

Cultural diversity provides window of opportunity for business world – UN report



20 October 2009 – Complying with cultural diversity, whether at the management, human resources or marketing level, can reap big dividends for businesses, according to a wide-ranging United Nations report on intercultural dialogue released today.

“The business world is beginning to understand and respond to the challenges of cultural diversity as a key factor of economic success,” says the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) World Report *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*.

“In an increasingly global marketplace, the capacity to create a universe with which consumers can identify adds significantly to a product’s value. Today, cultural diversity has a central role to play in the conception, brand image and marketing strategies of products that are successful in the global market,” it adds.

Multinational corporations are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of diversifying and customizing their products to penetrate new markets and meet the expectations of local consumers, according to the report, which covers a raft of issues ranging from migration, to languages, education, sustainable development, and democratic governance.

“As a result, cultural diversity today figures as prominently on private-sector agendas as it does on those of political decision-makers at the national or international level,” it says, citing major global brands, such as Nike and Coca-Cola, which spend millions of dollars advertising and promoting their products to align with the cultures, needs and aspirations of consumers.

Cultural diversity, too often reduced to the protection of heritages in danger, is also the development of intercultural skills, the search for an antidote to expressions of cultural isolationism, the lever of the effective exercise of universally recognized human rights and a means to reduce imbalances in the world trade in creative products, it adds.

On another plane, the report notes that media and cultural industries represent more than 7 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP) – approximately \$1.3 trillion, or twice the level of receipts from international tourism – but Africa’s share in the global trade in creative products remains marginal at less than 1 per cent of worldwide exports despite its abundance of creative talent.

To improve this situation, it is urgent to invest in cultural diversity and dialogue, it stresses.

“Through this World Report, UNESCO wishes to build on the advances of recent years and in particular to emphasize that cultural diversity has as its corollary intercultural dialogue, which implies a need to move beyond a focus on differences that can only be a source of conflict, ignorance and misunderstanding,” UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura says in a foreword.

“Cultural diversity is related to the dynamic process whereby cultures change while remaining themselves, in a state of permanent openness to one another. At the individual level, this is reflected in multiple and changing cultural identities, which are not easily reducible to definite categories and which represent opportunities for dialogue based on sharing what we have in common beyond those differences.”

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