



# ENUGU STATE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

**Volume 11  
Number 2,  
2026**

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**PUBLISHED BY**

**Faculty of Social Sciences,  
Enugu State University of Science And Technology**

## **Reclaiming Cultural Futures: Why Community-Based Musical Arts Education Must Become Central to Cultural Sustainability in Underdeveloped Countries**

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### **Abstract**

*Indigenous cultural heritage in many underdeveloped countries is facing threats of globalization, urbanization, cultural homogenization and the legacy of colonial education. Indigenous musical traditions are one of the most fragile cultural resources that are vital to cultural identity, social memory, the transmission of intergenerational knowledge, and community cohesion. The aim of this paper is to explore the role of community-based musical arts education in cultural sustainability. Based on the current literature in the fields of music education, cultural heritage studies, and sustainable development, the paper posits that community-based musical arts education is an effective means of preserving and revitalizing indigenous musical traditions. It challenges the formal music teaching in schools, such as the Western-based syllabuses, examination-oriented education, lack of resources and weak relation to local culture. The paper also illustrates through case studies how community learning spaces, apprenticeship systems, oral pedagogies, festivals and cultural practices are used to pass on indigenous knowledge from one generation to the next. It concludes that community based musical arts education should be accepted as a key element to cultural sustainability as it reinforces cultural identity, indigenous knowledge systems, social cohesion, youth empowerment and sustainable community development which formal music education can build on.*

**Keywords:** *community-based musical arts education, cultural sustainability, indigenous knowledge systems, cultural heritage, music education, cultural identity,*

### **1. Introduction**

Music and other arts have a prominent place in the life of any culture. Music is not only a means of beauty, but can also be a place of collective memory, a way of creating one's own culture, a tool of social cohesion and a way of transmitting indigenous knowledge from one generation to the next. Musical practices are living expressions of cultural heritage, they represent the histories, values, beliefs, languages and worldviews of communities. Music has become a focus for scholars as it plays a significant role in the transmission of cultural meanings, helps to strengthen social relationships and a sense of community identity (de-Miguel-Molina et al., 2021; Rehfeldt et al., 2021). Musical arts support the intergenerational transfer of knowledge: from younger generations to older ones and vice versa, younger generations learn the skills and values of culture and society and older generations acquire historical consciousness from younger generations through performance, participation, oral traditions and communal rituals. This means that the musical arts make important contributions to the continuity and sustainability of cultural traditions both formally and informally.

### **Aim of the Study**

The aim of this paper is to argue the role of community-based musical arts education as a pivotal element in the cultural sustainability agendas of underdeveloped nations. It validates

the worth of community-based musical arts education as a cultural, educational and developmental approach and contributes to the ongoing discussions on cultural policy, educational reform, heritage preservation and sustainable development by governments and international bodies who have become increasingly aware of the need to protect intangible cultural heritage.

### **Methodology**

This study applied an integrate literature review approach to examine how community-based musical arts education can be adopted in the teaching transmission and preservation of culture literature was sourced from different journals on community musical arts education, indigenous music, pedagogy, cultural sustainability and decolonial music education. Data was analyzed thematically to find the main principles, strategies and outcomes of community-based musical arts education for cultural reclamation while synthesis was used to develop a conceptual model for reclaiming cultural futures through community-based music in collaboration with formal musical arts education.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

Community-based musical arts education describes the kinds of musical education and cultural dissemination within communities that are based on and maintained through collective engagement, indigenous knowledge systems, and lived cultural experiences. Community-based musical arts education is not institution-based, curriculum-driven like traditional music education systems, but is a result of social interaction, cultural participation and experiential learning. It includes oral traditions, apprenticeship programmes, community performances like dances, singing etc, festivals and other ceremonial events, rituals, storytelling, and intergenerational mentorship, all of which teach and pass on knowledge of music. In many indigenous and traditional communities, music education is not taught in a formal pedagogy but rather through observing, imitating, participating and engaging with community music custodians. These educational experiences make music more than a means of artistic expression; they make it a social practice, a cultural life, an identity formation, a communal memory. Community-based musical engagement cultivates cultural democracy, social inclusion, collective creativity and local ownership of cultural resources, which are all highlighted in recent scholarship in community music studies (Evison, 2024; Schippers & Grant, 2022). In this way, community-based musical arts education is a mechanism of cultural preservation and a participatory framework for the maintenance of community-based knowledge systems.

### **Community-based Music and Cultural Sustainability**

Cultural sustainability has become a more and more prominent concept in current debates on sustainable development, heritage preservation and cultural policy. Cultural sustainability is the ability of societies to maintain, pass on, adjust and refresh cultural values, practices, identities and knowledge from generation to generation, in response to evolving social circumstances. Whereas approaches to culture as a form of preservation are static, cultural sustainability views culture as dynamic, changeable and continually reconstructed through social interaction and historical experience. It thus includes the continuity of culture while allowing adaptation and innovation. However, scholars believe that cultural sustainability goes beyond the preservation of heritage artifacts to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage which includes music, language, rituals, oral traditions, performance practices and indigenous knowledge systems (Gaonkar et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2025). Culture plays a central role in sustainable development, as culture resources help foster social cohesion, community resilience, identity and inclusive development, which is increasingly recognised

by UNESCO (2024a). In this context, musical traditions are of great cultural value and their sustainability is based on continual teaching, community involvement and the transmission of tradition.

In many underdeveloped countries, the curriculum is still dominated by remnants of the colonial educational systems, giving preference to western knowledge systems at the expense of local cultural traditions and indigenous forms of artistic expression. Globalization and urbanization have added even greater pressures that promote cultural homogeneity and limit traditional avenues of community involvement. Poor cultural policies, a decline in community infrastructure and lacking institutional arrangements for the protection of intangible cultural heritage all play a major role in the marginalisation of culture. Consequently, the passing of many indigenous music traditions is in danger, and transmission rates are decreasing while their public visibility is declining. It is in these kinds of contexts that the significance of community-based musical arts education is especially relevant, as it offers an approach which is accessible and culturally responsive to the preservation of cultural knowledge and strengthening of community identity and sustainable cultural development.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in Decolonial Theory (Quijano,1992; Mignolo, 2000) alongside African Decolonial thought (Ngugi,1986; Ndlovu-Gatsgeni,2013) calling for cultural reclamation from Colonialism and Decoloniality through community-based musical arts and Sociocultural Theory by Vygotsky and Rogoffs which argues that transmission happens through group participation in musical activities with elders and musicians. The two theories align with the topic which deals with reclaiming cultural futures through community-based musical arts education.

### **The Crisis of Cultural Sustainability in Underdeveloped Countries**

The current situation of cultural unsustainability in many underdeveloped countries is linked closely with the effects of globalization, colonial history, socioeconomic inequalities and inadequate educational systems for supporting indigenous cultural knowledge. While cultural change is an inevitable part of social development, the fast pace of the cultural changes occurring in these times has contributed to the dilution of cultural traditions, especially the indigenous musical practices that have historically provided an important means for identity formation, social cohesion and knowledge sharing across generations. In this context, the sustainability of indigenous musical heritage is seriously under pressure and at risk of continuity of cultural memory and community-based knowledge systems.

Globalisation is one of the greatest factors of cultural erosion. The wide range of communication technologies, digital media, streaming services and global entertainment industries has enabled unprecedented access to transnational cultural products. Globalization has brought opportunities for interculturalism and creative innovation, as well as an increased presence of the global popular culture, Western and commercialized music forms. In many underdeveloped nations, the younger generation is listening to music transmitted all over the world via social media, music streaming and digital networks at the expense of listening to indigenous music. Local musical practices often find it hard to compete in the face of the increasingly visible and economically influential nature of global cultural products, for attention, legitimacy and institutional support. It is observed that globalization leads to the cultural homogenization, with the dominant expressions of culture being promoted and the localized forms of artistic production and cultural participation being marginalized (Schippers & Grant, 2022). As a result, traditional music repertoires, musical traditions, traditional music

instruments and music rituals, which rely on community participation, are in danger of losing their cultural significance and participation from younger generations.

Colonial and postcolonial educational legacies exacerbate the crisis as these remain influential in formal education systems of many developing societies. Colonial governments in many cases established educational institutions to teach, spread and reinforce European cultural values, languages, knowledge systems, and to devalue indigenous epistemologies and culture. Educational systems in many countries have undergone significant changes as a result of political independence; nevertheless, elements of colonial educational systems can still be detected in current curricula. It is often the case that music education programmes focus more on the Western musical traditions, theory, and notation systems, with little room for indigenous musical knowledge and community-based music education practices. This type of educational setup creates an epistemic inequality in that it privileges Western knowledge and renders indigenous cultural knowledge as peripheral or supplementary (Stein et al., 2022). Consequently, successive generations of students can graduate from formal schooling without an awareness of their musical heritage. Their culture and opportunities for the maintenance of local musical traditions are less guaranteed.

Another important aspect of the crisis is the loss of intergenerational transmission systems which have traditionally kept indigenous musical cultures alive. Knowledge about traditional music in many communities has traditionally been shared through the oral tradition, apprenticeships, community gatherings, oral histories, and hands-on experience within the tradition. The operation of these systems required on-going involvement from elders, cultural custodians and younger generations. Many of these traditional networks have been undermined by urbanization, migration, the changing family structure, modernism, and socio-economic pressures. Younger generations are attracted to the cities for education and work opportunities and thus do not have the opportunity to engage with the traditional musical practitioners due to a lack of exposure to local cultural environments. At the same time, many senior knowledge holders die without being able to effectively pass on their expertise in cultural knowledge. Loss of transmission is invariably raised as one of the most serious threats to cultural sustainability globally (Lenzerini, 2011) and is also the most common problem identified in research on intangible cultural heritage. Where there are no means of cultural continuity, valuable musical traditions may slowly die out, even though they are important to community life.

Musical arts continue to suffer from the marginalisation in formal educational systems. In many underdeveloped nations, determination of educational policies is driven by economic considerations and a narrow focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields as the only ones that bring economic development and competitiveness in the labour market. As a result, arts education is often marginalized in the school curriculum. In certain instances, the musical arts are regarded as the extra-curricular aspects of teaching and learning and not an integral part of a comprehensive educational programme. These perceptions ignore significant research on the role of arts education in cognitive development, cultural literacy, social-emotional education, creativity, and civic involvement (UNESCO, 2024b). Most significantly, the conception of music education as 'marginal' reduces opportunities for schools to act as cultural repository and transmission. If local music culture is not being taught, then students are becoming less connected to the local music culture, which is a huge part of the problem of cultural sustainability. This multifaceted problem calls for a new type of educational strategies that will identify musical arts education in the community as a powerful tool for the protection of cultural heritage and the reinforcement of cultural resilience in underdeveloped societies.

### **The Importance of Community Based Musical Arts Education.**

The community-based musical arts education plays a pivotal role in the project of cultural sustainability, especially in underdeveloped countries, where the indigenous knowledge systems are being challenged and threatened by globalization, urbanization and education marginalization. Community-based musical arts education is participatory, rooted in culture and serves a variety of social, cultural, economic and developmental purposes. Community-based musical arts education offers a multi-layered approach to both sustaining cultural heritage and fostering community resilience and inclusive development, through its ability to reinforce community values and culture, preserve local knowledge, build a sense of togetherness, encourage youth participation and engagement, and support local creative economies and livelihoods.

### **Cultural Identity**

A very important aspect of community based musical arts education is its impact on cultural identity. Music is a potent tool for the creation, expression and negotiation of individual and group identities. Collective memories, historical experiences, social values and cultural stories are all captured in indigenous music traditions which help people to build a sense of belonging in their communities. Local musical activity provides an access to culturally significant symbols and languages, stories and performance traditions that strengthen the relationship between personal identity and collective heritage. Music has been claimed to be a significant tool for identity formation as it connects people to shared history and culture and boosts sense of cultural belonging (Eleni, 2026; Koval et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2024). In community settings, music involvement helps them to actively interact with their heritage culture and thus helps to foster the historical awareness and continuity of culture inter-generational.

The maintenance of indigenous knowledge systems is also very significant in relation to community-based musical arts education. In many societies, music is a store of information that is more than just artistic, and in some communities, this information can be the only type of information that has been passed down in such a way as to be retained. Language knowledge, oral histories, moral and cultural teachings, understanding of the environment, spiritual beliefs, and social norms are often embedded in songs, chants, instrumental traditions, and performance practices. Communities share complex knowledge, sometimes not worth recording in formal education, through music. Often, indigenous languages live on through music, which helps to pass on vocabulary, stories and culture through the generations. UNESCO has long recognised the vital role of intangible cultural heritage, such as music, as a key element of sustainable development and cultural diversity, as it is a source of resilience, collective memory and cultural knowledge for communities (UNESCO, 2024a). Community-based musical arts education thus serves as a significant means of protecting living knowledge systems that could be lost through cultural erosion.

### **Building of Social Cohesion**

Community-based musical arts education also contributes to social cohesion and community participation, thus further highlighting its social value. When music is made in community spaces, it is usually about working together, shared culture and responsibility, and not just about personal accomplishment. Festivals, ceremonies, rituals, communal performances and participative musical events provide a platform for interaction between different social groups, and reinforce social ties and understanding. Community music studies research shows that when people gather to make music together, they feel more socially included, understand other cultures better, build trust and experience a sense of well-being within their communities (Ascenso et al., 2018). Social fragmentation, economic deprivation, and cultural marginalization in a society can create a need for communal musical activities to negotiate

social identities, to reinforce social solidarity, and to increase a sense of collective responsibility. In this way, music can be used to build social capital and help communities to become resilient.

### **Youth Empowerment and Cultural Continuity**

Youth empowerment and cultural continuity are also key aspects of community-based musical arts education. Young people are the main guardians of cultural sustainability and their participation is crucial to sustaining and revitalizing cultural practices. For cultural sustainability, there is need for meaningful involvement, creative adaptation and cultural ownership by younger generations. Musical arts education through communities is one way for young people to learn from the older generations, interact with practitioners, and be involved in the development of musical traditions. This involvement enhances cultural confidence, creativity, leadership and intergenerational dialogue. Youth involvement in cultural activities has been shown to foster social inclusion, identity, and participation in the community, as well as the long-term sustainability of cultural heritage (Sáez-Velasco et al., 2025 and Zhu and Ni, 2025). Musical arts education thus offers a means to empower young people to make cultural traditions alive, relevant, and flexible in the face of the social changes.

### **Supports Local Economy**

Community-based musical arts education also plays a major role in supporting local creative economies, in addition to its cultural and social roles. The cultural festivals, traditional performances, music tourism, instrument production, cultural business and creative entrepreneurship create jobs and boost local economies. Academics are increasingly realising that cultural industries are vital to sustainable development as they are capable of preserving culture and generating economic value (UNCTAD, 2024). Musical activities at the community level can be a catalyst to local tourism, markets for culture products, development of artistic careers and innovation in the creative industries. Musical arts education can link culture with livelihoods and help to sustain livelihoods by strengthening the importance of cultural resources. Community-based musical arts education thus has cultural and economic value in underdeveloped countries where employment opportunities are scarce, and can help to build community resilience and promote sustainable development goals.

### **The Drawbacks of Formal Music Education in Schools**

The role of formal music education in schools has long been considered as a useful vehicle for the transfer of musical knowledge, the development of art skills and cultural awareness. In many underdeveloped countries, however, formal music education is seriously challenged by structural, pedagogical and institutional constraints that restrict the meaningful participation of music education in cultural sustainability.

The entrenched issue is that of Western-oriented curricula. The development of formal education in many postcolonial societies was intricately tied to formal educational systems of the colonial societies which promoted European knowledge traditions, languages, and cultural practices. As a result, music curricula are still largely focused on western music theory, music notation, classical music, harmony, and musical performance conventions, with little consideration given to indigenous music traditions. Typically, these curricular contexts place local music as ancillary to core music education instead of a central part of it. Decolonial scholars contend that educational systems perpetuate epistemic hierarchies in which Western forms of knowledge are seen as universal and authoritative, indigenous knowledge systems are marginalized or excluded (Stein et al., 2022). In the context of music education, this imbalance can result in a discrepancy between what is taught in classrooms

and learners' cultural experiences. Pupils can gain knowledge of music from other parts of the world but not have enough access to music in their immediate environment, their local music makers and users, and traditional oral music passing on. Such curricular orientation diminishes opportunities for the transmission of culture and can help to reinforce the notion that indigenous musical traditions are not as valuable as the dominant musical traditions of the world.

Combined, these restrictions give an idea of the difficulties involved in using formal education in schools as the only means of providing continuity for indigenous musical traditions in less developed nations. To overcome these challenges, shifting from traditional institutional models to more collaborative relationships with communities, culture makers and holders of indigenous knowledge is essential. This would allow music education to be more culturally responsive, socially relevant, and effective for sustaining culture over time.

### **Community as Cultural Classroom: A Case for Repositioning Communities as Cultural Classrooms**

With the increasing importance of cultural sustainability in many underdeveloped countries, the need for alternative models of education that are not bound by the constraints of formal school based education and yet are able to reengage with local cultural realities is becoming increasingly urgent. In this context, community repositioning as 'cultural classrooms' has come to play an important role in protecting indigenous knowledge systems, enhancing cultural engagement and ensuring intergenerational transfer. Community-based approaches understand that cultural knowledge is not only created or passed on in formal learning contexts but exists in daily social life, collective memory, cultural practices and the lived experiences of people. Traditional music of indigenous peoples has always existed within the context of community-based learning systems, where skills, knowledge and experience are passed on through participation, observation, mentorship, ritual practice and social interaction. The repositioning of communities as cultural classrooms is thus an important step in the development of culturally responsive educational systems to sustain local heritage in rapidly changing societies.

A key element of this approach is the inclusion of elders, master musicians and cultural custodians as valid sources of knowledge and teachers. Many indigenous societies have developed their musical knowledge through active participation in cultural practices, ceremonial activities, oral traditions and communal performance settings. Elders tend to have a vast knowledge on traditional repertoire, performance techniques, cultural meanings, linguistic expressions, historical narratives and social values that are embedded in music practices. Recent work on indigenous music education holds that indigenous music practitioners should be considered as co-educators who are the custodians of living heritage and hold forms of knowledge which cannot be replicated in the usual institutional teaching and learning (Isabirye, 2021). Elders and master musicians play a crucial role in enhancing the cultural authenticity of educational experiences while fostering intergenerational dialogue, respect, and cultural continuity. This recognition poses a threat to the hierarchies of knowledge that have defined the colonial practices of education by claiming indigenous expertise as a vital part of educational practice.

Festivals, rituals, ceremonies and community events are also important learning spaces that need to be acknowledged as part of the repositioning of communities as cultural classrooms. Traditional educational discourse is predominantly linked to classrooms, textbooks and formal curricula. But many indigenous societies have traditionally depended on public cultural occasions for the dissemination of information and socialization. Incorporating

experiential learning opportunities such as musical festivals, rites of passage, seasonal celebrations, religious ceremonies, storytelling gatherings, and communal performances help provide opportunities for learning using cultural knowledge and social participation. Such participation allows younger generations to gain a hands-on experience, cultural values, historical awareness and collective identities. Cultural events provide opportunities for learners to watch performances, to join in rituals, to engage with knowledge holders and to experience cultural meanings in authentic settings. UNESCO's approach to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage provides a framework that distinguishes between cultural spaces and community practices as the environments in which living cultural heritage is passed on and continually reproduced from generation to generation (UNESCO, 2024a). Community cultural events infuse knowledge, practice, identity and participation into a holistic learning process, rather than the more common formal educational model that tends to compartmentalize learning and lived experience. Thus, festivals and rituals serve as living classrooms of culture, which carry on cultural memory and strengthen community solidarity. Also important is the use of apprenticeship and oral pedagogy in indigenous music education. In many communities, traditional musical learning takes place in a way that is very different from one another than formal instructional models. Indigenous musical traditions are often passed on through observation, imitation, participation, repetition, and mentorship, rather than being primarily written, standardized curricula, or teacher-led. Learners learn skills through practical experience with practitioners in real-world settings. Oral pedagogies focus on embodied knowledge, listening, memory, practice and social interaction as integral aspects of learning. The approaches preserve cultural knowledge, aligned with community values, contexts, and collective experiences. Oral systems of music learning help to equip learners with creativity, adaptability, collaborative learning, and a deeper understanding of their cultural context as knowledge is learnt through engagement with the music rather than passively (Isabirye, 2021). Moreover, research on cultural transmission shows that tacit cultural knowledge is hard to formalize, and can only be maintained by ongoing interpersonal relations and hands-on involvement (Miton & DeDeo, 2022). Thus, apprenticeship-based learning continues to be a highly successful means of passing on complex cultural practices, which rely on lived experience and embodied performance traditions. Implementation of the concept of communities as cultural classrooms is predicated on the concept of communities owning cultural education. It is impossible to realize sustainable cultural preservation if educational models are imposed from outside, without taking into account the local values, priorities and cultural realities. Rather, communities need to take an active role in deciding on the transmission, preservation, adaptation and revitalization of cultural knowledge. Community ownership will provide greater local agency in ensuring educational messages account for cultural needs, historical experiences and indigenous systems of knowledge. The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage developed by UNESCO highlights that people in a community must be at the heart of the safeguarding process, as cultural heritage is meaningful, continuous and legitimate as a result of its involvement (Blake, 2008). Community ownership-based educational programmes stand a better chance of ensuring long-term sustainability by fostering local engagement, relevance, and shared responsibility. Moreover, the community control fosters culturally responsive innovation by enabling traditions to develop naturally, with cultural significance intact. Repositioning communities as cultural classrooms is more than an education reform strategy, it is also one that aims towards a reassertion of cultural agency, the enhancement of cultural resilience, and the maintenance of living and vibrant indigenous musical traditions in the modern social world. Community-centred cultural education represents a potential way to sustain cultural continuity in underdeveloped countries under growing conditions of cultural homogenisation and endangerment while providing

communities with empowering means of cultural education to take ownership of their cultural futures.

### **Policy and Institutional Implications**

As a result, the community-based musical arts education is increasingly being seen as a key tool for cultural sustainability, which requires policy and institutional change. Local communities are the main protagonists of the conservation and transfer of indigenous musical heritage, but national, regional and institutional-level framework needs are also necessary for sustainable cultural development. In the creation of enabling environment for safeguarding musical heritage, educational systems and cultural agencies, government institutions, civil society organizations and international development partners have important roles to play. Hence, cultural sustainability strategies cannot only be community based, and need to be embedded in educational, cultural and developmental policies. These changes are especially needed in underdeveloped nations where indigenous music is more and more under threat from globalization, urbanization, lack of funding and the ongoing impact of colonial educational systems.

A primary policy issue is the need to reform national cultural and educational policies to see community-based musical arts education as an integral part of cultural development. In many post-colonial societies, educational policies have focused on formal education with little concern for informal and community-based modes of knowledge transmission. This institutional bias has led to the undermining of indigenous cultural practices and has resulted in a reduction in mechanisms of cultural continuity from one generation to the next. Therefore, it is important that more concerted efforts are made in contemporary policy frameworks to foster better articulation among schools, communities and cultural institutions, and that local musical practices are viewed as valuable educational assets. It is therefore important to recognize indigenous knowledge and living heritage as part of lifelong learning in sustainable educational systems (UNESCO, 2024b). Community-based musical arts education should be part of national education strategies to foster culturally responsive educational environments and to enhance cultural resilience and participation. These changes would also be in line with international obligations to protect non-material cultural heritage and encourage inclusive sustainable development.

Policy reform is closely tied with the requirement of curriculum decolonization. The decolonization of music education involves more than an educative framework where the musical traditions of the West have been taken as universal standards of artistic excellence. While there is no denying the educational importance of Western musical knowledge, basing education on Eurocentric curricula, however, can restrict learners' access to local cultural realities and can affect local systems of musical knowledge production. Therefore, curriculum reform should focus on incorporating indigenous music systems, local instruments, oral histories, musical practices, cultural narratives, and community knowledge systems. Reforms that would enable learners discover their own cultural heritage in the formal education space and respect cultural diversity and local identity. Educational change thus demands epistemic pluralism that embraces and acknowledges multiple forms of knowing and learning, and not a single cultural lens (Stein et al., 2022). In music education, it translates to an appreciation of oral pedagogies, community engagement, traditions of improvisation, and culturally located understandings of music, alongside the more traditional academic models. Curriculum decolonization is thus an educational and cultural necessity for societies that want to increase cultural sustainability.

It is also important to have policy interventions that seek to tackle the lack of funding and resource support for musical arts education as it done for science subjects (STEM). In most of the less developed nations, cultural development is not given sufficient attention as far as its funding is concerned. But if indigenous musical heritage is to be sustained in its preservation it will need long-term resources. Grants should be created to encourage community-based music projects, cultural festivals, education initiatives and heritage preservation projects by governments, development agencies, philanthropic organizations and private sector partners in order to achieve this goal. Arts centres in the community can be a place for musical learning and rehearsal, performance and intergenerational interaction, through investment. Likewise, cultural archives and documentation centres can help preserve musical recordings, oral histories, and traditional ways of performance and can serve as hubs for indigenous knowledge resources. There is need also for support to local instrument making initiatives, since traditional instruments may be the expression of special craftsmanship, ecological knowledge and cultural symbolism. Studies on cultural sustainability have shown that institutional support has a great impact on communities' capacities to protect and revitalize intangible cultural heritage (Soini & Birkeland 2014). Funding is therefore not only a cultural investment but an investment in the sustainable development, preservation of identity and social cohesion.

Another significant implication is the need for building partnerships between school and communities. Learning centres should not stand alone, unengaged with their cultural contexts. Rather, music education must be achieved through partnerships between schools, artists and culture producers, families, local governments, community groups, and NGO's. These relationships may help to share knowledge, share resources, enhance the curriculum and provide opportunities for experiential learning. Cultural practitioners and master musicians have the ability to bring specialized knowledge and experience that could supplement classroom teaching and learning; and schools can provide structures for involvement that would benefit the broader community. The involvement of family also helps to support cultural continuity through enhanced links between the learning experiences and the actual practice of the culture. Collaborative models have been found to foster more inclusive and participatory learning environments, and improve the relevance of learning, community ownership and cultural outcomes (Schippers & Grant, 2022). Therefore, there is need to promote ongoing collaboration between various actors involved in cultural sustainability through institutional mechanisms.

The access to digital technologies also brings significant possibilities for documentation and digital preservation of indigenous music. Many traditional musical forms are still at risk as a result of transmission being largely oral and may not be systematically recorded. Proper recording, archiving and dissemination projects can help to sustain and pass on significant cultural information and make it more accessible to future generations. The digital archives can capture sound recordings, performances of artworks, interviews with people who make their livelihoods from culture, instrument-making procedures and community history in a way that facilitates the long life of the archives. Digital preservation, however, must be bound by ethical considerations that acknowledge community ownership and cultural rights, informed consent and intellectual property rights. Scholars have warned that the use of extractive documentation practices by digital heritage initiatives should be avoided, as this approach is not only harmful to the cultural resource being documented, it also removes the resource from the control of the community (Giaccardi, 2012). On the contrary, communities should continue to be active in decisions around documentation, access and dissemination. If used responsibly, digital technologies can be used in conjunction with traditional transmission

methods to offer a further means for safeguarding musical heritage, as well as providing opportunities for access to education and cultural revitalization.

These policy and institutional recommendations, in total, make it clear that holistic solutions are needed in which community-based musical arts education is a key component of cultural sustainability strategies. Policies, decolonisation of curricula, dedicated funding, partnerships, and ethical digital preservation can foster enabling environments for indigenous music to thrive, and culturally sustainable futures to be realised, by governments and institutions.

### **Proposed Position Statement**

The purpose of this paper is to argue that community-based musical arts education needs to be acknowledged as an important cornerstone of cultural sustainability in underdeveloped countries. The argument rests on the fact that music arts are not just art forms or entertainment, but are actually cultural institutions which serve to hold the collective memory, transmit indigenous knowledge, build social identities, and help to sustain cultural continuity from one generation to the next. Music can encapsulate language, history, spirituality, values, ecological knowledge and social norms in many societies, especially those with high oral traditions and community focused cultural practices. Therefore, the conservation of musical traditions cannot be separated from the conservation of other cultural knowledge systems that help communities be resilient and sustain themselves.

The current issues that affect underdeveloped nations, such as cultural homogenization, rapid urbanization, migration, colonial educational systems and the lack of policies and programs for indigenous arts, have further increased the need for new and culturally responsive strategies for heritage preservation. The formal educational system alone has been found inadequate to protect many kinds of intangible cultural heritage, which is frequently dismissed by formal education systems that are based on a uniform curriculum, a learning focus on examinations, and a knowledge system that is dominated by western influence. This has led to a decline in many valuable musical practices and indigenous knowledge systems, especially where intergenerational transmission mechanisms have been weak. In this context, community-based musical arts education provides a viable and sustainable alternative by placing learning in the cultural context where knowledge is being developed, applied, and passed along.

Musical arts education in the community is an effective method of strengthening cultural sustainability, not only by documenting indigenous knowledge systems but also by engaging with them. By learning music within their community, younger members can immerse themselves in the knowledge and skills of older generations of people, master musicians, cultural custodians, or people who have lived with and learned from music. These types of encounters help to spread cultural significance, performance traditions, oral histories, languages, and social values that can be hard to maintain through formal institutional processes. Community-based musical arts education, in supporting these intergenerational learning processes, helps to perpetuate and regenerate cultural traditions and ensures cultural knowledge remains pertinent in evolving social settings.

Also crucial is the function of neighborhood music arts education in preserving cultural identity and social cohesion. Engaging with the music in their community helps to create a sense of belonging and a feeling of shared history, shared memories, and shared values. The playing of music in festivals, ceremonies, rituals and people's meetings strengthens social bonds and fosters a sense of responsibility, respect for each other and intercultural understanding of the people. Community-based music-making offers opportunities for dialogue, participation and community engagement, which enhances social capital and

cultural resilience, in contexts of social fragmentation, economic difficulties and cultural marginalisation.

Moreover, community-based musical arts education also plays a vital role in sustainable development, as it supports the local creative economy and cultural tourism, artistic entrepreneurship, and heritage-based livelihoods. Indigenous music traditions are cultural assets that can be used as a means of cultural authenticity with economic opportunities. Education in musical arts can contribute to culture preservation, social development, and economic empowerment if communities are the owners and are in control of their cultural assets. These results are in line with the modern conceptions of sustainable development which acknowledge that culture is an essential part of the development of human beings and the resilience of communities (Soini & Birkeland, 2014; UNESCO, 2024)

### **Conclusion**

In this paper it has been argued that cultural sustainability in underdeveloped countries is not possible with formal education only. Schools are still key actors in transmitting knowledge, but educational systems are unable to always capture indigenous cultural realities, and are often designed around the exclusion of local music. Formal music education has been limited in its ability to protect indigenous cultural heritage effectively due to the dominance of western centered curricula, examination-based learning systems, inadequate funding, and low engagement with the knowledge holders in the community. Therefore, alternative and complementary strategies need to be implemented to safeguard and pass on cultural knowledge from generation to generation.

A solution to this challenge can be found in community-based musical arts education, which is culturally responsive and viable. It is grounded in local traditions, oral pedagogies, apprenticeship, festivals, rituals and the community and opens up possibilities for meaningful interaction with indigenous knowledge systems and living cultural heritage. These community-based learning experiences serve as vehicles for the transmission of language, history, values, spirituality, collective memory and social identity in addition to being artistic expressions. These practices help in enhancing intergenerational learning and cultural continuity, aspects that formal educational institutions cannot replicate.

The paper has also shown that community-based musical arts education is vital for cultural identity building, the fostering of social cohesion, young people's empowerment, and local creative economies. Through a participatory approach to cultural practices and community engagement with elders, master musicians and cultural custodians, communities can help to keep musical practices alive and thriving. In addition, embedding the community-based musical arts education within the cultural and educational policy can contribute to wider development goals, such as inclusion, participation, creativity and cultural resilience.

In conclusion, it is important to recognize and re-establish community-based musical arts education programs as a tool for cultural sustainability in underdeveloped countries. Collective efforts by governments, educational and cultural institutions, community leadership, and researchers are needed to reinforce indigenous music and to develop enabling conditions for its transmission and renewal. Communities can safeguard their cultural heritage, empower future generations, boost their collective identity and promote sustainable development by seeing a community as a valuable cultural classroom and indigenous music as a valuable repository of knowledge. Musical arts education has to be provided in the community, therefore, and is not only a cultural choice, but a developmental imperative for culturally sustainable futures in underdeveloped countries.

### Recommendations

1. National governments and ministries responsible for education and culture should integrate community-based musical arts education into national educational and cultural policies so that schools, communities, and cultural institutions can work together to preserve indigenous musical heritage and strengthen cultural sustainability.
2. Governments, development agencies, and cultural ministries should provide dedicated funding for community music programs, cultural festivals, arts centers, and heritage preservation initiatives to support local musicians, cultural practitioners, youth groups, and community organizations.
3. Curriculum development agencies and educational authorities should revise school curricula to include indigenous musical traditions, local instruments, oral histories, and community knowledge systems, thereby enabling students to develop stronger connections with their cultural heritage.
4. Universities, colleges of education, and teacher-training institutions should equip music educators with competencies in indigenous music pedagogy, community-based learning, and culturally responsive teaching approaches to enhance the quality and relevance of music education for learners.
5. School administrators and educational institutions should establish partnerships with elders, master musicians, and cultural custodians so that students can benefit from experiential learning, mentorship, and direct engagement with living cultural traditions.
6. Community leaders, traditional authorities, and cultural custodians should actively promote youth participation in indigenous musical traditions through apprenticeship, mentorship, and community cultural activities to ensure the continuity of cultural knowledge across generations.
7. Cultural organizations, museums, heritage institutions, and non-governmental organizations should support and finance festivals, workshops, apprenticeship schemes, and cultural exchange programs that facilitate the transmission of indigenous musical knowledge to younger generations.
8. Government heritage agencies, archives, libraries, and cultural institutions should establish ethical systems for documenting, recording, archiving, and digitally preserving indigenous musical traditions to ensure that valuable cultural knowledge remains accessible to educators, researchers, communities, and future generations.
9. Local governments, tourism agencies, and economic development organizations should promote creative-economy initiatives that connect indigenous music with cultural tourism, entrepreneurship, and sustainable livelihood opportunities for musicians, instrument makers, artisans, and local communities.
10. Researchers, universities, and research institutes should undertake empirical and community-centered studies on the relationship between community-based musical arts education and cultural sustainability to provide evidence that can guide policymakers, educators, cultural organizations, and community stakeholders in future interventions.

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