"Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter."
- African proverb -
The concept of SANKOFA is derived from the Akan people of West Africa. The term Sankofa comes from the words "san" (return), "ko" (go), and "fa" (look, seek, and take).

Sankofa teaches us that we must go back to our roots in order to move forward. That is, we should reach back and gather the best of what our past has to teach us, so that we can achieve our full potential as we move forward.

Visually and symbolically Sankofa is expressed as a mythic bird that flies forward while looking backward with an egg (symbolizing the future) in its mouth.
Why a General History of Africa?

“Crushed by centuries of oppression, Africa has seen generations of travelers, slave traders, explorers, missionaries, governors, and scholars of all kinds give out its image as one of nothing but poverty, barbarism, irresponsibility and chaos. And this image has been projected and extrapolated indefinitely in time, as a jurisdiction of both the present and the future... Is it surprising then, that African History should have been accorded such a small and subordinate place in all the histories of mankind and of civilization?”

Introduction, GHA Vol I. J. Ki Zerbo, Director of Vol. I.

A history that was for a long time ignored, confiscated, and deformed

The majority of racial prejudices regarding Africans have their source in historical bias inherited from discourses that justify the slave trade, slavery, and colonization, and the notion that Africa is a continent without history and civilization that has always been occupied by other and more evolved peoples.
What is the Main Contribution of the General History of Africa?

"My own background, the experience I gained as a teacher and as chairman, from the early days of independence of the first commission set up to reform history and geography curricula in some of the countries of West and Central Africa, taught me how necessary it was for the education of young people and for the information of the public at large to have a history book produced by scholars with inside knowledge of the problems and hopes of Africa and with the ability to apprehend the continent in its entirety."


A mind-opening initiative

It is precisely to deconstruct these prejudices and re-establish the truth of their African past that African peoples expressed their desire to "decolonize" the history of their continent. Immediately following independence, African States, wishing to complete their liberation processes, asked UNESCO, the organization within the United Nations system dedicated to combating ignorance and to promoting mutual understanding, to assist them in undertaking the writing of a General History Of Africa.

An African perspective

The best way to accomplish this goal was to let African scholars elaborate the history of their continent from within.
A monumental enterprise

Launched in 1964 and completed in 1999, the General History of Africa:
- Mobilized over 35 years more than 350 eminent historians and world experts, two-thirds of who were African. Moreover, it resulted in the writing and publication of 8 volumes of more than 800 pages each, a Guide to the Sources of the History of Africa in 9 volumes, as well as 12 complementary studies on different aspects of the history of the continent published in the series The General History of Africa-Studies and documents.
- Is a publication recognized worldwide: Published in one principal edition and one abridged version in 8 volumes, the General History of Africa was translated in 13 languages including 3 African languages (Kiswahili, Hausa, and Peul).
- Is one of the most important contributions of UNESCO in favour of Africa: The completion of this monumental work represented a remarkable accomplishment for the Organization.

An Overview of the General History of Africa

**Volume I:** Methodology and African Prehistory, Editor, J. Ki-Zerbo

**Volume II:** Ancient Civilizations of Africa, Editor, G. Mokhtar

**Volume III:** Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century, Editor, M.M. El Fasi et I. Hrbek

**Volume IV:** Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century, Editor, D.T. Niane

**Volume V:** Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century, Editor, B.A. Ogot

**Volume VI:** Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s, Editor, J.F.A. Ajayi

**Volume VII:** Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935, Editor, A. A. Boahen

**Volume VIII:** Africa since 1935, Editor, A.A. Mazrui and C. Wondji
A unique initiative of its kind

For its pluralist perspective, its methodological approach, its process of validation and finally for the number and quality of its contributors, this work is considered even today as a major contribution to the knowledge of African history and historiography. It sheds a new light on a certain number of facts:

- History can be recorded not only on the basis of written sources, but also by relying on oral traditions and little-known African written sources such as the Ajamis;
- Africa not only has a history, but a long history that spans more than 3 million years;
- Africa played a leading role during the first 15,000 centuries of the history of humanity;
- The most ancient civilizations, including Ancient Egypt, found their origins and inspiration in African peoples themselves and were the fruit of the evolution of these peoples in the face of challenges to their existence;
- Africa was never cut off from the rest of the world, and benefited from mutual exchanges and influences with Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas and contributed largely to the general progress of humanity;
- The Sahara has never been a barrier, but a space of contact and exchange between different peoples of the African continent;
- The slave trade, slavery, and colonization had a considerable impact on the fragmentation of the continent;
- The African Diaspora that resulted from this tragedy contributed then, and to date, continues to contribute in a significant manner to the construction of new cultures and societies.
"At a time when the peoples of Africa are striving towards unity and greater cooperation in shaping their individual destinies, a proper understanding of Africa’s past, with an awareness of common ties among Africans and between Africa and other continents, should not only be a major contribution towards mutual understanding among the people of the earth, but also a source of knowledge of a cultural heritage that belongs to all mankind.”

B. A. Ogot, President, International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa

An under-utilised resource
More than ten years after its finalization and despite the strong motivation that led to its realization, the General History of Africa remains insufficiently used and pedagogically under-exploited in Africa and other regions of the world. Many African countries continue to teach an African history that remains largely tainted by Euro-centrism or subscribe to a nationalism that neglects the notion of the common heritage of African peoples while focusing disproportionately on the colonial period.

In recognition of this need
The Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African Union took a decision calling on UNESCO in collaboration with the Commission of the African Union to undertake the translation of the General History of Africa into pedagogical tools usable by educational institutions in Africa.

An ambitious project
To regenerate the teaching of African history in Africa and bring an Afro-centric response to the legitimate expectations of current and future generations of Africans, the second phase of the General History of Africa entitled “The Pedagogical Use of the General History of Africa” was launched in UNESCO in March 2009.

An important challenge
To elaborate and integrate common content in African history in the different African systems and educational programmes.
The General History of Africa informs a continental vision and articulates an African perspective of the Continent’s contributions to humanity. These elements are more than ever necessary to restore African dignity and self-confidence in order to construct a continental identity and citizenship that will enable the new African generations to actively contribute to a collective African vision in a rapidly globalizing world.

Political and Psychological

Through the integration of common historical content into the educational programmes of African countries, the pedagogical use of the General History of Africa will facilitate the revitalization of the teaching of African history and contribute to the reestablishment of the link between education and culture as called for in the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa.

Educational and Cultural

The strengthening, under the African Union, of a political leadership committed to African regional integration with a renewed vision for re-establishing Africa’s place in a global context;

The launching of the Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006-2015) that emphasizes the reinforcement of the links between education and culture, and encourages the enhancement of African content in curricula and the improvement of the quality of pedagogical content;

The convergence of requests addressed to UNESCO by African Union Member States to develop pedagogical material based on the General History of Africa;

A new sense of partnership between UNESCO and the African Union in implementing the NEPAD philosophy of developing Africa-led solutions to African challenges.

A strong desire expressed by the African Diaspora to know more about the History of Africa in order to reverse historical distortions and past inequalities... The translation of the General History of Africa into Portuguese and its use in basic and higher education by the Brazilian Government, in cooperation with UNESCO, falls within this framework.
What are the Objectives of the Project?

Contribute to the construction of an African identity and citizenship through the teaching of a common history in order to encourage the process of African political and economic integration initiated by the African Union;

Promote a better understanding of Africa’s rich past, its cultural heritage, and its contribution to the general progress of humanity;

Promote the awareness of the ties that unite African peoples and promote their shared values;

Contribute to an enhanced understanding of how African societies have evolved through time and space and the impact of social transformation on the present and future;

Contribute to the renovation of history teaching in Africa by developing content and pedagogical tools based on the General History of Africa while improving the training available to history teachers.

The different components of this project

1. Elaboration of three common content and accompanying pedagogical materials (historical atlas and educational CD-ROM that takes into account the evolution of historical knowledge) for primary and secondary schools;

2. Elaboration of a teacher’s guide to contribute to and improve the training of history teachers in light of the advances made in the methodology and methods of teaching history;

3. Assisting African states in integrating this content in educational programmes;

4. Promotion and harmonization of the teaching of The General History of Africa in African universities through the introduction of innovative methods of history teaching in higher education;

5. Improvement of the accessibility of the 8 volumes in higher education institutions in Africa;

6. Development of partnerships for the elaboration of materials for informal education and public information (illustrated, animated, audiovisual and multimedia productions);

7. Restructuring and updating of the General History of Africa Internet site to ensure the online accessibility of the 8 volumes, common content, and other pedagogical material developed within the framework of the project as well as the results of the different meetings and conferences organized during its implementation.
What are the Different Stages in the Implementation of the Project?

- Cooperation between the Commission of the African Union and UNESCO on this project;
- Validation of the project by the different African institutional and academic stakeholders in order to facilitate its appropriation (Ministries of Education, professional associations including historians, history teachers, pedagogues, etc.);
- Establishment of a Scientific Committee of 10 members from the 5 sub-regions of Africa who participate in their personal capacity in order to ensure the intellectual and scientific responsibility of the project;
- Undertaking of evaluation studies of the history teaching in Africa at the primary, secondary, and higher education levels;
- Organization of regional conferences bringing together the principal actors to discuss the issues and define the strategies as well as expert meetings and workshops to develop the pedagogical content and corresponding tools;
- Establishment of different drafting groups to elaborate the content, guides, and other pedagogical materials for use in primary and secondary schools;
- Development of communication and information campaigns concerning the project;
- Incorporation of common content into national curricula.
Requirements for the Project’s Success

1. A collaborative force: the establishment of coalitions between concerned stakeholders from Africa and the diaspora including decision-makers, education administrators, researchers, teachers, pedagogues, parents, editors, journalists, playwrights, musicians, dancers, the multimedia industry, illustrators, and other artists to further develop content on the basis of the General History of Africa;

2. Participation of the Commission of the African Union and a fruitful partnership with the governing bodies of the African Union, especially those responsible for Education and Culture;

3. The support of national governments and the national authorities concerned;

4. Involvement of regional institutions, professional organizations, and civil society associations in Africa;

5. A good information and communication strategy to prepare a shift of mindset among the public at large.
How to order the volumes of the General History of Africa

Via internet on the UNESCO website www.unesco.org/publishing
(payable only by credit card);
Directly from the distributor at the following address:
DL Services, SPRL Avenue du Roi 202B 1190
Bruxelles, Belgique, Tel : +32 2 538 4308; Fax : +32 2 538 0841
Email : jean.de.lannoy@dl-servi.com
(payment required before order, by credit card or check)

The Volumes of the General History of Africa are also available for consultation and download free of charge at the following address:
http://www.unesco.org/culture/africa

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Email : gha@unesco.org
Site: http://www.unesco.org/culture/africa

The Eight Volumes of the General History of Africa