

Statements and Recommendations for Safeguarding ICH in Disasters and Mobilising ICH for Disaster Risk Reduction

Preamble

The Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on Intangible Cultural Heritage and Natural Disasters was convened in Sendai, Japan, 7-9 December 2018. The workshop was organised by the International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI) as its research project in FY 2018, in cooperation with the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties (co-organiser), and the Center for Northeast Asian Studies, Tohoku University (cooperating body). The workshop was attended by more than forty Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) researchers, policy makers, and observers from Australia, Bangladesh, China, Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Vanuatu, and Vietnam within the Asia-Pacific region, Peru in Latin America, the UNESCO Office in Beijing and three UNESCO Category 2 Centres in the field of ICH (ICHCAP, CRIHAP, and CRESPIAL).

Statements

Reflecting on the discussions held at this three-day workshop, the workshop participants made a series of statements and recommendations. While these are specifically intended for ICH and DRR researchers they are relevant to all sectors working at the intersection of culture and DRR. Workshop participants noted the following features of the relationship between ICH and DRR:

- ICH-related DRR strategies have been developed, refined, and transmitted over centuries, reflecting long-term relationships between people and their environments.
- ICH practices, such as religious rites, ceremonies, stories and legends, and other community-based activities, are an effective tool for DRR, including post-disaster recovery.
- Certain ICH elements have been identified as playing a highly specialized role in DRR and community resilience, such as traditional weather and hazard indicators, and traditional food preservation.
- Traditional forms of building, engineering and agricultural knowledge that rely on the use of locally-sourced raw materials can be effective in both reducing disaster risk and supporting and strengthening community resilience.
- ICH embodied in museums, monuments and other commemorative institutions and objects, sustains and transmits a collective memory of disasters.
- The effectiveness and applicability of ICH in support of DRR depends on a range of factors, including the nature of the hazard, the scale of disaster, and the social context in which they occur.

- In a context of changing environmental conditions, the efficacy of certain ICH practices and knowledge is being questioned. It is unclear how traditional indicators of impending disaster, or DRR practices, operate under these new conditions.

Recommendations

1. Understand the nature of disaster impacts on `ICH` or living heritage.

- 1.1. Due to the 'intangible' nature of ICH, it is not always easy to identify how it is impacted by disasters associated with natural hazards. In many instances, impacts are assessed in terms of damage to the tangible features of ICH, such as the places where ICH is practiced or performed, or the equipment and raw materials used.

Further studies are required to determine ways of assessing the positive and negative impacts of disasters on the intangible aspects of ICH elements.

- 1.2. ICH inventories are not always available as baseline data for assessments by cultural or disaster specialists. Moreover, there are many elements that are not recognized by local communities as ICH. These may play a role in DRR.

There is an urgent need to develop and regularly update ICH inventories, covering all categories of ICH, that provide baseline information on ICH in vulnerable localities, including elements that are important to communities and contribute to DRR.

- 1.3. Standardized measures for determining the impact of disasters on ICH are essential for post-disaster assessments. However proposed measures, such as the ICCROM/Prince Claus Fund handbook First Aid to Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis (2018), have yet to be tested and widely adopted. Determining the impact of disasters on ICH provides a solid foundation for developing ICH safeguarding strategies.

Once baseline inventories are developed, further studies are required to test proposed frameworks for assessment and monitor changes to ICH following disasters.

- 1.4. Given that ICH is held and transmitted by people, the importance of protecting individuals who practice ICH is paramount.

Safeguarding strategies should make provisions for the protection of the individuals and communities who possess and practice ICH and its transmission.

- 1.5. In cases where community-based ICH knowledge is being lost, museums, archives and other repositories of knowledge can play a crucial role in its storage and transmission.

Safeguarding strategies should make provisions for the protection of knowledge repositories and their role in transmission.

- 1.6. ICH elements can be negatively affected during post-disaster recovery, particularly through the interventions of humanitarian agencies: the replacement of traditional local materials with foreign products, the re-organization of local economic activities,

and the bypassing of local governance structures, are some of the ways in which post-disaster interventions can negatively impact on ICH.

The impacts on ICH of externally-driven disaster relief and recovery interventions should be further investigated and understood.

- 1.7. ICH has always been exposed to pressures exerted by globalization, urbanization, and lifestyle shifts. Disasters often accelerate or enhance these impacts, leading to the reconfiguration, transformation, or abandonment of ICH practices.

Recognising that ICH is subject to a diverse range of impacts over time and space, further research should examine the contexts and processes that shape the long-term transformations of ICH, in which disasters are treated as one amongst several causative factors.

2. Understand and further explore the active roles of ICH in community-based DRR and post-disaster recovery.

- 2.1. ICH can be highly effective in contributing to DRR, post-disaster recovery, and sustainable development.

Further studies are required that examine how local communities participate in using, transmitting, maintaining, resuming, reviving, reconfiguring and transforming ICH in the context of disaster, across all dimensions of DRR.

- 2.2. ICH can be generated as a direct result of disasters, such as the development of new forms of memorialization or new DRR practices.

Studies are required that identify examples of ICH generated as a result of disasters, and that understand their role in community-based DRR initiatives.

- 2.3. The revitalization of local performing arts by communities and multi-sector social actors can greatly assist in post-disaster recovery, uniting people displaced by disasters, and exerting positive psychological effect on human and societal well-being.

Opportunities for communities to practice and revitalise their ICH following disasters need to be maximised.

3. Further promote community-based safeguarding and mobilization of ICH in DRR, including post-disaster recovery.

- 3.1. Cultural knowledge and practices that are used in disasters often form part of day-to-day lives and are difficult to perceive as ICH. Given that ICH is still a relatively new concept, it is often challenging for people working in fields outside cultural heritage, such as DRR professionals, government officials, and community members, to fully grasp the role of ICH in disasters.

DRR and ICH stakeholders are strongly encouraged to continue learning about and promoting the importance of ICH safeguarding and the potential role of ICH in DRR, including post-recovery.

- 3.2. Insufficient understanding of ICH limits the extent to which impact assessments take account of cultural loss and damage, and the extent to which ICH contributes to DRR, including post-disaster recovery.

Review and regularly update existing ICH inventories and safeguarding plans to reflect what has been learned through the experience of disasters.

4. Enhance ICH-DRR dialogue to ensure that ICH and other cultural factors are further incorporated into DRR planning at regional, national and international levels.

- 4.1. Major DRR programmes intended to increase community resilience have often overlooked the integration of local DRR knowledge and practices, sometimes replacing them with introduced ideas and technologies.

Community-based inventorying of disaster-related ICH knowledge and practices should involve a diverse array of stakeholders, including local and external experts in both ICH and disaster. These stakeholders should work together, in a relationship of mutual respect, to define domains of cultural knowledge and practice that will assist in identifying ICH that is relevant to DRR, and to understand this living heritage within its socio-cultural context.

- 4.2. ICH research in DRR contexts remains limited. Likewise, disaster is not always addressed in ICH safeguarding. Recognizing that disasters can affect the viability of ICH is essential. ICH and disaster specialists are encouraged to work together to find ways of integrating and supporting both fields to improve the resilience of communities and to reduce the risk of disaster on ICH.

Research and practice should emphasize a ground-up approach to optimize ICH safeguarding, acknowledging the importance of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the development of DRR policies at regional, national and international levels.

(Adopted on 9 December 2018, Sendai, Japan)