



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Intangible
Cultural
Heritage

International Assistance

ICH-04-Report – Form

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE FUND

PROGRESS 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
Reporting period:	From: 15/May/2019 to: 09/November/2019
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 CRC/Project Coordinator</p> <p>Address: 93 Toktogul St.</p> <p>Telephone number: +996 312 664 832</p> <p>E-mail address: office@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. Established and developed as part of nomadic nations' world- and self-perception, pilgrimage and ritual practices at sacred sites were used to establish connection with the ancestor and guardian spirits, strengthen bonds with forces of Nature and establish inner balance. These practices withstood the test of time through the span of history. The pilgrimage tradition and ritual practices have seen its days of difficulties and challenges during the atheistic Soviet era, when these practices were harshly banned, but as a true example of a living heritage it's still practiced today by numerous pilgrims, practitioners and bearers of ICH.

The pilgrimage practices haven't been studied and researched much after the collapse of the Soviet Union, although it's an essential part of Kyrgyz people's intangible cultural heritage. Aigine CRC was the pioneer institution that initiated the nationwide systematic study of sacred sites and related ritual practices from 2004 to 2015.

Thus, at the time of the request for assistance, over 1,000 sacred sites and a number of ritual practices were identified and documented by Aigine CRC. The center also established a database of sacred site guardians, pilgrims, practitioners and ICH bearers in all 7 provinces and initiated collaboration processes. Aigine CRC systematized and made publications of collected data in Kyrgyz, Russian and English languages. However, the national inventory of pilgrimage practices and sacred sites hasn't been elaborated and inscribed into the state inventory of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Therefore, the main need aimed to be addressed by the assistance was elaboration and establishment of the national inventory of sacred sites and related ritual practices followed by its inscription to the state inventory and development and preparation of the national manual on safeguarding measures.

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 the concerned communities and stakeholders - practitioners, guardians, pilgrims, local and state government agencies, researchers and NGOs - to carry out and implement required measures for safeguarding the pilgrimage practices and sacred sites on different levels.

The third need aimed to be addressed by the assistance was conducting capacity building and awareness raising activities on the 2003 Convention among the concerned community members and stakeholders, as well as to raise general publics' awareness and information on pilgrimage practices to sacred sites in the Kyrgyz Republic.

The following main gaps that the assistance aimed to address were:

- absence of a unified national inventory of sacred sites and pilgrimage practices;
- pilgrimage practices not being represented on the country's national 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 outlets.

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

The project team has undertaken the following activities during Stage II to reflect the progress towards achieving the final project results and objectives. The undertaken activities and their successful outcomes are reflected under each point.

(i) The objectives:

(a) the identification of elements of living heritage related to sacred sites in Kyrgyzstan to ensure their continued viability;

-- The project team started undertaking activities to achieve the abovementioned objective by launching community based inventorying of sacred sites and ritual practices in all 7 provinces of the country during Stage I with the help of specifically identified and selected regional working group coordinators. Then the inventoried sacred sites and ritual practices were carefully examined, cross checked and discussed during the on-site capacity building training courses with the concerned community members and stakeholders for accuracy and comprehensive representation.

The project team and the coordinators of the regional working groups along with community members are still undertaking follow-up activities directed at cross-checking, overviewing and updating the information on identified sacred sites and ritual practices. These activities will continue during Stage III of the project (please see Annex I for updated list).

(b) improved public awareness of the importance of intangible cultural heritage;

-- Activities on raising and improving public awareness through regular participation in radio and TV talk shows of coordinators of regional working groups has taken place during the implementation of Stage I, while series of documentaries by Aigine CRC on sacred sites in Kyrgyz language have aired weekly on Manas TV channel in August and September.

The project team has been proactively and regularly posting project news, updates and also sharing information on sacred sites and ritual practices on the Aigine CRC's website and social networking page. The project team made series of short videos, about 3-5 minutes, during the on-site inventorying and capacity building workshops with communities in all 7 provinces. The videos feature and give voice to practitioners, sacred site guardians and pilgrims, who tell their stories and emphasize importance of ICH in their lives and in the lives of their communities, and also stress the value and significance of pilgrimage practices for the whole community of Kyrgyz people, especially for young generation. These videos have been posted on most popular social networking pages and received quite a few shares and likes. It is of great significance when the importance of ICH is stressed and conveyed visually and verbally by community members and practitioners themselves, which provides a direct connection of the viewer with the bearer.

(c) the increased capacity of the stakeholders concerned to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage in question, in order to ensure its transmission to the future generation.

-- To address this objective, the project team has conducted series of on-site capacity building workshops for concerned community members and other stakeholders in all 7

provinces during the implementation of Stage II of the project. Members from the concerned communities - sacred site guardians, practitioners, pilgrims, and various stakeholders - historians, teachers, journalists, writers, local government officials - totaling 89 people, participated in these workshops. The participants became well familiar with the 2003 Convention on ICH, its safeguarding principles and the role of communities in ensuring viability and transmission of ICH.

During group works, the participants discussed threats, challenges and risks in contemporary state of pilgrimage practices and sacred sites in their regions and worked on compiling safeguarding measures that would address those challenges and risks. Thus, both the community members and other stakeholders along with national experts on ICH were able to come together, build a dialogue, raise current pressing issues and find ways to address them. In this regard, the on-site capacity building workshops were invaluable in terms of information and ideas exchange. By the end of each course, participants were more confident in their practices, energized and encouraged to safeguard and transmit their ICH elements, while other stakeholders came to deeper understanding of the significance of ICH and ensuring its further viability and transmission. Therefore, the project team is quite confident to state that this objective was fully addressed during the Stage II of the project.

The results:

(a) an inventory published on intangible cultural heritage related to sacred sites in Kyrgyzstan for their safeguarding;

-- The progress to achieve this result is being successfully carried out by the project team. During Stage I, community-based inventorying of sacred sites and ritual practices have been conducted and regularly updated during Stage II. In the course of on-site capacity building workshops, community members and concerned stakeholders together with the national ICH experts and project team has developed first draft of the National Inventory document that was analyzed and reviewed by an international ICH expert. The second draft of the National Inventory is completed and the project team is in the process of filling in the data and preparing the final draft as part of the Stage III (please see Annex V for details on the inventory).

(b) safeguarding measures developed, in the form of a national manual, for the elements of intangible cultural heritage in question;

-- The progress to achieve this result was successfully implemented during Stage II. The project team has developed a plan and general layout for the National Manual together with national ICH experts, which was discussed and thoroughly reviewed with the concerned community members and stakeholders during the on-site capacity building workshops. During the workshops, suggestions and ideas for safeguarding measures on sacred sites and pilgrimage practices on individual, community, regional and national levels have been collected from concerned community members and stakeholders. Then the first draft of the manual was developed by the project team/national experts and reviewed by the international expert with his feedback and suggestions. During Stage III the project team will put together the final draft of the manual (please see Annex VI for manual draft).

(c) capacity building training provided to the stakeholders concerned.

-- The project team carried out 7 on-site capacity building workshops for 89 concerned community members and stakeholders from 6 June to 6 October 2019 with proactive involvement and participation of 2 national experts on ICH (please see Annex II for the list of participants). The participants received full texts of the 2003 Convention in Kyrgyz language provided by the National Commission of the Kyrgyz Republic for UNESCO and other books on sacred sites published by Aigine CRC. The national experts on ICH provided in-depth information on the 2003 Convention and its safeguarding principles along

with the role and importance of communities in ensuring viability and transmission of ICH. These training courses have significantly contributed to strengthening the capacity and raising the awareness of community members' on their role and significance of their ICH. It was evident that learning about the Convention and the plan to inscribe the list of sacred sites and pilgrimage rituals into the state inventory, boosted the sense of recognition and self-worth of concerned community members and also provided motivation to continue practicing, safeguarding and transmitting their ICH to the younger generation.

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 project team has carried out the following activities during Stage II of the project from 16 May to 11 November 2019.

1. The project team together with the coordinators of the on-site working groups planned, organized and conducted a 3-day on-site capacity building workshops for concerned community members - sacred site guardians, practitioners, pilgrims and other interested stakeholders from 6 June to 6 October, 2019. In each province, the regional coordinators were in charge of setting the workshop dates, selecting a place and venue, identifying participants from the concerned community and choosing sacred sites for group pilgrimages.

There were from 11 to 14 participants who took part in these workshops. Initially, the project team planned on inviting 11 participants in each province, however, community-based inventorying and public awareness raising carried out by the regional working groups have significantly increased communities' and stakeholders' interest in the project. Thus, the news on the capacity building workshops attracted more people eager to participate; thus, in total, there were 89 participants in 7 regions. The project team was able to include all the interested members and managed to stay within the budget (please see Annex III for workshop summaries in each province).

At the beginning of Stage II, the project team identified and invited 3 national experts on ICH to be involved in on-site capacity workshops as facilitators. These experts have been working with Aigine CRC for over 10 years on number of projects and have been representing Kyrgyzstan in various ICH related conferences and workshops. Their work have encompassed different aspects of ICH, from historical, philosophical and community perspectives. Therefore, their knowledge and expertise were invaluable in delivering the workshops and working with the communities and stakeholders.

- 1) Abdaliev Gulzada, Cand. Sc. History, Associate Professor at the I.Arabaev State University, national ICH expert;
- 2) Kojobekova Aijarkyn, PhD in Philosophy, Associate Professor at the American University in Central Asia, national ICH expert and facilitator;
- 3) Samakov Aibek, MA in Natural Resources Management, an expert on natural heritage sites of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention .

Ms. Abdaliev and Ms. Kojobekova travelled with the project team to Chui and Osh provinces, while Mr. Samakov and Ms. Kojobekova travelled to Jalal-Abad, Batken, Talas, Naryn and Yssyk-Kul provinces.

The agenda of the workshop was designed in the same way for each province. The 1st day

of the workshop was devoted to introduction and overview of the 2003 Convention. The following main concepts - ICH, communities and their role, safeguarding principles and ensuring ICH viability - were discussed and analysed. The full text of the Convention in Kyrgyz language provided by the National Commission of the Kyrgyz Republic for UNESCO was distributed among all the participants. It was quite surprising to learn that 99,9% of all the workshop participants didn't have prior knowledge of the Convention and the information provided by the ICH experts and the project team was greatly appreciated and much needed. There is a big information and knowledge gap among communities and stakeholders as participants mentioned it being one of the main challenges. Therefore, there is a strong need to provide capacity building workshops encompassing wider range and greater number of communities and stakeholders.

The 2nd day was on detailed discussion of the current state of sacred sites and pilgrimage practices in the regions - challenges, issues, risks and threats were identified and presented by the participants. To address these challenges, the participants worked on and identified safeguarding measures on sacred sites and pilgrimage practices on individual, community, regional and national levels. Participants also discussed and answered the following questions - what are the pilgrimage practices; who are the community/ies & stakeholders and what are their commonalities and differences.

Thus, the communities and stakeholders together with the ICH experts and the project team prepared and developed the main concept for the National Manual. Community members and stakeholders identified and listed the following as some major risks among many - lack of information, devoted Muslims, absence of law on sacred sites and pilgrimage practices and lack of visibility, ownership and recognition from the local, regional, national authorities and certain segments of society. The project team believes that the inscription of the inventory of sacred sites and pilgrimage practices into the state inventory will address the communities' concerns and needs in terms of empowerment, ensuring recognition and increasing visibility. The first draft of the manual was prepared upon completion of all the regional workshops.

The 3rd day of the workshop was a working meeting with the regional coordinator, working groups and participants on crosschecking, data verification and selection of sacred sites and ritual practices from each province to be included in the Inventory. There were some sites and rituals that no longer exist/practiced, they have been removed from the list, while some new sites and rituals have been added. The first draft of the inventory has been prepared upon completion of all the workshops.

The project team would like to mention that one of the members of the Steering Committee, sacred site guardian, Jenish Kudakeev, passed away in the summer of 2019. During the workshop in Talas, the project team and the community members organized a group lunch dedicated to his memory with participation of his family members, his wife and son, who became the guardians of Nyldy-Ata sacred site in Talas after him. Currently, the project team is in search of a new member for the Steering Committee to take Jenish Kudakeev's place.

2. At the initiative of the community members and stakeholders, within the course of the workshop, the project team together with the experts and participants made several trips to sacred sites. The main idea was to practically demonstrate to participants how identification, documentation and inventorying of ICH is carried out. Participants were able to be both, the interviewers and interviewees. They took part in photo and video documentation and collection. They were able to witness the whole complex of ICH inventorying.

3. The project team analysed the workshop data and prepared the first drafts of the inventory and the manual upon completion of all the workshops.

4. The project team identified and invited Mr. Gaura Mancacaritadipura, international ICH expert from Indonesia. Aigine CRC has known and been working with Mr.

Mancacaritadipura on various international platforms of UNESCO, and he is the expert, who

worked out the national ICH inventory of Indonesia. Therefore, the project team was confident that Mr. Mancacaritadipura's expertise and extensive experience will highly contribute to elaborating the national inventory of sacred sites and pilgrimage practices.

The project team contacted Mr. Mancacaritadipura in the summer and chose 22-23-24 as the workshop days. Upon completion of all the workshops, the project team put together the first draft of the inventory and the manual. Mr. Mancacaritadipura closely studied the prepared documents and provided his feedbacks and suggestions and produced a report on the project implementation and products at the end of his trip (please see Annex IV for the expert's report).

Apart from office meetings and paper discussions, the project team took Mr. Mancacaritadipura for a pilgrimage to Yssyk-Ata sacred site together with 2 practitioners, who performed sham-jaguu, a pilgrimage ritual. It was aimed to provide a hands-on experience, where the expert is directly involved in ICH practice, thus will receive deeper and meaningful understanding of the pilgrimage.

The project team organized a joint meeting of an international expert, coordinators of the working groups, members of the Steering Committee to discuss the project progress, inventory and the manual.

5. The project team developed the second draft of the inventory and manual with consideration of Mr. Mancacaritadipura's valuable feedback and recommendations. During the Stage III of the project, the team will start filling in these documents with collected data and preparing the final drafts for publication during Stage III of the project.

6. The project team is in the process of systematizing and cross checking all the data for the inventory and the manual and continues working with the coordinators of the regional working groups and national ICH experts. The team has already initiated and conducted a meeting with 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 system. All the necessary documents and forms will be filled out during Stage III for the inventory to be inscribed into the state inventory system.

7. The progress report of Stage II along with Annexes will be sent out to the members of the Steering Committee for their review and feedback.

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

Directly concerned community members in the field of sacred sites and pilgrimage practices are - sacred site guardians, practitioners, pilgrims and bearers of traditional knowledge. Aigine CRC has a long history of successful and reliable collaboration with them.

The project team employs 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. Representative from each province were chosen and involved in inventorying process, one of them becoming the coordinator of the regional working group. They underwent basic training on inventorying, received audio/visual equipment to conduct their field research and were fully in charge of their activities, data collection and reporting during Stage I of project implementation.

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 choose a place and venue, select/invite participants from the concerned community and other stakeholders, and choose sacred sites for group visits during the course. In the course of the training, the 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 work out safeguarding measures to address those issues.

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 verifying, updating, crosschecking and compiling all the collected data and putting it together for the final documents of the project.

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

The project team can already see the benefits of the project during its implementation. The main benefits it grants to concerned community members and stakeholders - greater sense of ownership and recognition. The communities start feeling that their ICH and their values are not overlooked and paid attention to, that they matter in society and that they're ICH practices are important and recognized. The on-site capacity building trainings, in particular have significantly contributed to increased sense of ownership and self-worth.

The main result of the projects of the project - the inventory of sacred sites and pilgrimage practices - will be inscribed into the state inventory, while the second main result of the project - national manual on safeguarding measures - will serve as a practical tool or a guideline to be used by any community member and stakeholder to choose and implement safeguarding measures on any given level. These results along with communities' enhanced capacity will ensure sustainability of the project and further actions and activities that are to be carried out.

As a result of participatory approach, community-based inventorying, awareness raising and on-site capacity building activities, coordinators of the regional working groups, concerned community members and stakeholders began self-organizing into informal groups in order to start addressing some of the pressing issues related to sacred sites and pilgrimage practices in their regions. The leaders of these informal groups have further plans on establishing a formal state association of sacred site guardians and practitioners to address to implement safeguarding measures and address their issues on a national level. These ideas, plans and initiatives are a strong indicator of the project's sustainability after its completion.

The project team will continue its strong and successful cooperation with the concerned

communities and stakeholders during Stage III of the project and ensure continuation of the benefits the project brings to the main beneficiaries.

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

One of the key lessons learned throughout Stage I and II of project delivery - the state of pilgrimage practices to sacred sites is alarming. The sacred sites as such are there and still strongly represented, however the pilgrimage practices aka performance of rituals, ceremonies and rites face significant risks and threats. The overall number of sacred site guardians have greatly diminished compared to 7-10 years ago. The main concern that was raised by communities and stakeholders - the restrictions they face to perform pilgrimage rituals at sacred sites. These restrictions are imposed and come from strict followers of Islam, who criticize and condemn those, who make visit sacred sites and practice rituals. This social pressure make communities feel vulnerable and instil sense of certain guilt and doubt of their ICH practices.

However, delivery of on-site capacity building trainings with a strong emphasize on 2003 Convention, participation of the communities in the project implementation and planning of activities - greatly contribute to strengthening their sense of ownership, recognition and visibility and strongly motivate them to continue practicing, safeguarding and transmitting their ICH the current difficulties and challenges notwithstanding.

Upon implementation of Stages I and II, the project team is strongly confident that the initiation of the project and its delivery is quite timely. The attainment of the expected results, particularly the inventory of sacred sites and ritual practices, and its inscription into the state inventory will be of pivotal importance for the communities' representation and confidence to carry on with their ICH practice.

Another important lesson learned was the significance of awareness raising and capacity building as the notion of ICH and 2003 Convention is almost non-existent among communities themselves and wider public in general. Therefore, if the awareness of the Kyrgyz society on the importance of the intangible cultural heritage is raised and the capacity of communities and stakeholders is strengthened - then the viability and safeguarding of country's ICH, especially pilgrimage practices, will be ensured. And this is the notion the project team was able to deliver to concerned communities and stakeholders we worked with. The communities now have a greater sense of ownership and understanding that the safeguarding and transmission of their ICH starts with them on an individual and community levels.

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)*

All the Annexes are included as separate attachments.

Name and signature of the person having completed the report

Name: Cholponai U-G

Title: Project coordinator

Date: 11 November 2019

Signature: 