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Workshop

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WORKSHOP ON PROVIDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO STATES PARTIES REQUESTING INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

UNESCO Headquarters, Room XIV
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Summary report

From 20 to 22 July 2015, ten experts in the field of intangible cultural heritage joined UNESCO staff from the Intangible Cultural Heritage Section for a workshop devoted to various complementary efforts to strengthen the capacities of States Parties to effectively implement safeguarding activities using funds granted by the Committee from the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund. Centring on experiences to date with the experimental mechanism to provide individualized technical assistance to States Parties requesting such International Assistance from the Fund, the workshop also explored other efforts underway or planned by the Secretariat to: provide authoritative information to States Parties about the criteria and procedures for requesting such assistance; develop practical tools to facilitate the preparation of timetables and budgets for International Assistance requests; and expand the existing curriculum materials of the global capacity-building programme to include in-depth treatment of International Assistance. The ten expert participants included several past members of the Consultative Body or Subsidiary Body, several persons who have already provided individualized technical assistance to States Parties as well as several members of the network of facilitators for the global capacity-building programme (some participants wore all three hats). The workshop was made possible by funding from the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund, made available to support 'other functions of the Committee' (Resolution 5.GA 7 and Decision 9.COM 2.BUR 1).

Rationale for the workshop

International Assistance is at the very core of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Among the international safeguarding and cooperation mechanisms set out in Articles 16-24 of the Convention, International Assistance is the one that responds most fully to the Convention's purposes, as stated in its Article 1, particularly the first purpose 'to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage' and the fourth, 'to provide for international cooperation and assistance'. Regrettably, however, International Assistance has not yet fulfilled the vision of the Convention's drafters, with few requests submitted by States Parties and even fewer of sufficient quality to warrant approval by the Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, or by its Bureau (in the case of emergency requests or those up to US\$25,000). The Committee has regularly expressed its regret at the relatively low number of requests for such assistance, given the fundamental importance of international cooperation at the heart of the Convention and the many safeguarding needs confronting States Parties.¹

1. See, for instance, Decision 8.COM 7.c.

Similarly, UNESCO's Internal Oversight Service observed, in its [2013 evaluation of the implementation of the Convention](#), that 'many States Parties do not have the human and financial resources to prepare elaborate project proposals'. Furthermore, faced with limitations on the number of files the Committee can examine each year, States Parties must choose whether to submit a request for International Assistance or a nomination (most often to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity), and IOS observed that they are most often inclined towards the latter. The IOS evaluation concluded that 'building State Parties' capacities for the implementation of the 2003 Convention is an urgent priority and the International Assistance mechanism can play an important role in this.'² In response, the eighth session of the Committee called upon 'States Parties and the General Assembly, as well as the Secretariat, category 2 centres, non-governmental organizations and all other stakeholders, to [...] promote international assistance as a tool for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and the implementation of the Convention'.³

In its 2013 report, the Consultative Body also addressed this problem. It observed that 'Submitting States face a number of conceptual and technical problems in framing the requests in a well-structured and rigorous manner, adequate to satisfy the relevant criteria and UNESCO's financial and administrative regulations. The Consultative Body is confident that in the medium and long terms, the fruits of the Convention's global capacity-building strategy will become increasingly apparent, but it also wonders whether there are not measures that could be taken in the shorter term.'⁴ It therefore suggested the possibility of one such mechanism: 'For instance, in order to reverse the trend of under-utilization of International Assistance, the Committee may consider devising a means to provide technical assistance to States Parties for preparing International Assistance requests. [...] the Secretariat could perhaps arrange for the provision of expertise, as described in Article 21 of the Convention, to assist the State to develop its ideas and requirements into a full-fledged request.'⁵

The Committee accordingly decided to request the Secretariat 'to devise a means, on a shorter-term basis, and experimentally, to offer technical assistance, through the provision of experts, as described in Article 21 of the Convention, to States Parties wishing to elaborate requests for International Assistance, thanks to the funds available in budget line 2 of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund.'⁶

Such a mechanism was created in 2014 and eight States Parties have received such technical assistance, resulting to date in two requests approved by the Bureau:

State Party	Title of request	TA expert	Status of the request as of 10.08.2015
Côte d'Ivoire	Inventory of the intangible cultural heritage present in Côte d'Ivoire in view of its urgent safeguarding	Sidi Traoré	Emergency assistance request submitted following TA for an amount of US\$299,972. Approved by Decision 10.COM 1.BUR 2.1.

2. Evaluation by the Internal Oversight Service of UNESCO's standard-setting work of the Culture Sector. Part I: 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Document ITH/13/8.COM/INF.5.c.

3. Decision 8.COM 5.c.1.

4. Document ITH/13/8.COM/7.c.

5. Document ITH/13/8.COM/7.c.

6. Decision 8.COM 7.c.

Guatemala	Protection and dissemination of knowledge of the Maya-Mam people of the Municipality of San Pedro Sacatepequez, San Marcos, Guatemala	Soledad Mujica	TA completed in December 2014. Revised request under preparation by the State Party.
Uganda	Safeguarding and promotion of Bigwala, gourd trumpet music and dance of Busoga Kingdom in Uganda	Wim van Zanten	Revised request submitted following TA for an amount of US\$24,990. Approved by Decision 10.COM 1.BUR 1.2.
Fiji	Reinforcement of the living human treasures system	Noriko Aikawa	TA started in February 2015 but cancelled in July 2015 at the request of national authorities.
Burkina Faso	Research and valorisation project of intangible cultural heritage related to West African Masks	Claudine Angoué	TA completed April 2015. National authorities decided to postpone resubmission of a revised request.
Togo	Inventorying, safeguarding and promoting manufacturing know-how and the practice of traditional music instruments of Togo	Pierre Bois	Revised request submitted following TA for an amount of US\$ 24 950. Approved by Decision 10.COM 2.BUR 5.3
Lesotho	Comprehensive inventorying of intangible cultural heritage elements in the three regions of Lesotho	Wim van Zanten	TA closed in August 2015.
Seychelles	Capacity-building workshop on how best to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage of Seychelles	Rahul Goswami	TA completed in September 2015. Revised request being finalized by the State Party.

Given the experimental basis of this mechanism, and anticipating the need to take stock of the experience gained in its early implementation, the Secretariat requested the Bureau's approval of funds from the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund to support the workshop.⁷ The Secretariat also took advantage of the participants' diverse experience to solicit their feedback on a number of related and complementary efforts to increase the effectiveness of International Assistance.

Technical assistance: experiences to date and directions for the future

Experts welcomed the introduction of the technical assistance (TA) mechanism, agreeing that it responded to a critical shortfall in the capacities of many States Parties to develop solid International Assistance requests that could later be implemented effectively for safeguarding. The workshop was reminded of the guiding objective that the Secretariat had adopted for the mechanism: 'To increase the likelihood that States Parties can use international assistance effectively for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in their territories.' This means that the purpose is not simply to help beneficiary States Parties to produce convincing requests that can be funded, but rather to develop well-conceived projects that they can successfully and sustainably implement if funds are granted by the Committee. The over-riding challenge reported by those experts who had already provided technical assistance was therefore to assess the implementation

7. Decision 9.COM 2.BUR 1.

capacities of State Party counterparts, to identify how the expert's own knowledge and experience could contribute to a strengthening of national competencies, and to assist the State Party to elaborate the strongest possible request that accurately and realistically reflected its priorities and capacities.

Minimum requirements for TA

The TA mechanism begins when a State Party submits an ICH-04 International Assistance request form and the Secretariat determines, after analysis, that it provides an adequate basis for an International Assistance project but exhibits substantial shortcomings that cannot likely be remedied through written correspondence between the Secretariat and the submitting State. The Secretariat identifies an expert with an appropriate profile and offers his or her services to the submitting State; if the offer is accepted the Secretariat proceeds to contract the expert to provide the services agreed. In the initial round of eight TA consultancies, the Secretariat deemed that six should be addressed through remote consultation (e-mail, telephone, Skype, etc.) and that two also required a visit by the expert to the beneficiary country to work side-by-side with its team. Participants agreed that the initiative of the State Party to submit an ICH-04 form, filled out as fully as possible, should remain a precondition for an offer by the Secretariat to provide TA; without such a concrete initial document, experts emphasized, they themselves could not prepare adequately for the task.

Assessing the State Party's capacities

A watchword of the mechanism from the beginning was that the expert's role was to assist the State Party in its work, but not to do its work on its behalf. The experts endorsed this division of labour, but reported that in some cases it had to be reiterated frequently throughout the consultation process. A first step for the expert was therefore to agree with the national counterpart on a working schedule and the practicalities of the consultation (who should be the primary contact, what would be the preferred means of communication, who should be cc'ed, etc.). In this context, experts stressed the need for a detailed and concrete preliminary diagnosis of the situation within the submitting State and a 'who's who' guide to various stakeholders, although it was less clear when such a diagnosis could reasonably be provided by UNESCO (depending upon the capacities and workload of the field office concerned and whether it is resident in the beneficiary State) and when it could only be provided by the expert during the course of the consultation (particularly if a field visit was included). Experts also emphasized that the regular and attentive back-up of UNESCO staff throughout the TA consultation was key to its success.

Identifying the appropriate interlocutor

Experts identified several instances as especially challenging: those in which the person or entity that had originated the request was not the key agency designated by the country as focal point for implementing the Convention. Particular care was needed in these cases to confirm that the request indeed reflected the priorities of the State Party and that the key line agency(ies) were sufficiently invested in it to ensure its success. Similarly, although broad consultation might be appropriate at certain points during the TA process, experts emphasized the importance of having a single contact person designated with whom all written communications would take place (even if others might also be copied).

Linkages with capacity-building

Experts reported that in many cases their consultations had to begin with explaining the most fundamental concepts of the Convention; it sometimes required a substantial allocation of time to

ensure that those in the team preparing the request were equipped with a basic knowledge of those core concepts. In that context, participants highlighted the importance of the ongoing global capacity-building programme, while emphasizing that technical assistance should be seen as complementary to it but should not be limited to those States Parties that had already received capacity-building activities. Technical assistance should not, on the other hand, be expected to substitute for an adequately planned and resourced capacity-building programme.

Field mission

A general consensus emerged that a mission by the expert consultant to the beneficiary country should figure into a larger number of TA arrangements than in the initial set, even if the amount requested was less than US\$25,000 and the cost of a visit therefore proportionally high. Such a visit offers numerous advantages, including permitting the expert to work with a larger number of national counterparts than would normally be possible through correspondence and phone calls, allowing him or her to better assess national implementing capacities and institutional strengths and weaknesses, and increasing the likelihood that national counterparts would focus their attention and respond in a timely way. Even if this means that the overall cost of the technical assistance is relatively high in comparison to the amount finally granted in International Assistance, participants agreed that the process should be understood as itself constituting capacity building, and TA was therefore a long-term investment in the beneficiary State's ability to implement the Convention. A field visit will consequently be part of more future TA arrangements than previously, although some will continue to be conducted remotely, for instance where the cost of a field mission would be prohibitive.

Engagement of the State Party

Participants also shared a consensus that the beneficiary State's obligations should be more clearly spelled out in the form of a written agreement between it and UNESCO. Until now, UNESCO's only contractual relationship has been with the expert consultant. Written correspondence with the State Party summarizes the expectations that UNESCO has when providing technical assistance, but participants agreed that these terms should be formally accepted by the beneficiary State – particularly its obligation to respond in a timely way to the expert's communications, given that the expert's services are secured only for a limited time. Such an agreement would spell out the obligations of the State Party to make adequate arrangements to mobilize relevant human resources and to respond promptly to the communications of the expert. Formalized written agreement on the objectives of the technical assistance was seen as an effective tool to increase the seriousness with which a beneficiary State perceived the opportunity provided and took advantage of it, recognizing that national counterparts are often over-charged with responsibilities and their attention is diffused in many directions.

What constitutes a success in technical assistance?

The view that technical assistance should function as a complement to other capacity-building activities also means that the mark of success, in any given case, might not simply be whether or not the Committee or Bureau grants funding assistance or – as the overall purpose intends – that the beneficiary State effectively implements an international assistance project. An informed decision by a State Party that it needs to devote further time and effort to planning could also be considered as a successful outcome of a TA consultation, as could a decision not to pursue the particular project initially proposed. Participants concluded that technical assistance should be seen as an investment in the long-term capacities of a beneficiary State to implement the Convention effectively – part of a complement of services and mechanisms provided to States Parties by the Committee and Secretariat.

In sum, experts and the Secretariat agreed that the experimental mechanism had demonstrated its value to date, and that it should continue with several key improvements. These are aimed notably at providing the expert with the clearest picture possible of the State Party's institutional capacities and human resources, continuing the close support and back-up provided by the UNESCO Secretariat (both within the Intangible Cultural Heritage Section and in the field offices), expanding the use of a consultation mission, and formalizing the responsibilities of the beneficiary State Party.

Better informing States Parties:

Aide-mémoire for completing a request for International Assistance

The workshop continued by looking at several other aspects of International Assistance, taking advantage of the experts' broad experience in this area. Substantial discussion was devoted to a draft aide-mémoire for those requesting International Assistance. Until now, experts providing technical assistance have done so based upon their own knowledge, with back-up from counterparts within the Secretariat, but the 'Aide-mémoire for completing a request for International Assistance' is intended to serve as a public reference document available to all. The third in a series of such aides-mémoires (after those for the Urgent Safeguarding List and Representative List), the draft document aims to synthesize the advice of evaluators and the decisions of the Committee in order to assist those who are elaborating requests. The experts welcomed the draft and had several practical suggestions to increase its readability and usefulness.

Several experts explained how they themselves made use of the other aides-mémoires to bolster their own advice to national authorities. Although addressed in the first instance to those authorities within each State Party that might be responsible for a nomination or request, the aides-mémoires could effectively be used in guided reading where, for instance, an expert providing TA might work through a particular section alongside national counterparts. The document's character as an up-to-date compendium of the accumulated jurisprudence of the Convention was its strength, even if that meant it might lack advice on specific topics that had not yet come to the attention of the Committee or evaluation bodies. On the other hand, by depending on the written record of the Committee, the document also acquired a certain tone, meaning that it was a dry and detailed reference text.

An important distinction emerged during the discussion between a guide or manual for elaborating requests and the present aide-mémoire, which is instead intended to serve as an authoritative reference to the 'official' messages of the Committee and evaluation bodies. In that sense, experts agreed that the focus of the aide-mémoire should remain squarely on the words of the decisions of the Committee and the published reports of the evaluation bodies. The force of the document rests in its authoritative character, participants agreed, and less formal suggestions and advice that might find a place in a guide or manual did not belong in the aide-mémoire. As to the possibility of creating such a guide or manual, the Secretariat explained that the global capacity-building programme arose in large part because of the impossibility of writing such guides or handbooks for implementing the Convention. The Secretariat emphasized the plans to increase the place that International Assistance has within the global capacity-building programme (see below), highlighting the essential role of facilitators in 'translating' the sometimes-wooden language of Operational Directives, Committee decisions and evaluation body reports during the face-to-face interactions that typify the capacity-building activities.

Support for planning and budgeting: the ICH-04-Timetable and budget form

Workshop participants also simulated a process that is regularly undertaken by the Secretariat and will often figure into technical assistance consultations: extracting the timetable and budget information provided by a submitting State in its International Assistance request and transferring it into the more structured and detailed form of an Excel spreadsheet introduced by the Secretariat in November 2014: the ICH-04-Timetable and budget form. Working from the real-life example of a request that had been approved by the Bureau in 2012, experts and UNESCO staff teamed up for the exercise, discovering that the process of transferring data to the spreadsheet immediately revealed where there were weaknesses, errors or ambiguities in the timetable and budget created by the State – often, deficiencies that were not at all evident on an initial reading.

Participants agreed that the form itself was an efficient tool in structuring information that is necessarily complex. Whether as experts providing technical assistance or as facilitators training participants about International Assistance, they could make use of the form to assist collaborators or trainees in understanding basic principles of planning and budgeting. Although certain experts proposed revisions in the form that would increase its precision (at the expense of also increasing its complexity), most agreed that it represented a reasonable balance between detail and difficulty, helping submitting States to organize and present information but also retaining a good degree of flexibility. While emphasizing the persistence of the digital divide and not underestimating the difficulties of dependable access to computer services, participants also agreed that a basic familiarity with using Excel spreadsheets should be available within the teams in each State Party – particularly if they heed the Consultative Body's advice 'to take full advantage of the human resources available to them within their own country, without being impeded by institutional or administrative lines' (Decision 7.COM 7).

Strengthening the treatment of International Assistance in the global capacity-building programme

A recurrent point throughout the workshop was the necessity to conceive technical assistance as an important complement to the ongoing capacity-building programme, while also expanding and strengthening the latter's treatment of International Assistance. The workshop concluded with a wide-ranging discussion of the possibilities for enhancing the place of International Assistance in such capacity-building activities.

Work will be pursued by the Secretariat in late 2015 and early 2016 along two complementary paths: first is to update and enlarge the existing curriculum unit devoted to International Assistance (Unit 12), typically included within workshops on implementing the Convention at the national level, on elaborating nominations and on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Second is to develop a larger body of curriculum materials that could be utilized in a 3-day to 5-day workshop dedicated to International Assistance. The perspectives of experts were solicited particularly regarding the latter.

The pedagogical method proposed for the International Assistance workshop would be the same as has proven effective for the nominations workshop, based on the view that the best way to train people to be good *writers* is to train them to be good *critical readers*. Participants in the workshop will be asked to examine a mock International Assistance request that betrays a number of weaknesses and deficiencies. Working in teams, participants will analyse the mock request to determine how well it responds to the instructions in the ICH-04 request form and to the criteria for granting International Assistance and will identify areas for possible improvement. In a hands-on exercise, they will be asked to transfer data from the mock timetable and budget into the ICH-04-

Timetable and budget form (as did participants in the present workshop). The teams will then be asked to examine a revised mock request that responds much more closely to the instructions and criteria for International Assistance but that still includes deficiencies and ambiguities. Through this iterative process of team-based analysis and critique, trainees will be provided with critical reading skills as well as planning and budgeting skills that they can then apply when their opportunity comes to elaborate an International Assistance request. Three mock requests will be prepared: one for an inventorying project, one for a capacity-building project and one for safeguarding in a specific situation; a workshop will focus on one of the three topics, as agreed between UNESCO and the beneficiary country.

The discussions benefitted from the experience of several experts as facilitators for nominations or other workshops. Participants emphasized that the success of any given workshop depends directly on the care and efficiency with which it is organized – typically by the beneficiary country in cooperation with a UNESCO field office. Experts insisted that the quality of preparation, and particularly the selection of appropriate participants, determines whether or not a workshop will be effective, and they accordingly encouraged the UNESCO Secretariat to systematically impose an advance planning schedule and a profile of participants (with different profiles depending on the topic of the workshop). UNESCO should in their view be ready to postpone or cancel a workshop if the beneficiary State is unable to comply with the agreed conditions. As facilitators, they reported, they are not in the same strong position as UNESCO to determine basic conditions for the organization of a workshop, but are then sometimes expected to redeem a difficult situation through their own efforts. In this regard, the full involvement and careful attention of the UNESCO field office were identified as crucial, for instance in maintaining close communication with the national implementing partner and requiring timely planning information from it. However, these are also contingent upon whether or not the field office is resident in the beneficiary country, the knowledge of the UNESCO officer concerned, his or her status vis-à-vis national counterparts and – most importantly – the myriad other duties he or she is expected to discharge at the same time.

It was in this context that some otherwise very interesting suggestions for a different pedagogical approach to the International Assistance workshop revealed a certain vulnerability. Many participants suggested that instead of the mock requests – which necessarily describe a safeguarding activity in an imaginary country that may or may not resemble that of the trainees – it might be preferable to identify a real safeguarding need in the beneficiary country and have workshop members develop their own mock request referring to that situation. They would be more motivated and more interested, those experts suggested, if the subject chosen for the workshop was closer to their own experience than the mock requests. However, this proposed pedagogical approach would require that the facilitators, UNESCO and the host country identify a real situation beforehand and do extensive analysis of it in order to prepare custom-made curriculum materials. Moreover, given that the purpose of a workshop cannot be to produce a real request but is instead to strengthen skills the State Party will later use on a topic of its choosing, the situation selected would have to be one that the State Party does *not* intend to use later as a safeguarding project. Using a real-life situation would complicate the overall planning and organizing burden when, as the experts confirmed, this was often the weak point in workshops organized to date. Facilitators would be increasingly dependent on the host country and UNESCO field office to make the necessary preparations, even if this cannot be reliably expected even now with a less demanding approach. The mock requests, even if imaginary and culturally remote, would be available well in advance to the facilitators and they would better be able to prepare predictably for the workshop and less dependent on others.

Participants were in any case heartened to learn that additional curriculum materials were under development and should be available soon for those who are facilitators in the capacity-building programme. The enhanced Unit 12 on International Assistance, together with a unit focussing on planning and budgeting and the use of the ICH-04-Timetable and budget form, would also be important resources for those called upon to provide technical assistance (particularly if they make a field mission and are providing side-by-side assistance to working groups of national counterparts).

Expanding the effectiveness of International Assistance: Conclusions and way forward

Throughout the workshop, experts reiterated the concern with which it began: that International Assistance has not yet realized its potential to contribute to the effective safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in States Parties worldwide, particularly developing countries whose needs are substantial. The provision of technical assistance on a case-by-case basis was seen as an invaluable service to States that have formulated requests that could not be granted by the Committee or Bureau in the form in which they were submitted. Such TA would allow them to receive support customized to their own situation that could improve not only the quality of the request, but more importantly the effectiveness of implementation if funds were granted. Situating technical assistance as a form of individualized capacity building, the experts also insisted on the importance of expanding the place that International Assistance has within the global capacity-building programme. Training of core groups of experts in each country within the capacity-building programme offers a long-term solution, they considered, while technical assistance is more punctual and responsive to immediate opportunities.

Experts participating in the workshop saluted the Secretariat for the elaboration of a third aide-mémoire, this one devoted specifically to International Assistance. Those who had served as members of evaluation bodies emphasized the broad usefulness of the aides-mémoires – not only to States Parties that are their primary audience, but also to evaluators and Committee Members as a handy reference to the evolving history of the Convention. They also welcomed the new ICH-04-Timetable and budget form introduced by the Secretariat in 2014.

Even if all of these measures continue to meet with success, their impact on the effectiveness of the International Assistance programme will necessarily take a certain time to register. Participants also reiterated that the process of building basic understanding of the Convention's core concepts requires an investment of time and resources, and that all concerned must keep their eye on the Convention's overall purposes and not simply seek to accelerate the rate of spending from the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund. The success of International Assistance is demonstrated in actual safeguarding, participants agreed, and not in expenditure rates.

On a looking-forward note, the Secretary of the Convention recalled that Article 21 of the Convention describes the diverse forms of international assistance, the granting of financial donation being only one of the seven forms listed. Time has perhaps come to apply fully Article 21 and to use other forms of international assistance foreseen by the Convention, in particular the provision of experts, the training of all necessary staff, or the elaboration of standard-setting measures.