



Intangible Cultural Heritage



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



Intangible  
Cultural  
Heritage



Identifying

📍 *The Oral Heritage and Cultural Manifestations of the Zápara People, Ecuador and Peru*



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The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage defines intangible cultural heritage as the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills – including the instruments, objects artefacts and cultural spaces associated with them – that communities, groups and individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation and is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.

# and inventorying



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Intangible cultural heritage takes many forms. The Convention explains that it may be expressed in a number of domains, including but not limited to:

- a. Oral traditions and expressions including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;**
- b. Performing arts;**
- c. Social practices, rituals and festive events;**
- d. Knowledge and practice about nature and the universe;**
- e. Traditional craftsmanship.**

It goes without saying that many elements of intangible cultural heritage might belong to one or more of these domains.

The main purposes of the Convention are to safeguard such heritage, to ensure respect for it, to raise awareness about its importance and to provide for international cooperation and assistance in these fields. Countries that ratify the Convention (known as States Parties) take

on the obligation to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage present on their territories. At an international level, the Convention establishes two Lists, the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding and the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The goal of these Lists is to call attention to those elements of intangible cultural heritage that are representative of human creativity and cultural diversity and especially those in need of urgent safeguarding.

The Convention focuses on the role of communities and groups in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. It is concerned with processes and conditions rather than products, placing emphasis on living heritage that is performed by people, often collectively, and communicated through living experience. It deals with heritage that communities themselves deem important, and strives to contribute to the promotion of creativity and diversity, and to the well-being of communities, groups, and society at large.

📍📍📍 *The Rabinal Achi Dance Drama Tradition, Guatemala*

📍📍 *The Cultural Space of Jemaa el-Fna Square, Morocco*

📍 *The Bistritsa Babi – Archaic Polyphony, Dances and Ritual Practices from the Shoplounk region, Bulgaria*

### Safeguarding without freezing

To be kept alive, intangible cultural heritage must be relevant to its community, continuously recreated and transmitted from one generation to another. There is a risk that certain elements of intangible cultural heritage could die out or disappear without help, but safeguarding does not mean fixing or freezing intangible cultural heritage in some pure or primordial form. Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is about the transferring of knowledge, skills and meaning. Transmission – or communicating heritage from generation to generation – is emphasized in the Convention rather than the production of concrete manifestations such as dances, songs, musical instruments or crafts. Therefore, to a large extent, any safeguarding measure refers to strengthening and reinforcing the diverse and varied circumstances, tangible and intangible, that are necessary for the continuous evolution and interpretation of intangible cultural heritage, as well as for its transmission to future generations.

Safeguarding measures to ensure that intangible cultural heritage can be transmitted from one generation to another are considerably different from those required for protecting tangible heritage (natural and cultural). However, some elements of tangible heritage are often associated with intangible cultural heritage. That is why the Convention includes, in its definition of intangible cultural heritage, the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated with it.

Does this mean that intangible heritage should always be safeguarded, or be revitalized at any cost? As any living body, it follows a life cycle and therefore some elements are likely to disappear, after having given birth to new forms of expressions. It might be that certain forms of intangible cultural heritage, despite their economic value, are no longer considered relevant or meaningful for the community itself. As indicated in the Convention, only intangible cultural heritage that is recognized by the communities as theirs and that provides them with a sense of identity and continuity is to be safeguarded. By 'recognition', the Convention

means a formal or, more often, informal process by which communities acknowledge that specific practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills and, if appropriate, associated instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces, form part of their cultural heritage.

Safeguarding measures must always be developed and applied with the consent and involvement of the community itself. In certain cases, public intervention to safeguard a community's heritage may be undesirable, since it may distort the value such heritage has for its community. Moreover, safeguarding measures must always respect the customary practices governing access to specific aspects of such heritage, for example, sacred intangible cultural heritage manifestations or those that are considered secret.

### Inventories: identifying for safeguarding

The Convention is a permissive document and the majority of its articles are worded in non-prescriptive language, allowing governments to implement it flexibly. However, drawing up inventories is one of the specific obligations outlined in the Convention and in the Operational Directives for its implementation.

Inventories are integral to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage because they can raise awareness about intangible cultural heritage and its importance for individual and collective identities. The process of inventorying intangible cultural heritage and making those inventories accessible to the public can also encourage creativity and self-respect in the communities and individuals where expressions and practices of intangible cultural heritage originate. Inventories can also provide a basis for formulating concrete plans to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage concerned.

According to Article 11 of the Convention, each State Party is required to take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory and to include communities, groups and relevant NGOs in the identification and definition of



👁👁👁 The Cultural Space of Jemaa el-Fna Square, Morocco

👁👁 The Mystery Play of Elche, Spain

👁 The Cultural Space of the Boysun District, Uzbekistan

👁 Taquile and its Textile Art, Peru



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elements of that intangible cultural heritage. Identification is a process of describing one or more specific elements of intangible cultural heritage in their own context and distinguishing them from others. This process of identifying and defining should lead to 'inventorying'. Inventorying should be done 'with a view to safeguarding' – that is, inventorying is not an abstract exercise but an instrumental one. Therefore, if a certain number of elements of intangible cultural heritage have already been identified, States may decide to start implementing safeguarding projects for those elements.

Recognizing that States will take different approaches to inventorying, the Convention continues that States Parties are obliged to create one or more inventories of the intangible heritage present in their territory, and shall update them regularly (Article 12). While Articles 11 and 12 are more prescriptive than other Articles in the Convention, they still provide enough flexibility for a State Party to determine how it will prepare its inventories. States are free to create their inventories in their own fashion. However, intangible heritage elements should be well defined in the inventories to help put safeguarding measures into practice.

A State Party is not expected to have already drawn up one or more inventories before ratifying the Convention, although many have been doing so for many decades. On the contrary, the development and updating of inventories is an ongoing process that can never be finished. It is not necessary to have completed an inventory in order to start receiving assistance or filing nominations for the Lists of the Convention. However, the Operational Directives for implementing the Convention require that a State Party submitting a nomination file for inscription on either the Urgent Safeguarding List or the Representative List must demonstrate that the proposed element is already included in an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory.

Since there are great differences among States concerning population, territories and

distribution of intangible cultural heritage, as well as great diversity in their political and administrative structures, the Convention leaves each State Party a great deal of freedom to draw up inventories in ways best suited to its own situation, allowing national and local conditions and concerns to be taken into account.

Among the safeguarding measures enumerated in the Convention, research and documentation are likely to be among the first strategies that States will consider in order to understand 'what is there', 'who does it' and 'why they do it'. States may wish to set up national intangible cultural heritage committees to coordinate this work, including relevant institutions, researchers and community representation, which will also facilitate interaction between members of communities and researchers.

States are able to choose whether to create a single, over-arching inventory or a set of smaller, more restricted ones. That is why neither the Convention nor the Operational Directives ever speak of 'a national inventory': instead, they refer to 'one or more inventories'. In this way, States are not forced to include all domains or all communities within a single system. They may also incorporate existing registries and catalogues. A system that includes multiple inventories may be particularly appealing to federal states where responsibility for culture falls outside the remit of the central government, allowing sub-national regions or provinces to create their own inventories.

### **Involvement of tradition bearers and practitioners**

In spite of the freedom given to States in the way they inventory intangible cultural heritage, the Convention does impose several conditions. The most important of these is the one requiring community involvement.

Since communities are the ones who create intangible cultural heritage and keep it alive, they have a privileged place in safeguarding it. The communities that practise intangible cultural

heritage are better placed than anyone else to identify and safeguard it, and therefore they should be involved when their intangible cultural heritage is to be identified through inventorying. The Convention's definition of intangible cultural heritage reminds us that it must be recognized by its communities, groups or individuals; without their recognition, nobody else can decide for them that a given expression or practice is their heritage. So it is natural that inventorying cannot happen without the involvement of the communities, groups or individuals whose heritage is to be identified and defined. Sometimes, of course, communities may not have the power, or the means, to do this on their own. In this case the State, or agencies, institutions and organizations, might work to help them inventory their living heritage.

Documentation consists of recording intangible cultural heritage in tangible forms, in its current state, and collecting documents that relate to it. Documentation often involves the use of various recording means and formats and the collected documents are often preserved in libraries, archives or websites, where they may be consulted by the communities concerned and the larger public. But communities and groups also have traditional forms of documentation such as songbooks or sacred texts, weaving samplers or pattern books, or icons and images that constitute recordings of intangible cultural heritage expressions and knowledge. Innovative community self-documentation efforts and programmes to repatriate or disseminate archival documents in order to encourage continued creativity are some of the proven safeguarding strategies increasingly being used.

Also, Article 13 (d) (ii) stresses that States Parties should always keep in mind customary practices related to providing access to intangible heritage. In some instances, this may mean that certain forms of intangible cultural heritage should not be inventoried or that some intangible cultural heritage already included in inventories should be made public only under certain restrictions. Communities may decide,



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👁👁👁 *The Indigenous Festivity dedicated to the Dead, Mexico*

👁👁 *The Lakalaka, Dances and Sung Speeches of Tonga*

👁 *The Mystery Play of Elche, Spain*

for instance, to indicate who the custodians of certain knowledge are, rather than recording detailed documentation on sensitive topics in the inventories. Providing information about an element of intangible cultural heritage in an inventory makes access to that element easier. According to the spirit of the Convention, the will of those communities who refuse to include an element of their intangible cultural heritage in an inventory must be respected.

Although some States already and intensively involve communities of intangible cultural heritage bearers, many inventory projects do not yet take into account the provisions of the Convention concerning communities' involvement. They were often developed by organizations and individuals from outside the communities and often were not created with the aim of ensuring the viability of intangible cultural heritage, as required in the Convention.

States Parties are responsible for making appropriate institutional arrangements for involving communities in the inventory-making process. Such arrangements might include the establishment or designation of intersectoral administrative bodies for assessing relevant existing legislation, institutions and traditional safeguarding systems, as well as for identifying best practices and areas for improvement. Such bodies would be in charge of drawing up inventories of intangible cultural heritage, developing safeguarding policies, developing initiatives to raise awareness about the importance of intangible cultural heritage and encourage public participation in inventorying and safeguarding it. The administrative body should also, where necessary, develop appropriate safeguarding measures for inventoried intangible cultural heritage. States Parties may also wish to establish advisory or consultative bodies that would comprise practitioners and other tradition bearers, researchers, NGOs, civil society, local representatives and relevant others, as well as local support teams including community representatives, cultural practitioners and others with specific skills and knowledge in training

and capacity building. Methods for inventorying intangible cultural heritage might be carried out in steps and the identification of all relevant stakeholders and their involvement in the process. Potential consequences of inventorying, procedures to ensure an ethical relationship between stakeholders and customary practices, governing access to the intangible cultural heritage also need to be identified.

Inventorying should be a top-down and bottom-up process involving local communities as well as governments and NGOs. In order for States Parties to satisfy the requirement of communities' involvement, procedures should be established for:

- Proper identification of communities or groups and their representatives;
- Ensuring that only intangible cultural heritage recognized by the communities or groups is inventoried;
- Ensuring that the free, prior and informed consent of the communities or groups is obtained for inventorying;

- Ensuring the consent of communities when involving non-community members;
- Respecting customary practices regarding access to intangible cultural heritage;
- Actively involving local or regional governments;
- Adopting and following a code of ethics that should take into account the lessons learnt from good practices worldwide.

### Drawing up inventories

Many existing inventorying systems and almost all older inventories were not created with safeguarding in mind, as understood in the 2003 Convention. Some of them were designed by researchers to meet their own needs. Moreover, some old inventories are particularly problematic as they may have been produced under colonial conditions or as part of nation-building exercises.

Both Article 11 (b) and Article 12 of the Convention imply that the totality of the intangible cultural heritage in a country should



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🔗 The Mevlevi Sema Ceremony, Turkey

🔗 The Traditional Music of the Morin Khuur, Mongolia

### Community-based documentation contributes to the viability of intangible cultural heritage in the Philippines

Between 2003 and 2004 the Subanen community in Western Mindanao in the Philippines undertook innovative documentation of their indigenous knowledge about the plants found in their ancestral domain. The plants are valuable to them for their medicinal, agricultural, economic, and religious uses.

Plant diversity in the region is declining due to population pressure and climatic changes. Elders recognized that as plant diversity dwindles, knowledge about plants also declines. They also realized that as the younger generations are drawn into mainstream society, orally transmitted indigenous knowledge is no longer passed on to the next generation, and could eventually disappear forever.

The Subanen leaders sought assistance from specialized organizations to provide them with the skills to document this indigenous knowledge themselves, with external experts acting as facilitators. The non-literate but knowledgeable community elders provided the information, and younger literate community members assumed the role of documenters.

The resulting documentation was packaged into a multimedia format and other popular educational materials in English with Subanen translations. These materials were formally registered with the government copyright office, in order to guarantee the community's intellectual property rights. The community's education programme now uses them to teach schoolchildren about their culture; they are also used as curriculum material for adults who want to learn to read and write in their ancestral language.

This 'self-documentation' has turned out to be a successful way to preserve orally transmitted botanical knowledge and to make it available for present and future generations, contributing to the viability of this part of the Subanen's intangible cultural heritage.



Photo © Vel J. Sumingbat

🔗 A Subanen performing ritual before entering new documentation site as a way of asking permission from the unseen and informing them that specimen collection is to be carried out for documentation

**A four-year project to record living music and dance traditions in Ethiopia: towards a comprehensive national intangible cultural heritage inventory**

With over 80 living languages and ancient cultures nourished by African and Middle Eastern influences, Ethiopia is a land of astounding diversity. Forged over a long history of isolation and exchange periods resulting from Ethiopia's unique geographical and political context, this diversity is abundantly reflected in the country's music and dances.

Indeed, the music of Ethiopia has emerged from Christian-Orthodox, Judeo-Ethiopian and Muslim traditions as well as African polyphonic and instrumental expressions. Although predominantly vocal, Ethiopian music features a variety of instruments, some of which reputedly date from Old Testament times. Among the most widespread are *baganna* and *krar* lyres, the *masenqo* fiddle, the *kabaro* drums and the *washint* flute.

UNESCO launched a four-year project to collect and inventory music and dance traditions throughout Ethiopia. As a first step in the compilation of a more comprehensive national inventory encompassing all aspects of Ethiopia's intangible cultural heritage, the project aimed at building local capacities and document living practices and traditions.

In order to guarantee the continuation of the work by Ethiopian specialists, courses in ethnomusicology were organized at the University of Addis Ababa and the Yared Music School using specifically designed curriculum materials in English and Amharic. Training in inventorying music and dance began in 2006 with "The Musical Landscape of Addis Ababa", a survey of the various Ethiopian traditions found in the capital. Students then joined European specialists who were already working in the field to study traditions and practices in different regions. Activities included conducting research among the Maale people of



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southern Ethiopia and organizing training in the use of equipment for multi-track polyphonic recording for the staff of the South Omo Museum and Research Center in the town of Jinka. Numerous centres and museums around the country have received training and equipment adapted to their particular needs.

By the project's completion, a generation of Ethiopians has been trained to carry on the national intangible cultural heritage inventory by including other domains while also raising awareness of the importance of intangible cultural heritage among local and national authorities thus contributing directly to the long-term safeguarding of Ethiopia's living heritage.



Photo © François-Xavier Ireland / UNESCO

📍 *The Vimbuza Healing Dance, Malawi*

📍 *The Carnival of Barranquilla, Colombia*

be covered, since they refer to *the* intangible heritage present in the territory of the State Party. Inventories should therefore be as comprehensive and complete as possible. However, in many cases, this may prove an almost impossible task. Inventories can never be completed or fully updated because of the immense scope of the heritage covered by the Convention and the fact that intangible cultural heritage is constantly changing and evolving.

Considering the amount of intangible heritage to be identified and listed, some priorities might need to be set. In this case, those elements which are recognized by the communities or by their practitioners as particularly important for their identity or as being particularly representative of their intangible cultural heritage might be inventoried first. The role of creating inventories as a safeguarding measure should not be forgotten. Therefore, where possible, the viability of inventoried elements should be indicated and threats to their survival outlined. This is for instance the case of inventories in Brazil and Colombia. In Bhutan, Bulgaria and Lithuania the

risk of disappearance is used as a criterion for inclusion in the inventory.

In order to reach as quickly as possible a certain degree of representativeness in the inventories, States may wish to start drawing up inventories by providing relatively brief information. Some elements might benefit from greater attention than others, but it is advisable as far as possible to present each element according to the same template and to refer to detailed information available elsewhere rather than include it within the inventory.

Inventories must be regularly updated, as stated in Article 12 of the Convention. This is vital due to the fact that intangible cultural heritage constantly evolves and threats to its viability can emerge very rapidly. Many national inventories already contain elements that no longer exist while others include information on practices that have substantially changed. States Parties are obliged to periodically provide relevant information on their inventories, including information on the process of regular updating.





The Convention explicitly leaves the choice of whether to draft one or several inventories to the States Parties, but remains silent about parameters for defining the scope of each of the inventories in the case of a multiplex system. One can think of discrete inventories for different domains of intangible cultural heritage, different communities, different regions, or for different subjects of federal States. Whoever the actors involved in preparing the inventories or parts of them are, at the end of the day it is the States, i.e. the States Parties to the Convention, who are responsible for the design and implementation of their inventories.

While States Parties may be encouraged when drawing up inventories to follow the definition of intangible cultural heritage as developed for the Convention, they are not obliged to do so, particularly as inventories may be drawn up in a manner best suited to the circumstances of the State Party in question. However, if a State Party proposes an element for inscription on the Representative List or Urgent Safeguarding List or wishes to request financial assistance for the element's safeguarding, it will have to demonstrate that it meets the definition of intangible cultural heritage as laid out in Article 2 of the Convention.

Most inventories will include a system of classifying the intangible cultural heritage. One place to begin would be the domains listed in Article 2.2 of the Convention: oral traditions and expressions including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practice about nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship. As already noted, the Convention makes it clear that these domains are not comprehensive, and any system of classification is only a tool for helping to organize the information within an inventory.

Some inventory systems, like those in Cape Verde, Mauritius and South Africa, more or less follow the domains laid out in the 2003 Convention. In other States Parties, there is a great deal of variation: some, especially in Africa and Latin America,

present languages as intangible cultural heritage in their own right and not just as a 'vehicle' of it, and others explicitly mention 'music and dance' rather than the term 'performing arts'; still others consider music separately from dance, and so on.

However, numerous categories in national inventories can be easily accommodated under one or more of the domains outlined in the Convention: 'traditional medicine' and 'indigenous knowledge systems' might be classified under 'knowledge about nature' and such categories as 'games' or 'play' and 'social organization', under the domain of 'social practices'. Themes such as 'mythology' and names of places, objects or animals could be accommodated under 'oral expressions' and some religious ceremonies and pilgrimages, under 'rituals' or 'festive events'. Other categories such as 'memories and beliefs', 'genealogical information' or 'culinary traditions' also find their place in one or more of the domains presented in Article 2 of the Convention. Divergence concerning domains often reflects the different focuses of communities' intangible cultural heritage in different parts of the world, and this is perfectly consistent with the Convention's insistence that each State should draw up its inventories in a manner geared to its own situation. Algeria and Haiti, for example, have separate categories for particular religious practices.

Some inventorying systems are not limited to elements of the intangible cultural heritage. The Lithuanian system, for instance, integrates tangible elements associated to practices of intangible cultural heritage, to the traditions' bearers or to archives, as well as several elements that are no longer practised. On the other hand, in Belgium, there are plans to include elements of cyber culture and virtual practices in the classificatory system of intangible cultural heritage.

Another major difference between States is that some limit themselves to inventorying indigenous or native intangible cultural heritage while others – Belgium and the USA, for instance – also take into account the intangible cultural



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Shashmaqom Music,  
Tajikistan and Uzbekistan



Photo © Andrew P. Smith / UNESCO

heritage of immigrant communities. Many multicultural States do not restrict themselves to the expressions and practices of the most widespread culture but rather undertake, from the start, to consider the intangible cultural heritage of minority groups.

There is also a huge variation in the amount of documentation and the degree of detail provided in inventories. It seems not physically or financially feasible to provide detailed information about all the intangible cultural heritage manifestations present in countries with a tremendous variety of intangible cultural heritage. About half of the systems in use today present extensive documentation, while others are less exhaustive in providing information about listed elements. Some take the form of catalogues or registers, while others present information as a series of encyclopaedia-like entries. In Brazil, a system is used that incorporates both approaches. There is a national level of elements that have been included in a 'Registry' and another level with elements included in an 'Inventory'. On a national level, extensive documentation is



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📍 *The Oral Heritage of Gelede, Benin, Nigeria and Togo*

provided for both of these categories, while in the federal states inventories are being created without this weight of documentation.

In most countries there are no legal provisions to protect the property rights of the communities, groups of practitioners and tradition bearers over their traditional cultural and social practices and expressions. This may mean that caution is necessary when dealing with easily accessible information with possible commercial applications. Without appropriate legal protections, outsiders may use and take commercial advantage of information such as traditional medical knowledge, knowledge of natural resources, and of music and oral traditions. Since communities should give their free, prior and informed consent before their heritage is inventoried, they can restrict how much information they wish to provide – or none – about elements of their intangible cultural heritage. Communities may not always be aware of the potential value of their heritage to others, so those responsible for the inventorying should be sensitive not to include information that would violate privacy or invite unfair exploitation by outsiders.

📍 *The Maroon Heritage of Moore Town, Jamaica*





Photo © Juan Rodríguez Acosta

📍 *The Cocolo Dance  
Drama Tradition,  
Dominican Republic*

There is no minimum age for how long practices need to be established and transmitted between generations in order for them to be considered elements of intangible cultural heritage under the Convention. Some States impose such a requirement on elements to be inventoried, and these range from two or three generations up to seven. In some cases, it is difficult to establish over how many generations a tradition has been practised, particularly in communities whose first language has traditionally not existed in a written form. Since the community itself should decide what it recognizes as its intangible cultural heritage, imposing a uniform, external age limit seems to contradict the Convention.

Particular attention should be given to rapid evolutions with significant impact from external factors: while they may have their roots in traditional intangible cultural heritage elements, they may not always be seen as resulting from an uninterrupted chain of development. Some inventorying systems do not include revitalized elements where there has been such a break; others choose to include them if they are recognized by a community as its heritage.

Some States divide their inventories along internal administrative lines. Venezuela, for example, presents the cultural heritage of each of its municipalities separately. Federal states often structure their inventories according to territories; indeed, many States use administrative partitions as a primary classifying principle.

In Colombia, a separate inventory is under development for each of the country's thirty-two departments. China officially recognizes fifty-six ethnic groups and organizes its inventory accordingly. Some countries, such as Haiti, feel no need to distinguish between different communities or regions. However, due to urbanisation, migration and centralizing policies, present day administrative divisions do not always coincide with borders of regions that were traditionally occupied by discrete ethnolinguistic or otherwise definable communities.

### **The Bulgarian experience in inventory-making**

In Bulgaria, at the national level, the Ministry of Culture (National Folklore Committee) and the Institute of Folklore of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences carry the responsibility for the safeguarding, inventorying and promotion of the intangible cultural heritage. An inventorying project was conducted in 2001 and 2002. The inventory was made on two levels, national and regional-local according to the existing administrative divisions, and combined the territorial principle with classification according to

ethnic and religious background as these two factors often coincided. The main criteria for including an element in the inventory were authenticity, representativeness, artistic value, vitality, rootedness in tradition. The selected domains for classifying intangible cultural heritage were traditional rites and feasts, traditional singing and music playing, traditional dancing and children's games, traditional narration, traditional crafts and traditional production of home-made objects or products and traditional medicine. A questionnaire established by experts was sent to communities both

through administrative channels and through the network of local *chitalishte* ('culture and community centers'), the collected data were analyzed by the experts and a first version of the inventory was elaborated and put online for comments. Upon integration of comments and additional field research, the final version of the inventory was published on paper and on the Internet. Today, the *chitalishte* network, coordinated by the Regional Cultural Policy Directorate with the Ministry of Culture, ensures to a large extent the transmission of knowledge and skills in the area of the intangible cultural heritage.

### The Brazilian experience in inventory-making

Brazilian experiences in inventory-making go back to the creation in the 1930s of the Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN) and the application of an administrative act called *Tombamento* for the legal protection of cultural heritage, both movable and immovable. The *Tombamento* was based on Western notions of authenticity, including preservation of property as much as possible in its original form, focusing on objects rather than on related social processes. When, in the 1970s, the concept of cultural heritage was broadened to include explicitly intangible assets, it became obvious that living cultural assets were to be safeguarded through specially adapted means, which eventually led to the creation by decree of the Registry of Intangible Cultural Assets in 2000.

Through this Registry intangible cultural heritage items are documented and publicized, in a way that takes into account the collective and individual rights linked

to that heritage. Considering the dynamic nature of intangible cultural heritage, the Registry must be periodically revised, at least once every ten years. The registered properties are declared 'Brazilian Cultural Heritage', which entitles them to be promoted and to receive financial support for safeguarding plans. Parallel to the Registry, a National Programme for Intangible Heritage was established for preserving the country's ethnic and cultural diversity, which included the National Inventory of Cultural References. For this National Inventory, an inventory-making methodology was prepared by IPHAN aimed at the identification of cultural assets, both tangible and intangible. Intangible cultural assets are divided into four categories: 'Celebrations', 'Forms of expression', 'Craftsmanship or traditional knowledge' and 'Places or physical spaces'. The local delimitation of inventorying activities may correspond to a village, a district, a zone, an urban sector, a culturally differentiated geographic region or a complex of territories.

The inventory-making methodology comprises three phases: (1) preliminary collection, (2) identification and documentation, and (3) interpretation. The inventories carried out by IPHAN emphasize the cultural references of indigenous people, Afro-Brazilian citizens and groups inhabiting protected urban nuclei, as well as people living in multicultural urban contexts. There is a special focus on cultural properties at risk.

According to IPHAN, an important goal of inventorying intangible cultural heritage is to maintain the country's cultural diversity in a context of homogenizing tendencies, and to contribute through the implementation of safeguarding mechanisms to social inclusion and improvement of living conditions of the tradition bearers. Since 2000, IPHAN has concluded 48 inventories of cultural references throughout the country and other 47 are now in progress. Sixteen cultural assets have been registered since 2002 and eleven action plans are being implemented in order to guarantee their transmission and continuity.



Photo © Yu, Jae-Won



Photo © JKWalsimbi

📍 The Gangneung Danoje festival, Republic of Korea

📍 Barkcloth making in Uganda

### The Venezuelan experience in inventory-making

The *Ley de Protección y Defensa del Patrimonio Cultural* (the Venezuelan Law on the Protection and Defence of Cultural Heritage) of 1993 decreed the establishment of an Instituto del Patrimonio Cultural, IPC (Institute of Cultural Heritage, [www.ipc.gob.ve](http://www.ipc.gob.ve)). One of the main tasks of this Institute is the inventorying of Venezuelan Cultural Heritage. During a first inventorying exercise, only 610 cultural goods were declared of which 476 were architectural (colonial). The Institute realised then that this did not reflect the wealth and variety of the country's cultural heritage. The Institute decided therefore in 2003 to start a new inventory project that would aim at reflecting all forms of cultural heritage of all Venezuelan municipalities. In 2005, 68 000 expressions of tangible and intangible heritage had been registered, and the project was expected to be finalised with some 110 000 expressions inventoried.

The new inventory aimed at reflecting those cultural manifestations that are valuable for the communities themselves. By doing so, it rejects the principles previously used of the establishment by a specialist of their exceptional value, and of the appropriation of heritage by society in general through public policies. The final goal of the new inventory was instead to register all the activities, manifestations, products or cultural expressions that represent and socially characterize each of the Venezuelan communities and groups. The basic inventorying criterion used was the

representative character of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage for the communities and groups, including the listing of individuals with distinctive skills that symbolise a collective identity.

Field work started in 2004 through the gathering of information, on municipal basis, by using pre-existing questionnaires, which resulted to be of limited effectiveness as they were neither reflecting the representative principle of the exercise, nor including the right questions for valuing other heritage than monuments or sites. New questionnaires were therefore developed with the idea that one question would lead to the next, leaving enough flexibility to afterwards compile and edit the information gathered. The assessment criterion used for determining the representative character was the need to prove the evidence of a collective valorisation of the cultural goods to be registered. Lacking this evidence, the elements were rejected.

The information gathering was organized by workers in the field of culture, students, volunteers and the network of local teachers, which is one of the most extended public networks in the country. The communities were informed about the scopes and purposes of the project and were told that only the information they wanted to provide would be published in the *Catálogos del Patrimonio Cultural Venezolano*, a series of more than 200 books that presents the results of the inventory in 335 municipalities. Cultural heritage was registered, for each of the municipalities,

under five categories: *los Objetos* (objects), *lo Construido* (built heritage), *la Creación Individual* (individual creations), *la Tradición Oral* (oral traditions) and *las Manifestaciones Colectivas* (collective manifestations).

An editing and publishing team was in charge of bringing the information back to a brief description of each of the elements for practical reasons concerning the publication of the inventory. The rest of the written and audiovisual information is included in digital form in a central database of IPC, with the purpose to make it accessible via internet and other means to the general public. IPC also has the intention to publish a CD with the cultural heritage of each of the Venezuelan administrative regions and a cultural mapping project. The inventory is seen as a main cultural and educational tool to be used in development policies.

From a legal point of view, the Tribunal Supremo de Justicia (Supreme Court) decreed that all cultural heritage that has been duly registered and published in the inventory, is subject of protection by the Law on the Protection and Defence of Cultural Heritage. When allocating financial resources for safeguarding inventoried intangible cultural heritage, priority is given to cultural heritage under threat of disappearing. Today, more than 84 000 cultural expressions have been inventoried and more than 160 *Catálogos* have been published and are available for free in every cultural, social and educational institution of each municipality.

The spirit of the Convention calls for inventories to be as representative as possible of the intangible cultural heritage borne by local communities and groups who make up the national community of the submitting State Party. Above all, the elements that feature in inventories of intangible cultural heritage should be selected on the basis of the primary criterion of whether they are recognized by one or more communities, groups or, in some cases, individuals as being expressions of their cultural identity. The Convention requires that inventorying be done with the participation of those very communities. Other questions of classification, scope, level of

detail, and the mechanisms of conducting, maintaining and updating those inventories will be determined by each State, 'in a manner geared to its own situation'.

➔ *The Darangen Epic of the Maranao People of Lake Lanao, Philippines*



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## Possible outline for inventorying elements of the intangible cultural heritage

### 1. Identification of the element

- 1.1. Name of the element, as used by community or group concerned;
- 1.2. Short, maximally informative title (including indication of domain(s));
- 1.3. Community(ies) concerned;
- 1.4. Physical location(s) of element;
- 1.5. Short description.

### 2. Characteristics of the element

- 2.1. Associated tangible elements;
- 2.2. Associated intangible elements;
- 2.3. Language(s), register(s), speech level(s) involved;
- 2.4. Perceived origin.

### 3. Persons and institutions involved with the element

- 3.1. Practitioner(s)/performer(s): name(s), age, gender, social status, and/or professional category, etc;
- 3.2. Other participants (e.g., holders/custodians);
- 3.3. Customary practices governing access to the element or to aspects of it;
- 3.3. Modes of transmission;
- 3.4. Concerned organizations (NGOs and others).

### 4. State of the element: viability

- 4.1. Threats to the enactment;
- 4.2. Threats to the transmission;
- 4.3. Availability of associated tangible elements and resources;
- 4.4. Viability of associated tangible and intangible elements;
- 4.5. Safeguarding measures in place.

### 5. Data gathering and inventorying

- 5.1. Consent from and involvement of the community/group in data gathering and inventorying;
- 5.2. Restrictions, if any, on use of inventoried data;
- 5.3. Resource persons(s): name and status or affiliation;
- 5.4. Date and place of data gathering;
- 5.5. Date of entering data into an inventory;
- 5.6. The inventory entry compiled by....

### 6. References to literature, discography, audiovisual materials, archives

☞ *The Makishi Masquerade, Zambia*

☞ *The Lakalaka, Dances and Sung Speeches of Tonga*

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☞ *The Cultural Space of Palenque de San Basilio, Colombia*



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Intangible  
Cultural  
Heritage



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



Intangible  
Cultural  
Heritage

Intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.