

INTERVIEW SERIES OF EXPERTS AND DELEGATES

2017 Sub-Regional Intangible Cultural Heritage Network Meeting in South Asia: Exchanging countries' experiences concerning the implementation of the 2003 Convention at national level

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Dr. Seong-Yong Park, South Korea

Assistant Director General of the Internal Information and Networking Centre of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific region under the auspices of UNESCO (ICHCAP)

“ICH is becoming a very good tool to represent cultural identity for Korean people”



Seong-Yong Park is an international expert and scholar in the cultural heritage field, who earned his Ph.D. Degree from the University of Queensland, Australia, in Heritage Studies. He is currently an Assistant Director-General of ICHCAP, a UNESCO Category 2 Centres in the field of Intangible Cultural Heritage for 48 Member States in Asia-Pacific region.

He is also an Expert Advisor of the Korean Cultural Heritage Committee. Mr Park is the Author of "On Intangible Cultural Heritage Governance: An Asia-Pacific Context (2013) published by the Cambridge Scholars Publishing, UK.

Question (Q): What is ICH for South Korea?

Answer (A): ICH is starting to be a very good tool to represent cultural identity for Korean people.

Q: How do you safeguard ICH in South Korea?

A: In 1962 the South Korean Government enacted the Culture Heritage Protection Act. This Act also protects Intangible Cultural Heritage. Now, recently in 2015, Korean Government was able to develop ICH Act, which is very specialized and I think it is a very good model for different countries as well. It plays a very good role in safeguarding ICH in a comprehensive manner. Not only safeguarding, but also promoting the value of ICH to utilize it for sustainable development.

Q: What is the impact for the communities of ICH inscription on the lists of the 2003 Convention?

A: Thanks to the contribution of 2003 Convention in Korean society the community is more highly appreciated and their role is getting more strengthened. I think communities have a stronger pride over ICH elements after having inscribed these

elements in the UNESCO list. According to me they diversify the programmes and projects to increase visibility of the ICH elements without Government subsidy.

Q: If you could incorporate something in the 2003 Convention, what would you include?

A: That is a very difficult question. Of course the 2003 Convention is not a perfect regulation. There should be some revision or addition, but at the moment I haven't thought about it in any manner.

Q: What are the main challenges your country face while implementing the 2003 Convention at national level?

A: Understanding about the ICH is still a big task. It is important for Korean people to understand the core spirit of the 2003 Convention. There have been tangible heritage oriented policies for several decades, so even though locally Korean Government could take care of ICH events nevertheless there have been big infusing balance between tangible and intangible heritage safeguarding. To keep that balance between tangible and intangible still when is raising ICH it is a very big issue and a future task for Korean society.

Mr. Nazir Ahmad, Pakistan

Deputy Secretary (Heritage), National History and Literary Heritage Division, Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage

“Including Intangible Cultural Heritage in learning and teaching will be the best practice for safeguarding in future”



Nazir Ahmad is the Deputy Secretary of National History and Literary Heritage Division of the Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage in Pakistan.

He is heading the ICH working group. He has also worked with UNESCO Office in Islamabad in different projects for safeguarding of ICH in the country.

Q: What is ICH for Pakistan?

A: ICH is living culture heritage. Historic site of Gandhara and the Indus civilization are in fact complemented by magnificent ICH comprising knowledge and skills, oral religion, performance gods, social practices and festivals. This is all our ICH and we are proud of it.

Q: How do you safeguard ICH in Pakistan?

A: The basic tool for safeguarding ICH is documentation. We have established a working group and we have requested and suggested our provinces that they should identify the ICH elements available in our country. They will forward us all the elements and we will make the national ICH list and then we will make the inventory.

Secondly it is important the awareness between communities because they are the owners of this ICH. There is a need to awareness raising in the community for safeguarding their ICH and Government will provide assistance for it.

Other thing I would like to mention is that we have implemented a project for integrating ICH into learning and teaching for promoting

education for sustainable development. I think if the ICH is included in learning and teaching it will be the best practice for safeguarding in future.

Q: What is the impact for the communities of ICH inscription on the lists of the 2003 Convention?

A: Basically when an element is inscribed on the UNESCO List of ICH in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, UNESCO provides assistance for the safeguarding. ICH gains national and international popularity. Communities make also programmes for safeguarding. Personally I think when the ICH elements are famous in villages, cities and provinces of the country and at an international level, its marketing increases. ICH contributes for sustainable development and it creates financial resources, financial opportunities for the communities. Inscribing of an ICH on the UNESCO list promotes economic prosperity for the community.

Q: If you could incorporate something in the 2003 Convention, what would you include?

A: I have read it and it is a very comprehensive convention but it is not

limited to some extent. As you can see, the ICH have been divided into five domains in this Convention but it is not limited. Every country can add some more domains in this ICH. It is very flexible. We have added traditional cuisine, traditional games and others. We have seven ICH categories in our country. So it is a flexible convention. If it is implemented it can safeguard ICH in a very good way.

Q: What are the main challenges your country face while implementing the 2003 Convention at national level?

A: Financial resources for the implementation and safeguarding. When you go to the community for the safeguarding, when you go to impart training, when you want to make some safeguarding plan it all needs expertise and financial resources.

Expertise is also a problem and if you arrange trainings it also involves financial sources. If you don't make safeguarding plans yourself, you cannot ask UNESCSCO for financial assistance for safeguarding your ICH. So first of all we have to make something for safeguarding.

For getting financial resources the Government should approach the National Fund for Culture Heritage which is being maintained in UNESCO. They can provide assistance.

We have done all the work without financial support from Government. We have contacted NGOs and INGOs, financial partners and some other institutions which are working for promotion of tangible and intangible heritage. We have gathered sources but the basic point is that you have the will to promote and safeguard your ICH.

Mr. Danister Perera, Sri Lanka
Expert

“We have included some elements into the school curricula to encourage the students about their ICH”



Danister Perera is an expert on traditional medicine. He has worked for the World Bank project on inventory of traditional medicine.

He has attended all the UNESCO training workshops; has also done paper for UNESCO on the current legal / policy framework governing ICH in Sri Lanka.

Q: What is ICH for Sri Lanka?

A: ICH terminology is new for us in Sri Lanka. It was introduced by the Convention and the UNESCO workshops conducted by specialists. Before that, we were using many other terms like traditional knowledge and practices, folklore, indigenous knowledge...Then we understood that the ICH covers the scope of all these terms. Moreover, we understood that Sri Lanka is a country which is rich in these ICH elements. We have many kind of ICH practices and domains coming from the early history.

Q: How do you safeguard ICH in Sri Lanka?

A: Safeguarding has been happening from the past. It was there before the 2003 Convention. It was carried out by the Government institutions, NGOs, community organizations, universities. Many measures were taken by these institutions to safeguard ICH.

We have also included some ICH elements into the school curricula to encourage the students. We want to raise awareness among the communities towards their own heritage to transmit it in a sustainable way to the new generations.

Q: How safeguarding the ICH can contribute to sustainable development?

A: Sustainable development is a kind of dilemma in Sri Lanka because we are facing a very fast growing economic advancement which is bringing some projects that can have an impact in rural areas and could affect the sustainability of the ICH. Therefore we need to look at alternates modes of sustainable development. A real sustainable development should be practiced. Actually we have a Ministry on Sustainable Development, but I don't believe that the Government is honestly committing on this issue. They take any kind of fundraising projects. They get some foreign funds and they invest that money in any rural area which can sometimes destroy the national heritage which is the resource base of ICH.

Sustainable development is not a new concept according to me, because it was there with our ancestors. Before the colonialism and the industrial revolution, countries like Sri Lanka, India and Nepal have this sustainable development model. It was part of the work, of the livelihoods of our ancestors and it had a minimum impact in the environment. They didn't destroy it in a

useless way. They used the natural resources in a sustainable way. So, I think sustainable development is a good model to be revisited and for introducing it to the society.

Q: Do you think that having ICH inscribed in the UNESCO list has an impact on communities?

A: Definitely. Any kind of international cooperation for ICH safeguarding must be effective and beneficial for the Sri Lankan communities. That is why we need to get more support from the international agencies like UNESCO to safeguard ICH elements and to get more exposure to other countries in the same region, share our experiences and also learning from them: what are they doing, how are doing it, what kind of challenges and problems they face, etc.

Q: If you could incorporate something in the 2003 Convention, what would you include?

A: The Convention is not a bible, it is a flexible instrument. In the national context we could have our own modalities and the Convention can be the guideline, a kind of "light" from outside.

I think operational directives are more important than the Convention because they are always updated. The terms of the Convention can be defined in our own culture. It is originally drafted in English and in my opinion, sometimes it doesn't suit with the local thinking. Sometimes you can't define, interpret the words, the terms within the local context. Ultimately we understood that cannot be a universal document because we have and we think in our own

language. We can also find some incompatibilities, but despite of it the Convention is still fine.

Q: What are the main challenges your country face while implementing the 2003 Convention at national level?

A: At a ground level, the local community is always thinking that if somebody is collecting their own knowledge, there is some kind of interference. Sometimes people see that as a threat. There are too many NGOs working in the community in our countries with many different interests. Sometimes these NGOs mislead the community, they give some misconceptions to them.

In my opinion, the best way of dealing with ICH elements is selecting some members from the community, training them and let them to do it. Otherwise if you appoint a cultural officer from outside, community members can feel that their heritage is in danger and they will try to protect themselves from strangers.

Other challenge is that markets should be more ICH friendly. Sometimes ICH goods cannot be traduced in a fast way because they need some natural resources and people don't have access to them.

And finally the Media, which are a big threat to ICH in Sri Lanka and most of South Asian countries. Journalists are producing some information which is not ICH friendly. Nowadays media are selling a product to attract more spectators, more readers. Then they have "to add some poison" in the information. Otherwise you cannot sell the product. I call it "information toxicity": there is too much information and it is not easy to differentiate if it is good or bad.

Ms. Ritu Sethi, India
Expert

“Having ICH elements in the list of UNESCO brings great respect and interest in transmitting Indian heritage”



Ritu Sethi is a Chairperson at Craft Revival Trust since 1999. She has been a member of ICH expert committee and reviewed many dossiers for the Government of India.

She was the Chairperson at the Consultative Body in India for the Nomination to the Urgent Safeguarding List in 2010-2011.

Q: What is ICH for India?

A: ICH means for Indian people our costumes, our live, our way of existence, the indigenous knowledge that we have, our oral traditions, the agricultural traditions, and the rituals that are followed. The interesting thing about India is that it has been always been opened to influences. As a result, they have had invaders, information, now Internet, television and so many new forms of communication that when it comes into India, it becomes completely Indian.

Q: How do communities perceive having some ICH elements in the list of UNESCO?

A: I think it brings recognition and that itself it is a huge benefit because they realize that their ICH is recognized by others. That brings great respect and also interest in transmitting.

Q: If you could incorporate something in the 2003 Convention, what would you include?

A: I wish that other conventions related to culture are brought closer because at the end of the day built heritage was built by people that live in traditions and many of

them continue around the field of that area to be recreating the same traditions. So the recognition of the link between these traditions and the conversations between these conventions I think must be strengthened.

Q: What do you think is the main challenge to link the ICH with sustainable development?

A: I think the main challenge is to recognize that this ICH contributes to sustainable development. We have to translate ICH elements in a way that they are recognized by the rest of the world and by our own communities, our own country and our own region. It will require a working on and that is why I'm so delighted that the conversations started because you are going to learn from each other how to recognize your ICH and how to obtain a benefit from it.

Q: How do you safeguard ICH in India?

A: Before the term ICH, India has been protecting its heritage whether it has been traditional arts and crafts through recognition of the masters through giving programmes, getting demonstrations to many aspects and the same for the performing arts. It was never looked at as one whole because it was only

in 2003 that the five domains came up. But till then I think India it was one of the countries in this region that has been continuously working. Basically it was initiated by Mahatma Gandhi, who started the movement back to the roots. It has always ingrained into us, this recognition of what is now the ICH.

Q: Why are there so many NGOs in India?

A: I think it is because we are such a diverse country and we have such extremes between wealth and poverty. We have extremes of being entitled and having nothing. Many of us are convinced that we need to give back. That is why there are so many organizations.

Mr. Bhim Prasad Nepal, Nepal
Expert

“We must have a link between ICH activities and the economy of the people”



Bhim Prasad Nepal holds Master's Degree in Humanities and Social Sciences. Mr Nepal is one of National Culture Experts of Nepal. He has co-facilitated the UNESCO ICH all the series of training workshops held in Nepal along with the UNESCO accredited trainers.

Recently, he has facilitated a community-based ICH identification, inventorying and safeguarding workshop in Halesi, Khotang in Nepal which was a great success. He has been providing advisory and consultancy services to UNESCO, the Ministry of Culture and other stakeholders.

Q: What is ICH for Nepal?

A: In the context of Nepal the ICH also is defended by the 2003 Convention and we are following its definition. But at ordinary people level, the ICH is understood just like festivals, traditional dances and traditional workmanship. This sort of festive events is what people understand ICH is.

Q: How do you safeguard ICH in Nepal?

A: If we speak historically, the communities themselves safeguard ICH. In the context of Nepal to safeguard some of the ICH elements (for example, festive events or religious activities) it was managed by the Guthi system. The Guthi system means a kind of trust which has a long history in Nepal. It was established for the management, the performance and the continuation of the ICH. Later the Government and others institutions are also supporting the safeguarding of ICH in Nepal.

Q: How safeguarding the ICH can contribute to sustainable development?

A: Now, we are not able to link the heritage safeguarding or conservation to the economic income of the concerned

community and to the concerned practitioners. The main point is that we must have a link between ICH activities and the economy of the people. So it will be the sustain I hope.

Q: Do you think that having ICH inscribed in the UNESCO list has an impact on communities?

A: It is also very important inscribing elements in the UNESCO list. It will have a positive impact in the community. People will feel proud of being in the list. It is a question of pride.

Q: If you could incorporate something in the 2003 Convention, what would you include?

A: In my opinion in the article 2 of the 2003 Convention defines ICH in a global context and there is one provision ICH should be transmitted from generation to generation and it is constantly recreated by the community. This provision can be sometimes difficult to define in the context of, not only in Nepal but in other countries of the region. This is because can be disturbed due to many reasons like political conflicts, globalization, community participants that

will not be dear (respected). If something like this happens and the cultural activity is not recreated, it doesn't mean that is not ICH. So I'm not fully convinced about this provision in the article 2. UNESCO should consider this point.

Q: What are the main challenges your country face while implementing the 2003 Convention at national level?

A: It is a very interesting and appropriate question in the context of Nepal. Since the last seven years we are in the beginning of the implementation of the 2003 Convention. There is a lack of training. There is also a need of a separate department or institution

responsible to look after the implementation. Until then it will be very difficult to hold the responsibility of implementing the Convention.

It is a new subject in Nepal, so we need new trained staff to carry out the activities related to ICH. At the same time and not only in the case of Nepal, but also in all underdeveloped countries, the priority goes to the development activities which conduct direct economic benefit. In Culture there is no direct benefit, we have to wait some time. In all these countries the priority goes to other fields: floods in Nepal, for example. This kind of disaster also impact in the implementation of the Convention.

Dr. Yonten Dargye, Bhutan
Head of Research Division, National Library and Archives,
Department of Culture, Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs

“Protecting ICH can bring harmony and unity to the community and help establishing its identity”



Yonten Dargye holds a Ph.D. Degree in Buddhist Studies from the University of Delhi, India (1997). He is currently working as a Research Specialist in the National Library & Archives in Bhutan.

He has coordinated research and publication of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Bhutan including many other publications. He also has contributed many articles in intangible heritage of Bhutan such as rituals, ethics, social practices etc. and papers on intangible heritage in seminars/conferences.

Q: What is ICH for Bhutan?

A: ICH means Bhutanese people’s creative excellences as knowledge, skills, att, beliefs, music, drama, oral traditions, festivals, and other such values that are principally derived from Buddhist doctrine and ethics.

Q: How do you safeguard ICH in Bhutan?

A: We safeguard our ICH mainly preparing policies, bills, rules and regulation; carrying out written and photographic documentation; video filming, and audio recordings; conducting workshops, seminars, meetings as well as contests, exhibitions and festivals; bringing out publications and; educating and creating awareness through TV.

Q: How safeguarding the ICH can contribute to sustainable development?

A: Protecting ICH can bring harmony and unity to the community, and help establishing its identity, thus contributing to sustainable development.

Q: What is the impact for the communities of ICH inscription on the lists of the 2003 convention?

A: At present, Bhutan has only one ICH element inscribed on Representative List.

Not much is known about its impact on community. But I am sure inscription will surely boost community vitality in protecting and promoting ICH owned by particular community and identity construction of the community and the constituent community members.

Q: If you could incorporate something in the 2003 convention, what would you include?

A: Since I am not familiar with the 2003 Convention, I am not sure what needs to be incorporated exactly. However, in my opinion more importance should be given to community since they are the creator and custodian of ICH, hence adequate support (through financial incentives and recognitions) should be given.

Q: What are the main challenges your country face while implementing the 2003 convention at national level?

A: Lack of law or legal guidelines and funding support; lack of trained/skilled human resources and coordination; and lack of designated/dedicated ICH Division to carry out the sole ICH related works are the main challenges faced at present.

Mr. Ibrahim Mujah, Maldives
Head of Heritage Section, Department of Heritage, Ministry of Education

“We are only selling sun and sea to the tourists and our culture must be another incentive for them”



Ibrahim Mujah is currently a Photographer and Head of the Heritage Section in Maldives.

He has worked in the capacity of a photographer in different sectors in Maldives such as Department of Heritage, Ministry of Legal Reform, Arts and Culture, Television etc.

Q: What is ICH for Maldives?

A: ICH is important in Maldives for some communities. Some other are not aware of it because they are working and they are very busy. People in Maldives they usually make some ICH performances after work, especially on Friday night, which is a holiday in our country.

Q: How do you safeguard ICH in Maldives?

A: The Government is trying to protect ICH. Some TV channels from the Government encourage people to participate in festivals.

Q: Do you think that having ICH inscribed in the UNESCO list has an impact on communities?

A: It will be a good impact. Many tourists come to Maldives and we are only selling sun a sea to them. We are not selling the culture.

Our culture must be another incentive for tourists staying in Maldives.

Q: If you could incorporate something in the 2003 Convention, what would you include?

A: I think the Convention is fine now. We learnt about it only one year ago, so we are still studying it.

Q: What is the main challenge to turn ICH in sustainable development?

A: There are lot of people making performances as traditional dances in different resorts in many islands of our country but it is very difficult to put all these people together to have a better coordination regarding ICH. These traditional dances are focused on tourists. There are some cultural clubs which are paid by the resorts and this is a way to show our ICH.



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