Regional workshop

Conceptual and institutional frameworks for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in Arab States

Kuwait City (Kuwait), 7-9 May 2014

The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has just celebrated its tenth anniversary. Despite the fact that it is still young, this international normative instrument has gained a rich record of experiences. It already counts 158 States Parties (April 2014), and the number of elements proposed for the Convention's Lists and the Register of Best Safeguarding Practices clearly demonstrates the enthusiasm it has generated worldwide.

Initial evaluation of the implementation of the Convention

This observation is prominent in the recent report released by the Internal Oversight Service on the evaluation of UNESCO's standard-setting work of the Culture Sector. Among the key findings of the report, it is noted that the States Parties to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and many non-state actors consider this Convention as a highly relevant international legal instrument, whether in terms of consistency with national and local priorities, or in terms of the needs of the communities, groups and individuals concerned. However, the report notes that while many States Parties have incorporated the provisions of the Convention in the laws and policies relating to culture following its ratification, significant efforts are yet to be made to provide a more suitable political and legislative environment, both with respect to the laws and policies in the field of culture and in areas of sustainable development that may have an impact on the implementation of the Convention. The fundamental principle emphasized in Article 11 states that Each State Party shall take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory is not always reflected as it should be in current policies.

The Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage at its eighth session, held in Baku, Azerbaijan (2-7 December 2013), discussed the findings and recommendations of this evaluation and indicated in its resolution 8.COM5/5.c a number of actions to be taken. In this regard, the Committee has encouraged States Parties to strengthen cooperation with sustainable development experts in order to integrate intangible cultural heritage in non-cultural

legislation (education, health, environment, etc.), policy development as well as all other relevant work related to intangible cultural heritage and sustainable development. It furthermore calls for greater involvement of NGOs and local communities in the development of policies, legislation and safeguarding plans.

The Committee also requested the Secretariat of the Convention to support States Parties in their efforts to develop relevant legislation and policies as part of its capacity building programme and for this purpose to design appropriate formats.

It is clear that many policies have an impact on intangible cultural heritage. They may interfere with its practice; or potentially cause its denaturation, decontextualization and folklorisation. They also may strengthen it, thus contributing to ensure its transmission and viability. That is why it is important to ensure that policies be set within the context of clearly articulated strategies. The crosscutting nature of intangible cultural heritage is not likely to facilitate this task. A dual approach is needed: intersectorality, involving all the relevant government departments, and a participatory approach, associating all actors, communities and NGOs.

Implementing the Convention in the Arab region

The relevance and importance of the Convention for the states of the Arab region is evident: eighteen of them are parties to the Convention (except Somalia, Libya, Kuwait and Bahrain). Others are now working on its ratification. Among States Parties, Algeria, Egypt, the Syrian Arab Republic, Oman, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates have already submitted their first periodic reports on their implementation of the Convention. These reports are a valuable source of information on initiatives taken or underway to safeguard ICH, be it the revision of current legislation, the development of a new one, the compilation of inventories or any other relevant initiatives.

UNESCO's capacity building program

However, the need for capacity building for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage remains to be substantial. It is in this context that a program has been developed by the Secretariat of the Convention to assist States in creating institutional and professional environments conducive to the sustainable safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and promote public awareness of and support to the objectives of the Convention[1]. The Secretariat has developed training materials, with the support of facilitators, ten of whom come from ALECSO Member States. Capacity-building projects were launched in all regions of the world to enable States Parties as well as all stakeholders to take ownership of the Convention and contribute to its successful implementation.

Two such projects are worth mentioning in this context: a project currently underway in Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia funded by a contribution from Norway to the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund, as well as a project completed in 2013 and entitled 'Mediterranean Living Heritage (MedLiHer).' It was implemented by UNESCO with the support of the European Union and has contributed to strengthening the institutional capacity of four countries: Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

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[1] See Report of the Convention Secretariat on its activities submitted to the fifth session of the General Assembly of States Parties to the Convention (Document ITH/14/5.GA).

UNESCO has an extensive network of partners to support its action aimed at safeguarding and promoting intangible cultural heritage, in particular the seven regional centers devoted exclusively to the intangible cultural heritage under the auspices of UNESCO (category 2 centres), the most recent of which was created in Algiers for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in Africa[2].

Cooperation between ALECSO and UNESCO

Meanwhile, ALECSO, through its heritage safeguarding program, has shown a keen interest in safeguarding intangible heritage and supporting the implementation of the Convention in Member States. Thus ALECSO, UNESCO and the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage of Qatar jointly organized in Doha, from 14-17 January 2013, a regional workshop on intangible cultural heritage, to discuss the capacity building challenges in the field of intangible cultural heritage. It is part of a series of workshops that ALECSO is planning to organize, in collaboration with UNESCO and ALECSO Member States, during the period from 2013-2015, and probably beyond. These workshops will address a number of topics based on the needs to be identified, such as legal frameworks (which could be the topic of a workshop to be held in Oman by autumn 2014), community participation, and the contribution of ICH to sustainable development, among others.

The second workshop in this series will be jointly held in Kuwait City from 7 to 9 May 2014 by ALECSO and UNESCO, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture of Kuwait. The workshop will discuss conceptual and institutional frameworks for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the States of the region.

Objectives of the workshop:

This workshop has three objectives:

1. Provide a general overview of existing policies and institutional frameworks in the region for the safeguarding of ICH in both the cultural sector and other sectors of development.

2. Identify the needs and challenges of cooperation and technical assistance in the region, whether to develop policies and establish relevant institutional frameworks or to improve existing ones.

3. Suggest formats of cooperation and capacity building best suited to respond to identified needs.

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[2]. The Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe, Bulgaria; the International Training Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific region (CRIHAP), China; Regional Research Centre for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in West Asia and Central Asia, the Islamic Republic of Iran; International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific region (IRCI), Japan; International Information and Networking on Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (ICHCAP), Republic of Korea Centre; the Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Latin America (CRESPIAL) in Peru; the Centre for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Africa, Algeria.

Key issues:

1. Overview of policy and institutional frameworks:

Are there suitable policies for intangible cultural heritage in place in Member States and in what form? By whom and how are these policies developed, where they exist? Do they refer to the conceptual frameworks of the Convention? Do States have the necessary institutional frameworks to ensure that they are duly implemented once they have been developed?

2. Identify the needs and challenges of cooperation and technical assistance

Where institutional frameworks do not exist, it will be necessary to explore with the relevant States Parties steps to be taken to set up the most appropriate institutional structures. What would their objectives, mandate and vision be? How would their institutional architecture? What means would the institutional structures require to accomplish their mission to the best extent possible?

What about policies? Do States Parties wish that they be developed? What approaches and resources are necessary to ensure that, in addition to culture, these policies would include education, higher education and scientific research, crafts, agriculture and fisheries, health, tourism, intellectual property, etc.? What resources should be mobilized to develop these policies in a participatory manner associating civil society, including all stakeholders at the community level?

If institutional frameworks have already been set in place, are they geared to appropriately address ICH issues? Is their chart suitable? Do they have qualified human resources in sufficient numbers? Is specialized training in the field of intangible cultural heritage provided at university level to ensure that such human resources are available? Do they have sufficient financial means? With regard ti existing policies, are they embedded in short, medium and long term visions for the Sector (following horizontal approaches appropriate for the cross-cutting nature of this heritage), involving all partners, including, and more importantly so, local communities?

In all the above cases, what would the needs of States Parties be with regard to cooperation and technical assistance?

3. Suggest formats of cooperation and capacity building best suited to respond to identified needs

Do relevant good practices exists and if so which among these are more likely to serve States effectively? What kind of cooperative experiences involving States in the region are there in this area? How to further promote regional cooperation among governments through the exchange of experiences and expertise? What role could ALECSO play in support of these processes? How to consider complementarity and cooperation between governments and civil society so as to develop policies and strengthen institutional frameworks?

The UNESCO capacity building program underway is putting more emphasis on the component of technical assistance provided to States for the development of policy frameworks. What formats would be most appropriate to be effective?

The purpose of organizing the upcoming workshop in Kuwait is to seek answers to such questions and others that may emerge. The idea is to kick start a fresh dynamic

to assist countries in developing appropriate policies for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and implementing the 2003 Convention.

Participants:

The workshop will bring together representatives of ALECSO Member States, including at least one manager of intangible cultural heritage per each delegation. In addition, eight facilitators trained by UNESCO for the implementation of its capacity building program for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage will take part in this event. Furthermore, representatives of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Section of UNESCO, of UNESCO field offices of the region, and ALECSO delegates will participate.

Organization of work:

State representatives invited to the workshop will receive a questionnaire which they will be asked to complete. Based on the replies to these questionnaires, a synthesis will be prepared as part of the workshop documents. The workshop will be organized in plenary sessions and working groups. A plenary session will open the proceedings and another will debrief the participants about the results. The working groups will be dedicated to key issues: policy and institutional frameworks to safeguard ICH, the intersectorality and crosscutting nature of ICH, human and financial resources, and community and civil society involvement. Each working group will appoint its moderator and rapporteur. The rapporteurs will present the restitution of their working groups. The co-facilitators will present a summary of the results to the plenary prior to the conclusion of the workshop.

Technical committee of the meeting:

ALECSO

- Hayet Guettat Guermazi, Director of the Department of Culture and Heritage Preservation Program.
- Faika Bejaoui, Expert in the field of cultural heritage (email: f.bejaoui@alecso.org.tn or fakabejaoui@yahoo.fr).

UNESCO

- Cécile Duvelle, Secretary of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible. Cultural Heritage and Chief of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Section.
- Susanne Schnuttgen, Chief of the Capacity Building and Heritage Policy Unit, Intangible Cultural Heritage Section (email : s.schnuttgen@unesco.org).
- Marina Calvo, Assistant Programme Specialist and focal point for the Arab region, Intangible Cultural Heritage Section (email : m.calvo@unesco.org).

Facilitators

- Ahmed Skounti, Anthropologist, National Institute of Science Archaeology and Heritage Rabat (Morocco), facilitator of the UNESCO network.
- Géraldine Chatelard, Doctor of History and Civilization, Expert in the field of cultural heritage, especially in the Arab region, facilitator of the UNESCO network.