research on the different elements of 'Africanness' in order to shape policy and practice on governance, economic development and the evolution of African institutions.

3. Exploring the concept of Africanness

Through several activities, MINDS has been exploring how Africans can use a keen self-awareness of their identity to underpin efforts towards transformative and sustainable development of the continent, including exploring the concept of Africanness. Research began in 2014. Scholars, namely Dr Sithole and Dr Morakinyo, came together with funding from the National heritage Council to develop a better understanding of what defines Africans by looking at the different aspects of their heritage, and determining their relevance for the development agenda of the African continent. Between 2018 and 2019, MINDS brought together leading African heritage practitioners, academics and stakeholders to explore the value of articulating 'Africanness' for sustainable and transformative development in Africa. During the dialogues, Professor Muxe Nkondo called for African heritage studies to be used as a tool for looking critically at the strategic value of African languages, cultural practices, and knowledge systems. For example, he suggested establishing the efficacy of African languages by systematically institutionalising them as languages of science and technology.

MINDS ran the #Africanness social media campaign in 2019 to stimulate conversations amongst the continent's youth around promoting a keen self-awareness in their identity and heritage. The campaign shared some of the major African achievements in the continent's long history. These included those of Mansa Mousa I, ruler of Malian Empire (1280-1331) who is considered by today's standards to be the world's the wealthiest man ever worth a staggering \$400 billion. He extended his empire's reach into one of the largest on the planet, and developed the system of provinces, territorial mayors and governors still used today.

In November 2019, MINDS hosted a cultural dinner in partnership with CAPSI Wits Business School and AUDA/NEPAD, where eminent scholars shared perspectives on Africanness. Professor Charles Ngwena posited that African identity should be recognised as something that is continuously unfolding, and is the outcome of multiple ancestries, cultures, genders and many other human associations. Professor Kwesi Prah emphasised culture, both tangible and intangible, as what defines a people, and that the single most important determining pillar that holds the whole edifice of culture together is language. It is ultimately in language that Africanness should be defined, he advised.

4. Deepening #Africanness during CRISIS situations

In 2019, climate related disasters mainly cyclones, drought and flooding caused havoc in the Southern African region deepening poverty and hunger for many countries. The year 2020, sparing no mercy, started with the global COVID19 pandemic, a global health crisis that is disrupting national economies and people's livelihoods, with a disproportionate impact on poor households and small and informal businesses. Although the impact of the pandemic in the first few months was less on the African continent compared to Asia, Europe and North America, it is expected to worsen going forward with major medium to long-term development implications. An initial analysis of COVID-19's economic impact by McKinsey estimated that Africa's GDP growth in 2020 could be cut by 3 - 8 percentage points, and they called for major expansion of existing efforts to safeguard economies and livelihoods across Africa.¹

MINDS is seeking to expand the #Africanness campaign against this backdrop, and ramp up conversations on bringing Africans together to address the development challenges confronting the continent. It is impossible to fight a battle hoping to pursue development unaware of one's being, strengths and weaknesses. The Oxford dictionary defines Culture as "the customs, arts, behavioural characteristics, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group". Culture therefore describes, "how we do things around here." In Africa, it is very difficult to stipulate "how we do things around here" because so much of our being and essence is unknown, undocumented, or lost with those that lived before. MINDS seeks to change that by bringing experts on Pan Africanism and African heritage to remind us who we are, how we "did things around here", to self-introspect and interrogate the current status quo in fighting battles such as the pandemics and disasters. How should Africans be tactfully using their culture to respond and fight issues that tie us down to persistent poverty and hunger?

¹ www.mckinsey.com/za/our-insights/tackling-covid-19-in-africa

To lead this conversation, MINDS is inviting esteemed scholars on African culture and Pan Africanism, Prof Kwesi Prah and Prof Adekeye Adebajo, to shed the light on what being African is and “how we are supposed to do things around here.” This conversation will be supported with inputs from a young Pan Africanist, Amanda Sibiya who has invested time to learn about African culture and heritage and document it. The talks from these 3 pan Africanists will pave the way for an open engagement with the audience from all corners of Africa and various sectors to reflect how we should rethink our culture and leverage on it to take Africa forward.

The webinar will be conducted as follows:

Webinar on Promoting #Africanness for the #Africawewant

MINDS will host an online intergenerational discussion on the 28th of May 2020 to explore the concept of Africanness in the context of Pan Africanism as the foundation to take Africa forward and address our current challenges. Two prominent academics who have both worked extensively on Pan Africanism and written about African issues, Professor Kwesi Prah² and Professor Adekeye Adebajo³, together with a young Pan Africanist Amanda Sibiya, will specifically share perspectives on how the continent’s people, leaders, youth and institutions can and should work together to create the Africa they want. The Africa we want is an Africa with transformative and sustainable socio-economic development that is resilient to shocks like the current pandemic and embraces African culture to define how we see the world. Amanda Sibiya⁴, a young entrepreneur and storyteller, will add the voice of youth and provide views as a young African how her peers should be embracing African culture. Dr Moyo, the founder of MINDS, will open the discussion that will be facilitated by Dikeledi Mokoena⁵, a young Pan Africanist, feminist and researcher (her availability is still to be confirmed).

Key participants to be invited to join the webinar will include MINDS scholars and alumni, AU network, African Youth Network Movement members, Wits University community as well as students at MINDS selected universities on the continent. MINDS will use the output from the webinar to contribute youth voices in its engagement with regional partners in marshalling a greater and coordinated response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kwesi_Prah

³ www.uj.ac.za/contact/Pages/Prof-Adekeye-Adebajo%E2%80%8B.aspx

⁴ <https://hadithi.africa/hadithi-africa-media-group-founder/>

⁵ <http://dikeledimokoena.com/>

The webinar will be conducted as follows:

Date: Thursday 28 May 2020

Time: 16:00 – 17:30 (GMT+2)

Facilitator: Dikeledi Mokoena

Venue: MINDS YouTube Channel

Programme

Time	Description	Speaker
16:00 – 16:05	Opening and Welcome	Ms Mokoena
16:05 – 16:15	MINDS overview on Africanness	Dr Moyo
16:15 – 16:30	Africanness. African people creating the Africa they want	Prof Prah
16:30 – 16:45	Africaness. Institutions and leaders creating the Africa they want	Prof Adebajo
16:45 – 17:00	Africanness. Young people create the Africa they want	Ms Sibiya
17:00 – 17:20	Open Q&A with audience	All
17:20 – 17:30	Conclusion and summary	Mrs Graca Machel