

Futures Dialogues

Culture of Peace (Part I)

African Knowledge and Governance Systems for a Culture of Peace

Date and time: Wednesday 8 July 2026 (14:00–16:00 Paris time)

Languages: English and French

Format: Zoom meeting – Please click [here](#) to register

Humanity and the planet are facing increasingly complex and interconnected challenges, ranging from climate change to water insecurity, growing global inequalities, discrimination, and armed conflicts. These crises are not isolated: they reinforce one another, often exacerbated by the unintended consequences of ‘development’, including rapid technological and digital transformations. One of the most obvious and concerning interconnections lies in the environmental toll of armed conflicts: ecosystems are degraded and natural resources depleted, while at the same time competition over these very resources, especially land and water, becomes a major driver of conflict, further threatening their future availability and equitable access¹. By 2050, an estimated 2.4 billion people living in urban areas, equivalent to nearly half of the global urban population, are expected to face water scarcity. At the same time, some countries could lose up to 6% of their GDP due to the economic impacts of water scarcity.²

Contemporary crises are complex and multi-layered, and, as such, the task of building peaceful, resilient, and sustainable societies requires moving beyond universalized, one-size-fits-all perspectives and siloed responses. Yet, externally informed, top-down, ‘development’ and pacifying interventions have tended to be privileged over context-specific knowledge and practices, often held by Indigenous and local communities, that are frequently the most affected by these crises. The continued marginalization of these knowledge systems has not only contributed to their erosion but further limited the global community’s ability to draw on a broader range of knowledge systems and epistemologies in addressing contemporary challenges.³

This is particularly evident in the historical marginalization of Africa’s contributions to humanity, stemming from the legacies of colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, and imposed knowledge hierarchies. Indigenous and context-rooted knowledge and governance systems, grounded in centuries of lived experience and adaptation, offer holistic approaches to conflict prevention and environmental management, including water resources management. For example, community-based water governance systems in the Sahel demonstrate long-standing adaptive mechanisms for equitable water distribution and conflict prevention in contexts of scarcity. Their revitalization is therefore not only a matter of epistemic justice, but also a pressing necessity in the face of increasingly complex global crises.

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/how-conflict-impacts-our-environment>

² UN World Water Development Report 2023: <https://www.unesco.org/reports/wwdr/2023/en>

³ Transforming Knowledge for Africa’s Future: Seven horizons for the African Union Decade of Accelerated Action for the Transformation of Education and Skills Development in Africa (2025-2034) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000395728.locale=en>

African societies have historically developed sophisticated approaches to collective governance and resource management, including participatory decision-making processes such as *palavers*, restorative justice practices, and philosophical frameworks such as *Ubuntu* and *Ujamaa* among many others. These frameworks emphasize interdependence between individuals, communities, and the natural environment; learning from them, as well as from other Indigenous cosmogonies and community-based approaches across the world, is essential to understanding both the root causes of and holistic responses to global crises and conflicts, effectively advancing a culture of peace. Furthermore, for sustainability, those proposing governance ‘solutions’ from different knowledge systems would need to understand and take such frameworks into consideration.

As a continent at times perceived solely as conflict-ridden and through the lens of ethnic wars, violence, poverty, or corruption, it also comes to demonstrate that Africa in particular already has endogenous systems providing cultural sources and resources for a culture of peace, to echo the 2013 *Pan-African Sources and Resources for a Culture of Peace in Africa*, forum which laid the ground for an Action Plan for a Culture of Peace in Africa and the Pan-African Forum for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence.

This is particularly urgent for “Strengthening Water Governance as a Tool for Conflict Prevention, Mediation and Resolution”, the theme of the 2026 Biennale of Luanda. Across Africa and beyond, communities have long developed adaptive governance systems for water conservation and management, often embedded in customary laws, community history, and sociocultural frameworks. Knowledge systems and context relevant epistemologies that fully embody the importance of the connection of individuals, communities and the planet are not just the heritage of certain communities, but powerful sources of learning and lessons to advance environmental sustainability and peace within Africa and beyond.

Objectives

This *Futures Dialogue African Knowledge and Governance Systems for a Culture of Peace* on 8 July will convene diverse expertise to explore how Indigenous knowledge systems and cosmogonies, grounded in the relationship between humans, nature, and peace, can inform responses to contemporary challenges, including climate change, educational transformation, and human-centered technological development. Additionally, the Dialogue will in particular take a forward-looking and anticipatory approach to Africa’s future development challenges as a way to respond to the *2021 Africa Governance report*⁴ where the African Union presented four plausible scenarios of African governance futures in 2063 – Baseline, Utopian, Dystopian, Surprise.

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⁴ https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/41632-doc-800614_APRM_Governance_Report_2021_03.pdf

Provisional Agenda

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14:00-14:05	Opening Mohamed Elfarnawany , Director, Priority Africa Coordination, UNESCO
14:05-14:25	Segment 1: Framing the dialogue Indigenous, particularly African, knowledge systems and world views as contributors to positive social transformation for a culture of peace. Moderator: Cecilia Barbieri , Chief of Section of Global Citizenship and Peace Education, UNESCO <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Martial Ze Belinga, Economist, Sociologist, Associated Expert for the General History of Africa• Joseph Karanja, Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS), Sciences Sector, UNESCO
14:25-15:00	Segment 2: Exploratory discussion Indigenous knowledge systems, world views, moral and political philosophies, particularly in Africa and its diasporas. Moderator: Cecilia Barbieri , Chief of Section of Global Citizenship and Peace Education, UNESCO <ul style="list-style-type: none">• George Ladaah Openjuru, Vice-Chancellor, Gulu University. Coordinator, UNITWIN Network on Education, Epistemic Justice and the Knowledge Commons, Uganda.• Jonathan Okeke Chimakonam, Affiliated Research Fellow; Senior Lecturer. University of Calabar, Nigeria.• Leon Tikly, UNESCO Chair in Transforming Knowledge and Research for Just and Sustainable Futures, University of Bristol, United Kingdom. Member of the UNITWIN Network on Education, Epistemic Justice and the Knowledge Commons.• Thaddeus Metz, Professor of Philosophy, University of Pretoria, South Africa.

15:00-15:15	<p>Discussion</p> <p>Moderator: Cecilia Barbieri</p>
15:15-15:30	<p>Segment 3: Open discussion</p> <p>What exact actionable pathways do these Indigenous knowledge and governance systems inspire? How do they empower individual and system-level actions for a culture of peace?</p> <p>Moderator: Kuany Kiir Kuany, Project Officer in the Section of Global Citizenship and Peace Education, UNESCO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kouamé Sylvestre Kouassi, Coordinator, UNESCO Chair Anticipation, Foresight and Sustainable Territories. Teacher-Researcher, Université Alassane Ouattara de Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire. • Edmond Dembélé, Co-coordinator of the UNESCO Chair on Community-Based Research for Development Levers: “Innovation for Emergence”.
15:30-15:50	<p>Reflections and discussion</p> <p>Moderator: Kuany Kiir Kuany</p>
15:50-16:00	<p>Segment 4: Closing reflections and next steps</p> <p>Abdul Rahman Lamin, Head of Social and Human Sciences at UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa</p> <p>Gilbert Dadzie, Priority Africa Coordination, UNESCO</p>

*** Register [here](#) ***