

African Politics and Policy

Newsletter
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Editorial

This issue of the APP Newsletter is entirely devoted to tourism, culture, cultural tourism and heritage protection in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Romualda Stormy in her article on Togo highlights the natural beauty, the historical wealth, and the cultural diversity of Togo where tourists may explore rivers, waterfalls, lakes, parks, castles as well as the traditional culture and religious traditions.

Kristina Bekenova in her article discusses the creation of the Gunjur Village Museum—a museum that Lamin M. Bojang established for the preservation of the cultural and natural/environmental heritage of the Gambia.

In addition to these two articles, this issue of APP discusses Solomon Teyakeresato's efforts to promote tourism in the Gambia, the publication of a volume devoted to the beauty of Madagascar's spiny desert, tourism in Somaliland and the importance of culture for Sudan.

The articles and the information provided in this issue are testimony of African elites' commitment to the preservation and promotion of culture in its various manifestations. This commitment is easy to understand. As Angola's Secretary of State for Culture pointed out culture is ultimately the most important driver of socio-economic and political development in the continent.

Riccardo Pelizzo

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Angola

The Secretary of State for Culture, Cornelio Caley, highlighted the importance of intangible cultural heritage that “lies in its intrinsic values by inspiring feelings of belonging and identity”

Gambia

Solomon Teyakeresato, the leading figure of a cultural group Kuteh Junbulu founded in 2000 along with the leading Gambian culture promoters in Sweden, want programs “to encourage European tourists to visit our smiling coast”.

Solomon Teyakeresato is best known for his outstanding initiative to promote the Gambian culture: Mandinka masquerade of ‘Kankurago’, “Gambian week” with dances and performances, organized in Sweden.

Togo: The Switzerland of Africa

By Romualda Stormy

One of the small countries in the West Africa, Togo is extremely well endowed in terms of natural wealth and diversity. In spite of the fact that Togo is not terribly well known around the world and is sometimes denigrated, the country is nonetheless well provided by nature. Because of its position the country has a mild and temperate climate. It is divided into five major economic areas. The maritime area in the south, with a stunning coastline of about 50 kms, is home to the capital Lomé where most of the country's economic activities are concentrated.

Lomé hosts the Grand Marchè, the Great Market, which is an important lung of the Togolese economy—a market made famous, years ago, by the "Nana Benz". Lomé also hosts the largest deepwater port in West Africa. The combination of commercial activities with a thriving port, make Togo and Lomé in particular, a commercial hub for the region.

The plateau region, blessed by its pleasant climate, mountains, rivers and waterfalls, has recently experienced economic dynamism. The economic revival of the region was initiated by the people who come every weekend to enjoy the delights of this region. Thanks to the appeal of the region, tourism and hotels have experienced a boom. The successes of the tourism industry paved the way for the blossoming of new business that provided further stimulus to the economic dynamism of the region.

The other three economic areas are no less economically relevant. Thanks to mining and production, flora and fauna, each of the remaining areas also plays an important role in the country's economy.

Togo has a diverse and varied culture and an equally rich history. In Agbodrafo one can still visit the slave house, where West African people were traded. The site, which dates back to the colonial era, is a very significant destination for tourists. Many other attractions scattered all over Togo annually attract thousands of visitors who wish to explore the many attractions of the country. The most attractive of these destinations are Lake Togo, the city of Togoville, the fetish market, the waterfall of Kpimé, the Vial Castle at Kpalimé, Aledjo fault, and Tamberma boxes (World Heritage of Humanity).

The various traditional festivals of the country including the taking of the Sacred Stone in the south and the Evalas in the north, also attract many people. Furthermore the annual International exhibition togo2mille attracts once a year some of the world's main economic players in the world who come to Lomé to find new business opportunities and expand their business activities.

Given its size, its natural beauty, a young and dynamic population and the many business opportunities it provides, Togo has long been regarded as the Switzerland of Africa.



Madagascar's Spiny Desert

Two conservationists, Louse Jasper and Charlie Gardner, in collaboration with WWF, recently published the book *Life amongst the Thorns* (<http://www.amazon.com/Life-Amongst-The-Thorns-Biodiversity/dp/1909612677>). The book is devoted to one of the beautiful places in the world – Madagascar Spiny Thickets, also known as “spiny desert”.

As noted by WWF (<http://www.worldwildlife.org/ecoregions/at1311>), while Madagascar itself is very famous for its unique animals and plants, the spiny thicket ecoregion is quite special. Located in the southern and southern-western part of the island, the spiny forest contains 95% of the plant species that are endemic for this driest ecoregion with the annual rainfall less than 350 mm per year.



Gunjur Village Museum

The childhood affection for community development determined Lamin M Bojang's desire to participate actively in the community's environmental protection and in the preservation of cultural and ecological heritage. The lack of a center where future generations can learn their own history and culture gave Lamin the idea to establish the Gunjur Village Museum aimed to preserve the community's natural and cultural history.

Established in the natural environment with the collaboration of the Footstep Eco Lodge, JIKI foundation of Holland and Ethical travels of Norway, the Gunjur Village Museum is something unique for Gambia. The museum performs different functions: a) it promotes the preservation of the endangered animal species, such as African scops owl, Northern white face scops owl, different butterfly species, snakes, beetles; b) it is a center for learning traditional medicine using the growing here traditional herbs and medicinal tree species; c) it ensure the protection of indigenous cultural heritage by housing the local artefacts; d) it is a platform for organizing different workshops, seminars, and exhibitions of the local art works; and e) it is cultural and eco-tourism destination.

The collection of the artefacts is one of the main challenges Lamin M Bojang faced in establishing the museum, because some of them are sacred and have been used for traditional rituals. With the support of local radio stations and village development committee Lamin ran several campaigns to inform locals about the importance of cultural treasures and, subordinately, about the purposes and objectives of the museum.

The future of the museum seems very promising for the development of the community. According to Lamin, the museum will organize annual workshops, with specialists from different institutions on the related field of natural and cultural history, to discuss the significance of the heritage. The museum will also hold different training programs and others activities such as nature walk, which will teach about the medicinal plants and the natural history of the community.

The museum for Lamin is not a place of business, but rather part of his and of community's life as well. In his view "there are no people without culture, and if any country does away with its culture, then you have no identity. Culture plays a key role in the dignity of its people. It also helps to unite the people, nations and continents".

Kristina Bekenova

Tourism in Somaliland

Somaliland is a self-declared from Somalia in 1991 small nation located in the northern part of Somalia along the southern coast of the Gulf of Aden. Last years, Somaliland is experiencing an increase in tourists, and perhaps, tourism could become a main contributor for its economy, which is the fourth poorest in the world (<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2014/01/29/new-world-bank-gdp-and-poverty-estimates-for-somaliland>). According to a director of Somaliland's Office of Tourism, Ibrahim Mohamed Shide, this year 700 tourists, the number was doubled compare to 2010, have visited Somaliland (<http://www.ozy.com/fast-forward/your-next-big-vacation-somaliland/66075>).

Sudan: the importance of culture

The Assistant of the President, Ibrahim Mahmoud Hamid, during the meeting with Minister of Culture Al-Tayeb Hassan Badawi, highlighted the importance of national cultural project of Sennar Capital Islamic Culture in 2017 implemented by Federal Ministry of Culture in their efforts to stabilize values and social security, and to maintain national heritage. This project will show the significance of Sudan Islamic Culture in building Islamic civilization.



Oxford University: call for papers

From June 27 to 29, Philosophy Faculty of Oxford University organizes Philosophy of "Race" and Racism conference. In that context, organizers announces a call for abstracts of 300-500 words for 30 minute presentation on race and racism issues.

The deadline of submissions is April 23.

The list of possible topics and the details could be found here <http://africanwords.com/2016/03/20/cfp-philosophy-of-race-and-racism-27-29-june-2016-oxford-deadline-23-april-2016/#more-8887>

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Academic Fellowships Available

Iso Lomso Fellowships provide an exceptional early career opportunity for Africa's brightest minds in academia. The programme is aimed at African scholars who have obtained a doctoral degree within the preceding eight years and who hold an academic position at a university or research institution anywhere in Africa. Deadline for applications: May, 25.

Iso Lomso Fellows will enjoy:

- a three-year attachment to the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS), South Africa, during which time they may spend a total of ten months in residence at STIAS to develop and pursue a long-term research programme;
- the possibility of a residency at a sister institute for advanced study in North America, Europe or elsewhere;
- funding to attend up to three international conferences or training workshops anywhere in the world;
- support to convene a workshop with collaborators at STIAS.

For more information please visit <http://stias.ac.za/iso->

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