

# RECENT INTERNATIONAL TRENDS AND SCOPE FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF ICH: RESEARCH AND THE 2003 CONVENTION

Himalchuli GURUNG<sup>1</sup>

Research and knowledge are key to culture, development, and our common future. In an increasingly complex and uncertain world faced with many global challenges, UNESCO's emphasis on cultural research aims to better understand, anticipate and imagine the futures of our cultural heritage in the service of our common humanity. The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage encourages *research* activity as part of "Safeguarding" measures. Within the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage<sup>2</sup>, *research* is incorporated within the safeguarding statement as safeguarding measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, *research*, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage (Article 2.3). As other measures for safeguarding, *research* is mentioned as: fostering scientific, technical artistic studies at the national level, including research methodologies (Article 13), and scientific research (Article 14).

## OVERALL RESULTS FRAMEWORK FOR THE 2003 CONVENTION

The Overall Results Framework (ORF) of the 2003 Convention was approved by the seventh session of the General Assembly of States Parties in 2018. It outlines the impacts that the Convention is aiming to achieve along with long-, mid- and short-term outcomes. It further introduces eight thematic areas with 26 core indicators and 86 corresponding assessment factors. It includes inventorying and research as one of the eight thematic areas with core indicators and corresponding assessment factors. ORF constitutes an important reference in guiding the implementation of the 2003 Convention. Thus, integrating the ORF into project design, monitoring and reporting is important to ensure that global efforts in implementing the 2003 Convention are guided by a common framework. Therefore, it is important that IRCI's research orientations are aligned with the ORF and thus can feed directly into UNESCO's initiative (Table 1; Figure 1).

---

1 Programme Specialist for Culture, UNESCO Beijing Office

2 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>

**Table 1** Eight Thematic Areas of the Overall Results Framework

<b>Thematic Areas</b>	Institutional and human capacities
	Transmission and education
	<b>Inventorying and research</b>
	Policies as well as legal and administrative measures
	Role of intangible cultural heritage and its safeguarding in society
	Awareness raising
	Engagement of communities, groups and individuals as well as other stakeholders
	International engagement



**Figure 1** Thematic area 3 and indicators

## UNESCO'S ICH SAFEGUARDING INITIATIVES/PROJECTS

Some of UNESCO's initiatives on research bibliography, interactive platform (Dive into ICH) and project activities implemented at the field level on community-based inventorying of intangible heritage in urban areas; living heritage and the COVID-19 pandemic; and safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in disaster context, listed below aim to highlight the current trends in Intangible Cultural Heritage safeguarding measures.

### 1. The Research Bibliography – Research references on the implementation of the 2003 Convention

The Research Bibliography is hosted by UNESCO under the 2003 convention, and led by an editorial group of independent researchers, including from IRCI, with the support of volunteer researchers. It provides an interactive bibliography of research references on the implementation of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Its objective is to foster better communication among researchers working in the field of ICH and enhance the

dissemination of ICH-related research for all stakeholders involved in the implementation of the 2003 Convention, including State Parties, communities, practitioners, civil society, UNESCO Secretariat and others. For interested people, this tool can help them know how they can feed into their research activities in the interest of the Convention itself.

## **2. Interactive platform ‘Dive into intangible cultural heritage’**

Launched during the thirteenth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2018, ‘Dive into ICH’ is another interactive platform under the convention. It is more or less like a constellation of living heritage, the intangible heritage, linking the interactive visual that demonstrates the diversity and interconnectedness of the living heritage elements that are inscribed under the 2003 Convention, linking all the domains, all the categories, all the countries from every region. Just as its name, it is fascinating/immersive that once people get in, they hardly want to come back because they can keep on navigating within this. As of 2021, there are more than 500 elements already listed in this from communities in over 100 countries. It is not a research platform itself, but it leads you to or connects you with some of the research that has been taken around the world. By using web-semantics and graphic visualization, the interactive platform proposes a broader conceptual and visual navigation. It explores the various elements across domains, themes, geography, and ecosystems, allowing people to learn more about them through visualized deep inter-connections among them. The visualizations are constantly evolving as new elements get inscribed and the indexing is refined. Altogether, it refers to more than 1,000 concepts, and 15,000 relationships were created between elements, concepts, countries, and regions. It is based on the data and prototype that was elaborated in early 2018, and it keeps on growing.

## **3. Community-based inventorying of ICH in urban areas (2018–2021)**

A global initiative with projects activities on Community-based inventorying of ICH in urban contexts in selected countries i.e. Malaysia, Zimbabwe and Jamaica (first phase) and Peru, Georgia, and Jordan (second phase). The objectives of this initiative are identifying and better understanding the key issues related to intangible heritage safeguarding in urban contexts; developing appropriate inventory methodologies and materials for urban contexts; and formulating possible recommendations for policymakers and practitioners. Its focus is mainly on identifying living heritage practices based on economic mechanisms that are key to the sustainable development of the communities. Besides, it also has a component of training and accompanying communities in conducting and inventorying their own ICH, own living heritage over a period of four to six months.

#### 4. Living heritage and the COVID-19 pandemic: responding, recovering and building back for a better future

In the aftermath of the outbreak of the COVID-19, a survey was circulated in April 2020 and the inputs were asked to share stories from around the world on what was the impact, how did the ICH living heritage survive or cope in this challenging time. Through this compilation, a report entitled “Living Heritage in the face of COVID-19” was produced by UNESCO. Available online in UNESCO’s website, it shows fascinating stories from all around the world. Three key recommendations that came up from this collective survey report: first, recovery support needs to be given at the local level. Also important is that the local governance structures need to be in place to help revive or overcome any challenges such as the one brought about by COVID-19. Second, to take advantage of digital technology to increase visibility, understanding of the living heritage is key. The third recommendation is to strengthen and amplify the linkages between safeguarding living heritage and emergency preparedness, response, recovery plans, and programmes. Based on the recommendations, eight pilot projects were launched in eight countries around the world, implemented through UNESCO field offices with local key actors. (Table 2)

**Table 2** Eight pilot projects launched by UNESCO field offices

Barbados	Living heritage virtual link up
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Digitization of the intangible cultural heritage elements of communities
Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela	Transmedia intangible cultural heritage for sustainable development
Gambia	Strengthening the contribution of living heritage in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its integration into national initiatives for disaster risk reduction
Indonesia	Recovery of living heritage from the COVID-19 pandemic: Ulos weavers and Gorga sculptors in the Toba region
Jamaica	Supporting local income-generating activities with the Charles Town Maroons
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Living heritage and crisis situations in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Sint Maarten	Living heritage, youth and COVID-19

## **5. Strengthening capacities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in disaster contexts**

The safeguarding of ICH in disaster contexts is important, and we also note IRCI's past, present, and future activities are focused on ICH in disaster contexts. As one of the safeguarding projects, the Strengthening capacity of safeguarding intangible heritage in disaster contexts is being piloted in Honduras and the Philippines (June 2020 to December 2021). Its objectives are to strengthen capacities for integrating disaster risk reduction into community-based inventories of ICH; to define training methodologies for safeguarding ICH in disaster contexts, and; to promote ICH's role in strengthening community-based resilience to natural disasters. Pilot activities include online training workshops on ICH and disaster risk reduction, pilot-inventorying activities integrating awareness for disaster risk reduction, awareness-raising activities to share results and lessons learned on the dual role of safeguarding ICH in the context of disaster.

### **LIVING HERITAGE IN EMERGENCIES**

Today, living heritage throughout the world is increasingly affected by emergencies, including conflicts and disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the transmission and viability of ICH, which provides a crucial foundation for the identity and well-being of communities, groups and individuals, are increasingly threatened. COVID-19 was just one clear example as we all experienced recently. ICH is also a valuable resource for communities to strengthen resilience, reduce vulnerabilities and help communities prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies. In this context, the Operational principles and modalities for safeguarding ICH in emergencies were adopted by the General Assembly in September 2020. It guides all State Parties and other relevant national and international stakeholders on how best to ensure that ICH is most effectively engaged and safeguarded in an emergency in line with the principles of the 2003 Convention for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. This also promotes a community-based approach, which recognizes the primary role that communities play in identifying how ICH may be at risk and the measures needed to safeguard it as well as how it might be best drawn upon to support resilience and recovery.

As a research-based C2C, IRCI's effort in instigating and coordinating research into practices and methodologies of safeguarding endangered intangible cultural heritage elements present in the Asia-Pacific region has been an important support to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.