



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Intangible
Cultural
Heritage

International Assistance

ICH-04-Report – Form

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE FUND

FINAL NARRATIVE REPORT

Beneficiary State(s) Party(ies): Kyrgyzstan

Project title:	Safeguarding of Practices and Rare Rituals Related to Sacred Sites in Kyrgyzstan: Preparation of Inventory and Safeguarding Measures
Time frame:	Starting date: 17/11/2018 Completion date: 18/10/2020
Budget:	<p style="text-align: right;">Total: US\$138,210.00</p> <p><i>Including:</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund: US\$99,950.00</p> <p style="text-align: right;">State Party contribution: US\$19,700.00</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Other contributions: US\$18,560.00</p>
Implementing agency (contracting partner or UNESCO Field Office):	Aigine Cultural Research Center
Contact person:	<p>Title (Ms/Mr, etc.): Ms</p> <p>Family name: Usubalieva-Gryshchuk</p> <p>Given name: Cholponai</p> <p>Institution/position: Aigine Cultural Research Center/Project Coordinator</p> <p>Address: 93 Toktogul St., 720040 Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan</p> <p>Telephone number: +996 312 664832</p> <p>E-mail address: office@aigine.kg cholponai@aigine.kg</p>

Partner agency (in the case of a service from UNESCO project):	
Implementing partners:	---

Background

Provide a brief description of the situation existing at the time of the request and the need that the assistance aimed to address. For safeguarding of a particular element, provide a description of the element, its viability and why safeguarding measures were required. For preparation of inventories, strengthening of capacities, awareness-raising, visibility or other safeguarding not focussed on a particular element, identify gaps that were to be addressed. For emergency assistance requests, describe the nature and severity of the emergency at the time of the request.

Not fewer than 750 or more than 1000 words

Pilgrimage to sacred sites and performance of ritual practices for centuries have been an integral part of Kyrgyz peoples' cultural identity and heritage. These practices were established and developed as defining part of nomadic nation's world- and self-perception. Through making pilgrimage to, and performing various ritual practices at, sacred sites have been utilized to establish connection with the ancestor and guardian spirits, strengthen bonds with forces of Nature and establish inner peace and energy balance. These spiritual and traditional practices withstood the test of time through the span of history although they have faced days of difficulties and challenges. During the atheistic Soviet era, pilgrimage and ritual practices were harshly banned, community members and practitioners were persecuted and punished for exercising their right to faith, cultural identity and heritage. However, what we see today is a true example of a living heritage, when pilgrimage and ritual practices continue to be part of Kyrgyz peoples' intangible cultural heritage and are still being practiced by numerous pilgrims, practitioners and ICH bearers.

The concept of sacred sites and pilgrimage practices have not been studied and researched during the Soviet Union or after its dissolution, or, for that matter, recognized as part of Kyrgyz peoples' intangible cultural heritage. The country's first years, following the independence, were directed at building the national identity and recognizing elements of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. But researchers, academicians and culture experts studied and documented mostly oral traditions and expressions, traditional craftsmanship and social practices and festive events as ICH elements. However, the ancient tradition of making pilgrimage to sacred sites and performance of ritual practices have not been studied, documented and/or considered as part of peoples' intangible cultural heritage. Thus, after the first decade of the country's independence, public foundation and NGO Aigine Cultural Research Center became a pioneer institution that initiated the nationwide systematic study and documentation of sacred sites and related ritual practices.

Aigine CRC spent 10 years of field research to identify and document more than one thousand sacred sites and a number of related ritual practices around the country. The center also identified and established a database of concerned community members – sacred site guardians, pilgrims, practitioners and ICH bearers and initiated collaboration processes with them. Consequently, Aigine CRC systematized and prepared publications of collected data in Kyrgyz, Russian and English languages to raise public awareness and integrate this knowledge into formal and non-formal education system. These undertaken research and awareness raising activities were financially supported by various international institutions.

Thus, having completed its identification and documentation activities, Aigine CRC continued its close collaboration with concerned community members and began identifying further issues and needs related to safeguarding and promoting pilgrimage practices and sacred sites. Thus, by the time of the assistance request, with the help of community members the center has identified the following gaps and needs that were to be addressed:

- absence of a unified national inventory of sacred sites and pilgrimage practices;
- pilgrimage practices not being represented on the country's national/state inventory;
- concerned community members' lack of information and knowledge on the 2003

Convention for the Safeguarding of ICH;

- decrease in visibility and representation of sacred sites and pilgrimage practices in local, regional and national mass media and social media;

- general public's and government's absence of understanding contemporary safeguarding challenges and risks faced by community members;

- absence of a systematized document developed together with community members on contemporary challenges/difficulties/risks and their possible safeguarding measures on different levels.

Thus, the abovementioned gaps and needs prompted Aigine CRC to apply for ICH Fund assistance to prepare and develop national inventory of pilgrimage practices and sacred sites with its further inscription into the state inventory of the Kyrgyz Republic; to develop a national manual on safeguarding measures of sacred sites and pilgrimage practices; as well as capacity building of concerned community members.

Development of these two documents ensures viability and further safeguarding of the ICH elements related to sacred site pilgrimage. Elaboration of the national inventory contributes to countrywide representation of the ICH practices and concerned community members by increasing their visibility and strengthening their sense of identity and ownership. The manual on safeguarding measures will serve as a practical tool for all concerned communities and stakeholders – practitioners, guardians, pilgrims, local and state government agencies, researchers and NGOs – to carry out and implement required safeguarding measures. Community members capacity building and raising general public's awareness on ICH practices and 2003 Convention will help communities be more cognizant of their rights and possibilities to efficiently carry out safeguarding measures.

Objectives and results attained

Overall, to what extent did the project attain its objectives? Describe the main results attained, focussing in particular on the perspective of the direct beneficiaries and communities. For each expected result identified in the request, explain whether it was fully or partially attained. Also describe any unexpected results, direct or indirect, whether positive or negative.

Not fewer than 100 or more than 500 words

All 3 (three) objectives and 3 (three) results identified in the project proposal have been fully attained during Stages I, II and III.

The project team prepared an Inventory of 1,233 sacred sites and 36 rituals practices representing the whole country in Kyrgyz and Russian languages. The inventory was submitted for review and inscription to the Ministry of Culture of the Kyrgyz Republic. Once the document is signed, it is to become a part of the State Inventory as a separate domain. The detailed version of the Inventory is to be published on Aigine CRC's website available for general public. The shorter version (Annex 1) of the inventory is published as part of the National Manual for Safeguarding Pilgrimage and Ritual Practices (NMSPRP).

The NMSPRP has been designed by community members and the project team. It has been developed by national ICH experts with recommendations by international ICH expert. It is published in two languages, 500 copies each (Annex 2).

Throughout the project implementation, the project team made 9 short videos featuring remote sacred sites, ritual practices and community members' stories (Annex 3). The videos emphasize importance and value of ICH and its safeguarding for younger generation. As part of the awareness raising campaign, the videos have been posted on most popular social networks and some of them broadcasted on national TV channel. Also, regional working group coordinators made 5 radio appearances and 3 TV appearances while the project team has regularly posted project news/updates and shared information on sacred sites and ritual practices on the center's website and social networks.

As part of the community capacity building, the project team conducted 7 on-site capacity building workshops for 89 concerned community members and stakeholders – sacred site guardians, practitioners, pilgrims, historians, teachers, journalists, writers and local government officials from 6 June to 6 October 2019 with proactive involvement and participation of 2 national experts on ICH. According to the participants, these workshops have significantly strengthened their capacity and raised their awareness on the role of their practices and importance of its safeguarding. Rich information on the 2003 Convention and perspective of their ICH being inscribed into the State Inventory – boosted self-worth of concerned community members and increased their sense of recognition and ownership.

The direct beneficiaries and concerned communities perceive the project and its results as necessary and important motivation to continue practicing, safeguarding and transmitting their ICH to the next generation. Preparation of the Inventory and its perspective inscription into the State Inventory provides communities solid ground and, to some extent, legal justification to practice their ICH, as the viability of their ritual and pilgrimage practices is threatened radical Islamic groups. Therefore, inscription of the Inventory gives much hope for the community members to protect their ICH practices under the 2003 Convention. Also, the awareness raising activities and publication of the NMSRP contributes greatly to spreading understanding, building a dialogue and nourishing acceptance of ancient-long ritual and pilgrimage as communities ICH.

Description of project implementation

Provide a description of the activities undertaken and the outputs they generated (e.g. trainings, consultation process, technical assistance, awareness raising, publications, toolkits, etc.). Also describe any problems encountered in project delivery and corrective actions taken. Describe the role of the implementing agency and of the partner agency (in the case of a service from UNESCO project) and the role of other implementing partners in carrying out activities and generating outputs.

Not fewer than 1000 or more than 1500 words

The implementation of the project was divided into 3 separate stages.

Stage I was the initial stage of the project and was focused on community-based inventorying (Annex 4 – 1st progress report). Thus, the following activities and outputs were generated during Stage I:

- conducting one-day training workshop for the project team, project beneficiaries, concerned communities, experts, consultants and interested stakeholders – totalling 13 people;
- identifying and selecting 3 members for the Steering Committee;
- carrying out 3 months-long desk research and detailed overview of the Aigine CRC's existing data on pilgrimage and ritual practices in all 7 provinces of the country;
- identifying and selecting 7 regional coordinators and 4-5 regional group members in each working group to carry out community-based inventorying in the regions;
- organizing and conducting two-day inventorying workshop for regional coordinators and working groups totalling 21 participants lead by 2 experts and project team;
- facilitating and providing technical, theoretical and other on-site support during two-months of field research and community-based inventorying carried out by 7 regional coordinators and with their working groups;
- conducting awareness raising campaigns – regional coordinators and community members participating in national TV and Radio programmes; regularly posting information on project progress and pilgrimage practices on center's social networks and website;
- reviewing and analysing the field data and audio/visual materials gathered by the regional working groups;

- preparing and submitting the first progress narrative and financial report by 16 May 2019.

The main problem encountered during Stage I was the ill-timing for the community-based inventorying for late April – early May. All the regional groups experienced substantial weather and transportation difficulties because of heavy and prolonged rains, mudslides, strong winds and snowfalls. Thus, the field work has been delayed for 3 weeks, and the big chunk of funds were spent on transportation. However, all the inventorying activities were within time and budget line.

The Stage II of the project contained core activities on regional capacity building workshops, involvement of international ICH expert and drafting the National Manual and Inventory (Annex 5 – 2nd progress report). Thus, the following activities and outputs were generated:

- planning and organizing a 3-day on-site capacity building workshops together with the regional coordinators for concerned community members – sacred site guardians, practitioners, pilgrims and other stakeholders from 6 June to 6 October, 2019. In each province, the regional coordinators were in charge of setting the workshop dates, selecting the venue, identifying participants from the concerned community and choosing sacred sites for group pilgrimages;

- conducting 7 capacity building workshops throughout the country with participation of 89 participants led by 3 national ICH experts. During these days the groups worked on the 2003 Convention; detailed discussion on the current state of the pilgrimage practices and identifying challenges, risks and threats. To address these challenges, the participants worked on and developed safeguarding measures on individual, community, regional and national levels.

- making photo and video documentation of sacred sites, community members' stories, ritual practices and preparing short documentary videos;

- developing the first draft of the National Manual and Inventory to be reviewed and analysed by the international ICH expert;

- inviting to Bishkek Mr. Gaura Mancacaritadipura, international ICH expert from Indonesia for 3-day workshop to review, analyse and provide his feedback and recommendations on the National Manual and Inventory draft;

- organizing a joint meeting with participation of Mr. Mancacaritadipura, project beneficiaries, members of the Steering Committee to discuss the project progress, final results and making a joint pilgrimage;

- developing the second draft of the National Manual and Inventory taking into consideration feedback, recommendations and comments of Mr. Mancacaritadipura;

- conducting awareness raising campaigns of regional coordinators and community members by participating in national TV and Radio programmes; broadcasting short videos and documentaries on pilgrimage and ritual practices on national TV channels social networks;

- systematizing and cross checking all the data for the inventory and the manual and continuing working with the coordinators of the regional working groups and national ICH experts;

- initiating and conducting meetings with the representatives of the National Commission of the Kyrgyz Republic for UNESCO and ICH department under the Ministry of Culture of the Kyrgyz Republic to discuss the procedure and required documents on inscribing the inventory into the State Inventory;

- preparing and submitting the second progress narrative and financial report by 11 November 2019.

The project team didn't encounter any major problems in completing Stage II of the project. Perhaps, the only challenge during the workshops was an extensive information and

knowledge gap among communities and stakeholders. All the workshop participants didn't have prior knowledge of the 2003 Convention and/or ICH related matters. Therefore, it was a slight challenge to deliver the workshop materials as planned, but quite rewarding at the same time, as all the participants accepted and understood the presented materials with great enthusiasm and appreciation.

Another unexpected and quite tragic event was the passing of a sacred site guardian from Talas province and a member of the Steering Committee, Jenish Kudakeev. He was a beloved community member and Aigine CRC's long-time affiliate. His death was perceived as a heart-breaking reminder of fragility of life and ICH knowledge and practices. During the workshop in Talas, the project team and the community members organized a group lunch in tribute to his memory with participation of his family members.

Stage III of the project implementation was solely dedicated to working out and preparing the National Manual on Safeguarding Pilgrimage and Ritual Practices (NMSPRP) and compiling the National Inventory.

During the first two months of the Stage III, the project team has conducted working meetings with the regional working group coordinators, community members and national ICH experts to discuss the general layout of the NMSPRP and the Inventory and ways to optimize its efficiency and practicality. Community members proposed the NMSPRP as a journey of two pilgrims through 70 different sacred sites where the reader immerses into the world of pilgrimage and ritual practices; becomes cognizant of their value and significance for the community; witnesses challenges and threats the concerned communities face and learns possible safeguarding ways. The community members tried to bring the readers closer to the element and experience it through virtual journey.

It was also proposed by the community members to combine the NMSPRP and the shorter version of the Inventory in one document. The reader gets acquainted with the general list and, if need be, get motivated to research and learn more in detail from an online document on Aigine CRC's webpage.

The final draft of the NMSPRP was prepared by two national ICH experts, Dr. Gulnara Aitpaeva and Dr. Aijarkyn Kojobekova in Russian and Kyrgyz languages. The project team together with the community members designed and prepared the layout and cover design. Then, both versions were proofread and edited by Mr. Jumadin Kadyrov, editor from the Central Institute of Bibliography of the Kyrgyz Republic, followed by submission to the designated printing house.

The project team conducted the bidding among several printing houses online, due to the pandemic, to ensure the best quality and low cost for publications (Annex 6). Subsequently, Bishkek-based printing house Zolotoi Oport was selected for the assignment. The project team monitored every step of the printing process, from submission to receiving the actual final product (the original hard copies of the publication are sent with the hard copies of the report).

The project team has conducted several meetings with the Ministry of Culture of the Kyrgyz Republic and submitted all the necessary documentation and materials for the Inventory to be reviewed and inscribed into the State Inventory in February 2020. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic posed substantial obstacles and delays. The ministry workers have been working offline without ability to meet in person, thus the progress of inscription is being on hold for the time being. Once the work routine of the Ministry will get back to normal, the project team believes that the inscription process will resume and be completed.

The project team planned on conducting a wrap-up presentation on the project results on TV and carrying out a ceremony of a rare ritual, however, taking the current epidemic situation into account, the project team was advised against gathering large groups of people. Therefore, official presentation of the project results, performance of the ceremony

and project product distribution is postponed to the spring of 2021 with much hope that the anticipated second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic will pass.

Community involvement

Provide a description of the mechanisms used for fully involving the community(ies) concerned. Describe not only the participation of the communities as beneficiaries of the project, but also their active participation in the planning and implementation of all activities.

Not fewer than 300 or more than 500 words

The project team employed participatory method as the main mechanism to fully involve the concerned community members. The community members were involved in the initial stage of project drafting and design. Seven community representatives from each province were selected as regional working group coordinators, while 3-4 community members from each province were chosen as working group members. They took proactive part during the inventorying workshop, followed by community-based inventorying of ritual practices and sacred sites around the country during Stage I.

During Stage II, the project team organized and carried out on-site capacity building workshops for community members and stakeholders. The regional coordinators' role in this activity was to set the workshop dates; identify the venue; select and invite participants from concerned communities and other stakeholders, and choose sacred sites for group visits during the workshop. In the course of the workshop, community members, stakeholders and the coordinators were main actors to list the challenges, risks and threats that the sacred sites and pilgrimages practices are facing today and also to develop safeguarding measures to address those issues. They eagerly took part in drafting the National Manual and the Inventory. The regional coordinators together with some community members met with the international and national ICH experts and discussed the international expert's recommendations and feedback on the 1st draft of the Manual and the Inventory.

During the Stage III, regional coordinators and working group members came together to review the second draft of the project results and provided their meaningful and valuable suggestions in designing the structure of the final draft. Thus, the concerned community members were involved in all stages and practically implemented the project from initiating to developing the final products. The project team and the national ICH experts provided their expertise and technical, theoretical, administrative and informational assistance.

The project team would like to emphasize the role of participatory approach – it significantly improves the communities' sense of recognition, ownership and greatly contributes to their empowerment and capacity building. The communities' participatory involvement in project delivery ensures that the identified issues and chosen safeguarding measures really reflect the needs and preferences felt by the entire community members and other stakeholders, as they are the ones who know the real situation from within.

The project team will continue working together with the regional coordinators and community members in distributing the project results in the regions among local-governments, educational institutions and community members. Also, the project team will continue its work with the communities to update the inventory.

Sustainability and exit/transition strategy

Describe how the benefits of the project will continue after the project has been completed. Where appropriate, describe the steps undertaken to ensure the following:

- *Sustainability of activities, outputs and results, including with reference to how capacity has been built under the project. Also describe any planned follow-up measures to ensure sustainability.*
- *Additional funding secured as a result of this project, if any. Indicate by whom, how much and for what purpose the contributions are granted.*

Describe how the ownership (of activities, outputs, results) by stakeholders and the community(ies) in particular has been promoted.

Describe, if relevant, how tools, processes, outputs, etc. have been adopted, adapted, replicated and/or extended for future use (e.g. in other regions, communities, elements, or fields of intangible cultural heritage.).

Not fewer than 100 or more than 500 words

According to the project beneficiaries, as a result of projects activities on community-based inventorying and capacity building workshops, the concerned community members and stakeholders have increased their sense of ownership over their ICH practices and feel greater sense of recognition from ICH experts and international community. The community members have also started understanding the importance and value of their ICH practices and the need to safeguard them in the face of fast rate of globalization. Having accompanied the project team throughout the whole project implementation process and having participated in various project workshops, the community members acquired necessary and valuable tools, experience, knowledge to cooperate with the state and independent civil sector to lobby, promote and safeguard their practices. Thus, the project team believes that these benefits acquired by the community members will help them continue their practices with greater confidence and motivation.

The sustainability of project activities is anticipated in further dissemination and exchange of knowledge and experience acquired by the community members among other communities and regions. The project's final outputs in the form of the National Manual and the Inventory is believed to ensure sustainability of the project activities. The project team believes that the inscription of the Inventory into the state inventory will provide legal support and serve as a solid ground for the community members to continue their practices with confidence without fearing ill-judgement, accusation and/or threats from radical religious communities. The Manual serves as a practical tool for community members, state bodies, civil sector, independent experts and scholars and all other interested parties to navigate through the current state of the pilgrimage practices and sacred sites and undertake and implement any necessary safeguarding measure, as these measures are application to all the ritual practices related to sacred sites around the country.

The implementation of the current project and generated outputs will serve as an example to cooperate together with other ICH communities and carry out community-based inventorying and developing safeguarding measures for other ICH elements in the country. The project team believes that the benefits acquired by the community members will help them to assist such similar projects in the future.

Lessons learnt

Describe what are the key lessons learnt regarding the following:

- *Attainment of expected results*
- *Ownership of key stakeholders and community involvement*
- *Delivery of project outputs*
- *Project management and implementation*
- *Sustainability of the project after the assistance*

Not fewer than 300 or more than 750 words

Key lessons learnt regarding the attainment of expected results was in delivering the capacity building workshops. There is a strong lack of knowledge and information among community members, stakeholders and general public on the concept of ICH and 2003 Convention especially in rural areas. Not only the community members are not cognizant of their rights to practice and safeguard their ICH, but also general public and youth don't have knowledge of different cultural practices being considered as community's ICH. The project team learnt that there is a strong need to integrate knowledge various ICH practices into formal education by establishing collaboration with universities and high schools by bringing together community members and students/teachers and build a dialogue and knowledge exchange between them. It's important to involve students and raise their awareness and build their capacity, because they have motivation and energy to learn and potential to bring positive change in the society.

The project team believes that the National Manual, one of the other outputs of the project, will successfully get integrated into the formal education and serve as practical tool for students and teachers and help to establish a bridge for future cooperation between communities and youth, therefore, ensuring the sustainability of the project.

Regarding the ownership of key stakeholders and community involvement, the project team learnt that the community members lack confidence and over the years have developed certain level of fear to own their ICH practices due to a strong and, in some parts of the country, aggressive process of Islamization. Therefore, direct involvement of community members into the project implementation proved to be quite effective in raising community's self-confidence and sense of ownership.

Having worked in close collaboration with the community members and travelling through rural areas, the project team has learned that the timing of the project was precise, as the pilgrimage practices and rituals at sacred sites are in an alarming state due to various reasons. Therefore, delivery of project outputs became one of the valuable measures and steps in safeguarding concerned community's ICH and raising its visibility among general public of the country.

In terms of project management and implementation, the project team learnt that there is a need to carry out more and extensive interactive workshops involving wider range of community members and stakeholders in rural areas. It would be effective to involve various national and international experts, national and international community leaders, religious representatives and leaders of civil sector and representatives of state bodies to come and work together and get equipped with necessary tools and knowledge for building a constructive dialogue and developing effective safeguarding measures.

Annexes

List the annexes and documentation included in the report:

- publications, evaluation reports and other outputs, when applicable
- progress reports prepared during the contract period
- list of major equipment provided under the project and status after termination of contract period
- other (please specify)

Annex 1 - inventory of ritual practices and sacred sites in Russian and Kyrgyz languages to be inscribed into the State Inventory;

Annex 2 - short information and content of the NMSPP translated into English;

Annex 3 - photo/video documentation with filled out ICH-7 forms;

Annex 4 - list of TV and Radio appearances;

Annex 5 - first progress report;

Annex 6 - second progress report;

Annex 7 - printing house bidding documents;

Name and signature of the person having completed the report

Name: Cholponai U-G

Title: Project coordinator

Date: 9 October 2020

Signature: 