# INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE FUND

# PROGRESS NARRATIVE REPORT

Beneficiary State(s) Party(ies): The Kyrgyz Republic

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| Project title: | Digital Journey to ICH of Kyrgyzstan |
| Reporting period: | From: 01/04/2023 to: 30/08/2025 |
| Budget: | Total: US$145,995.00<br><br>*Including:*<br>Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund: US$99 963,00<br>State Party contribution: US$21 425,00<br>Other contributions: US$24 607,00 |
| Implementing agency (contracting partner or UNESCO Field Office): | Aigine Cultural Research Center |
| Contact person: | Title (Ms/Mr, etc.): Ms.<br>Family name: Usubalieva-Gryshchuk<br>Given name: Cholponai<br>Institution/position: Aigine CRC, Head of Project Implementation Unit<br>Address: 93 Toktogul Street<br>Telephone number: +996 312 664 832<br>E-mail address: office@aigine.kg<br>cholponai.ug@gmail.com |
| Partner agency (in the case of a service from UNESCO project): | N/A |
| Implementing partners: | N/A |

## Background

### Background information:

In 2018-2020, Aigine CRC implemented a community-based inventorying project on Safeguarding Practices and Rare Rituals Related to Sacred Sites in Kyrgyzstan supported by the International Assistance Fund. As a result, community-based inventory of 36 pilgrimage rituals and practices along with 1,233 sacred sites across the country was achieved. The National Manual of Safeguarding Pilgrimage Practices and Sacred Sites was prepared by ICH community leaders and published by Aigine CRC with risks and challenges identified and safeguarding measures proposed that could be undertaken on the state, regional and community levels. A group of sacred site guardians, pilgrims, practitioners and community leaders united under the name of Heritage Protectors (HP) together with Aigine CRC started undertaking activities to implement the abovementioned safeguarding measures on the state level by cooperating with the Ministry of Culture, Information, Sports and Youth Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic (MoC). One of the results of this activity was inscription of the pilgrimage practices and sacred sites into the National Inventory of ICH elements of the Kyrgyz Republic as a separate domain.

In 2020-2021, in the process of wider dissemination of the National Manual among state educational institutions and deliberate discussions of various ICH stakeholders on the current state of ICH safeguarding in the country, the following **needs** and **gaps** were identified:

a) the existing significant knowledge, information, awareness gap and insufficient number of educational materials on the concept of intangible cultural heritage and the 2003 Convention in the local language – according to the community leaders of pilgrimage practices, this particular gap hinders the efficiency of safeguarding programs and activities. There are a number of current regulatory, educational and ideological risks of pilgrimage practices at sacred sites identified during the previous project that need to be addressed by increasing and diversifying information and raising awareness of general public, especially youth. This issue was specifically emphasised and reflected upon by the community leaders;

b) a need to modernise the National Inventory of ICH elements – according to concerned communities, the current inventory lacks a number of ICH elements in all of its domains; there is no up-to-date information on concerned ICH communities and other stakeholders, no information on mechanisms for monitoring ICH safeguarding activities that are being implemented. Additionally, the concerned communities feel that the National Inventory has low visibility and is not tailored to satisfy the need for information on cultural heritage of younger generation. As an information resource, the National Inventory is not represented at or integrated into any state or non-state database of cultural institutions, spaces or museums;

c) the underrepresentation of cultural heritage of ethnic minorities living in Kyrgyzstan – currently there is no registry of ICH elements of any other ethnic groups living in Kyrgyzstan, which was identified during Aigine CRC's work with various ethnic communities in 2018-2020 on the historical events of 1916. During the event, Dungan and Uyghur communities raised the issue of underrepresentation of cultural heritage of ethnic minorities living in Kyrgyzstan. Dungans and Uyghurs constitute a large part of the country's population. They have rich and vibrant cultural heritage and practices, which aren't known outside their communities, and the wider general public is incognizant of their heritage. Thus, in early 2022, Aigine CRC initiated three workshops with Dungan and Uyghur community leaders to discuss the possibility of community-

based inventorying of their ICH elements. Representatives of these two communities have given their consent and willingness to initiate the process of community-based and community-led inventory of their ICH.

After multiple deliberate consultations and discussions with the concerned communities, a request for international assistance was submitted aimed to address the above-mentioned needs and gaps as a second phase of Aigine CRC's previous project on Safeguarding Practices and Rare Rituals Related to Sacred Sites in Kyrgyzstan.

The aim is to establish an interactive multimedia digital platform (website) of modernized National Inventory of ICH elements inclusive of 8 (eight) ICH domains with information on ICH communities, active stakeholders, safeguarding activities, photo/audio/visual materials, comprehensive infographics on the basic texts of the 2003 Convention, as well as the ICH inventory of Dungan and Uyghur ethnic groups living in Kyrgyzstan. It was requested by the concerned communities that the platform be specifically tailored at younger generation with attention-catching visual layout. To raise the visibility and practical use of the Inventory, it's envisioned that the platform be integrated into the database of city and regional museums of culture and history accessible by university and school students, rural communities and general public.

The concerned communities believe that addressing the above-mentioned needs will contribute to popularisation and promotion of the 2003 Convention, strengthen sense of ownership, recognition, inclusion as well as will ensure and foster social cohesion, mutual respect and understanding between different ICH communities living in Kyrgyzstan. The assistance will also render significant contribution into building a stronger partnership of different ICH stakeholders in the country.

## 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 Administration team (PA) diligently follows the proposed timetable of activities and is progressively moving towards fully attaining the project results. This is the initial progress report and covering activities and attained results of only the first 5 (five) months out of the total 30 (thirty) months of the project. As of August 30 2023, the first 9 (nine) activities of Stage I were implemented, results of which are directed towards partially attaining the project objectives at this stage.

The concept, visual layout and preliminary sitemap of the digital platform is developed together by PA, Working Group (WG) and Monitoring Consulting and Evaluation group (MCE) and submitted to the selected website development company. The community-based inventorying of Dungan and Uyghur ethnic groups kicked-off with a preliminary list of ICH domains and elements listed.
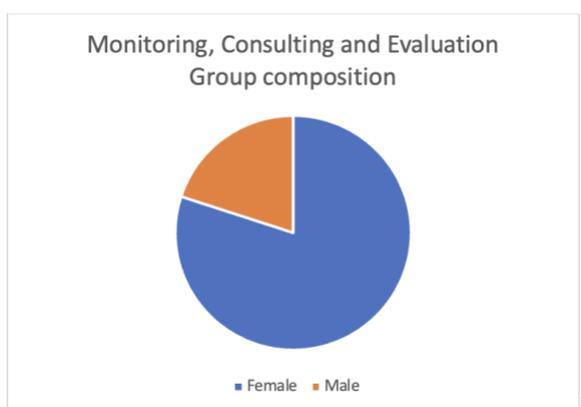
One of the most important results of these activities is the new concept of modernization and internal reorganization/restructuring of the National Inventory of ICH elements. The Working Group (WG) members are overviewing each domain and its elements' list based on their current viability, transmission status and frequency of practice. As a result, subdomains are being introduced (Annexes 9/9a/9b – example of 3 updated domains) with elimination of certain elements and introduction of new, previously, not included elements into each domain. The MCE, WG and PA is paying special attention to the viability and transmission status and plans to categorize each element *from widely to not* practiced/transmitted. This status will indicate the current state of the element to various stakeholders and the State and will give incentive to take

necessary measures.

The inclusion of the 8<sup>th</sup> domain on pilgrimage practices and two more inventories – Dungan and Uyghur ethnic groups into the modernized National Inventory viewed by the ICH community members as a one of the viable ways of transmission and safeguarding.

The process and results of these implemented activities have been communicated and shared on Aigine CRC's social network pages and website on a regular basis. These news posts have heightened interest on the project and stimulated discussion with some valuable feedback and comments from ICH community members. The possibility of capturing a wider audience of interested people through social networks became an unexpected, but positive result that WG and PA will definitely keep sustaining.

The gender ratio of the PA, WG and MCE composition is predominantly female, giving more space and voice to female practitioners and ICH community members. This ratio is also dictated by a traditional gender composition of practitioners/bearers of each domain. As part of the restructured National Inventory, the WG is compiling a detailed list of communities for each domain and listed elements with more specific gender and age analyses, which will be reflected in the next progress report.

Working Group composition

Female  Male

Project Administration Team

Female  Male

Monitoring, Consulting and Evaluation Group composition

Female  Male

## 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*

To ensure effective logical sequence of the project implementation, the key activities are divided into 3 (three) separate stages – Stage I, Stage II and Stage III accordingly. The current

progress report covers the project implementation from 1 April 2023 to 30 August 2023.

**Stage 1** (1st – 10th months / April 2023 – January 2024)

Activity 1 – A Project Administration team (PA) of three (3) Aigine CRC staff comprised of the coordinator, assistant coordinator and financial manager (administrative assistance) was formed on 1 April 2023 upon official signing of the project contract to carry out project administration and logistical implementation of activities *(Annex 1)*;

Activity 2 – a Working Group (WG) of ten (10) people comprised of 8 (eight) Kyrgyz ICH domain community representatives and 2 (two) members of Dungan and Uyghur ethnic groups is formed on 20 April 2023. The PA contacted the concerned communities who were consulted before submitting the project application and who gave their consent to digitize the National Inventory to assign responsible persons to become the WG members and represent their domain for the duration of the project. This decision carried out by communities was based on knowledge inflecting decision-making, responsive to the needs and priorities of the communities *(Annex 2)*;

Activity 3 – a Monitoring, Consulting and Evaluation group (MCE) of 5 (five) people – two (2) ICH elders, one (1) MoC representative, one (1) Natcom representative, one (1) representative of the ICH NGO was formed on 25 April 2023 *(Annex 3)*. The preliminary list of MCE members was drafted during the project proposal phase by HP and Aigine CRC with their approval and confirmation received on the possibility to join the MCE. The mixed composition of the MCE is to strengthen mutual collaboration between stakeholders and to ensure fair representation.

Activity 4 – on 20-30 April 2023, PA conducted a two-day workshop, first for the established WG and MCE members to overview the project, its objectives, expected results, modality of action, as well as to discuss the responsibilities and functions of each group – PA, WG and MCE. Questions were raised on the content of each domain of the current National Inventory. The importance of adding sub-domains and necessity to make the internal reorganization of domains was highlighted. General brainstorming of the concept of visual layout of the digital platform was initiated *(Annex 4)*. The second-day workshop was on community-based inventorying for Dungan and Uyghur community leaders and members. Djon Ali, a leader of the Center for Dungan and Chinese Studies under the Academy of Sciences together with his fellow young researcher, Jyldyz Aituganova, and Saifulla Abdullaev, a doctor of philology and professor at the Kyrgyz State Ysyk-Kol University in Karakol became familiar with basic concepts of the Convention, inventory methodology and approaches and received capacity building handout materials prepared by the PA *(Annex 4a)*;

Activity 5 – May through June 2023, the PA carried out 6 (six) online and 2 (two) offline consultation sessions with members of the WG and MCE to develop the overall concept, visual layout and sitemap of the digital platform. Different viewpoints were raised during the discussion, but majority group members put forth the idea to divert from classical static website structure, and rather make a strong emphasis on diversifying the visual stylistics of the website with various elements of motion animation. The underlying idea is to immerse the viewer into the world of Kyrgyz, Dungan and Uyghur ICH through vibrant and animated visual associations of each domain and element, where the audio/visual data might outweigh the textual information. It was decided by the WG that the visual layout of the future website to be hand painted by a young student of the State Academy of Arts, Anara Alybaeva, with online consultation of the the WG and PA *(Annex 5)*.

Activity 6 – Having approved the concept and visual layout of the digital platform at the end of June 2023, the PA announced a call for proposals outlining all the requirements among experienced companies working on website, software and multimedia product development *(Annex 6)*. Total of 3 (three) commercial offers were received on 22 June 2022. The offer submitted by company Tentek with the lowest cost was selected to develop the digital platform *(Annex 6a)*;

Activity 7 – Upon selection of the website developer, the PA, WG and MCE carried out an online consultation with representatives of Tentek to overview and discuss the Terms of Reference (ToR). The ToR was worked out by PA based on the concept and visual layout of the digital platform *(Annex 5)*. Due to summer holidays, not all the members could make it to

the meeting, but the majority members were present. Tentek presented its work portfolio and previous produced multimedia products and websites. The developer received the finalized ToR and started the initial steps in developing the platform. The first draft design of the developed website will be available in November 2023.

Activity 8 – As of June 2023, the WG has started the process of collecting existing textual and audio/visual data pertinent to the current National Inventory of ICH elements *(Annex 7)*, which will continue up to December 2023. The representatives of the Dungan and Uyghur ethnic groups finalized the overall structure of their Inventory's domain and started documentation and community-based inventorying of identified ICH elements, *(Annex 7a & Annex 7b)* which will continue up to March 2024.

Activity 9 – As of July 2023, the PA held 2 (two) consultation sessions with the WG to brainstorm for ideas on modernizing the National Inventory of ICH elements. The WG members expressed their desire to reorganize and restructure each domain of the current National Inventory by adding necessary sub-domains, extending the list of ICH elements, adding information on concerned communities and stakeholders. This is an ongoing activity until December 2023.

The remaining activities of the Stage I will be covered in the second progress report scheduled for 31 July 2024.

## 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*

Participatory approach: has been one of the main methodologies used by Aigine CRC in all of its projects. Community members and practitioners are the main actors, experts and partners of Aigine CRC in the field of ICH. Aigine CRC provides institutional, organisational and technical support and serves as an umbrella organisation uniting communities and stakeholders.

Grassroots approach: the idea of creating the unified digital platform was requested by the community of sacred site guardians, pilgrims, practitioners and community leaders united under the name of Heritage Protectors (HP) as a safeguarding measure to address the current regulatory, educational and ideological risks of pilgrimage practices at sacred sites. The idea of community-based inventory of Dungan and Uyghur ethnic groups was initiated by the Center for Dungan and Chinese Studies under the Academy of Science together and the Renaissance – Uyghur-Uzbek Ethnocultural Center. Aigine CRC addressed these requests by providing the concerned communities with institutional support and applying for assistance on their behalf.

Knowledge inflecting decision-making: consequently, when the assistance was approved, the concerned ICH communities appointed responsible individuals with necessary expertise to become the main actors of the project – members of the Working Group responsible to implement the planned project activities. The WG is comprised of the representatives of all 8 (eight) ICH domains and 2 (two) ethnic groups, who have direct and equal access and share responsibility in the project's implementation.

The Aigine CRC provides an oversight, technical and organizational support and works under the guidance of the WG members. Please see the section above on project implementation for details of the concerned communities' direct involvement for this reporting period.

## 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 is into its fifth month and the sustainability of activities has been the top priority from the very beginning.

The PA can already attest that concerned communities being the main actors responsible for implementation of the project activities contribute to acquisition of a greater sense of inclusion, recognition, responsibility and acceptance, which in turn increases the sense of ownership. The community members feel encouraged and motivated to raise visibility of their cultural heritage's full potential. Uniting and representing vibrant and rich cultural heritage of 3 (three) ethnic groups in a unique interactive multimedia digital platform with comprehensive information on the 2003 Convention and ICH communities in 2 (two) state languages, is strongly believed to contribute to strengthened capacity of concerned communities and sustainability of the project result in the future. Detailed information on this section is to follow in the subsequent progress reports to come.

## 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*

Over the course of the last 5 (five) months, the PA experienced a new perspective of the concept of community ownership and benefits it can generate. Concerned ICH community members have a leading role in implementation of project activities, which gave them boost of extra motivation and encouragement. They acquired a strong sense of responsibility for their role as members of WG and are demonstrating tireless and timely efforts in representing their ICH domains. They became more outwardly and outspoken in expressing their ideas, needs and building a dialogue among various stakeholders.

The PA also learned that multitude sources of information and data on cultural heritage notwithstanding, actually there is no valuable and practical information available for wider public, especially tailored at youth. Most of the information on ICH is of a repetitive nature and doesn't reflect the wisdom/knowledge of the heritage. We also learned that the content of the National Inventory on ICH elements is outdated and a bit static and doesn't reflect the spirit of the living heritage. The WG members working on internal reorganization and restructuring of the Inventory, which will undoubtedly give it a new life and perspective.

Another new observation worth mentioning is on usefulness of informing the public not only about the attained results, but also about the process of project implementation through the social networks. This provides opportunity to follow the process and gives possibility to various

stakeholders to monitor the implementation of the project.

It's just been only a short while into the project and we believe that more valuable lessons are waiting ahead of us.

## 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_PA member list Annex 1*

*Annex 2_WG member list*

*Annex 3_MCE member list*

*Annex 4_Two-day workshop_PA, WG and MCE*

*Annex 4a_Two-day workshop_Community-based inventorying for Dungan and Uygur ethnic groups*

*Annex 5_Website design, structure and concept*

*Annex 6_Call for proposal on website design and development*

*Annex 6a_Commercial offers on website development*

*Annex 7_Current textual data on National Inventory of ICH elements*

*Annex 7a_Fraft outline and domain structure of Uyghur ICH Inventory*

*Annex 7b_Fraft outline and domain structure of Dungan ICH Inventory*

*Annex 8_ICH-07_photo*

*Annex 8a_ICH-07_Video_1*

*Annex 8b_ICH-07_Video_2*

*Annex 9_ Traditional crafts and craftsmanship*

*Annex 9a_Traditional games*

*Annex 9b_Social Practices and Rituals*

## Name and signature of the person having completed the report

Name: Cholponai Usubalieva-Gryshchuk

Title: Project coordinator

Date: 30 August 2023

Signature: