

## APSARA Authority: ICH Safeguarding in the Angkor Living Site, Siem Reap

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Ceremony for asking the rain at prasat Leak Neang in Angkor region, Siem Reap province, Cambodia  
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After the Angkor was inscribed on the World Cultural Heritage List, it was necessary to establish working mechanisms to promote national and international collaboration. The creation of Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap called APSARA or APSARA authority in 1995 also corresponds to the request of the World Heritage Committee, which temporarily inscribed Angkor on the List of World Heritage Sites in Danger in December 1992. Permanent inscription was at that point depended upon the Cambodian government taking concrete action in the field. Acknowledging the three years of progress made toward an establishing national responsibility in the site protection and management in December 1995, the World Heritage Committee confirmed Angkor's permanent inscription on the World Heritage List.

The territorial authority of APSARA is clearly specified in Article 5 of the Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, 1996 which mention that: "The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts is responsible for policy implementation. However in the Angkor/Siem Reap region, the Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap, called APSARA, is responsible for the protection, the preservation and the enhancement of the national cultural heritage". Backed by these legal tools, APSARA authority is mandated to represent the Royal Government before all international partners concerned with cultural,

urban and tourist development of this region.

A social research unit of APSARA authority was created in 2000 for working with villagers within the world heritage site, engaging with an in-depth of their way of life, their traditions and customs all of which are significant components of the intangible cultural heritage of Angkor. The project so far has involved collecting cultural information from the villages within the Angkor Park. While we know it is an ambitious project, there is an imperative to document this living heritage particularly as it is fragile and seriously threatened today by many factors. Through this project, most of the main traditional and ceremonial events have been identified. There are two main categories of the ceremony. The first is concerned with the Rite of Passage, and with rituals associated with either the fixed ceremonial calendar or with special occasions (which can occur at any time). The second aspect is concerned with customs and performing arts, which are also considered to have a ritual component, and contribute as part of collective events such as shadow plays, dances and theatres.

Since 2008, according to the new structure of APSARA authority, a committee for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage will form with representatives from departments of APSARA such as Department of Cultural Development Museums and Heritage Standards, Department of Land and Habitats Management, Department of Agricultural Extension and Community Development, Department of Angkor Tourism Development and

Department of Communication for conducting APSARA projects or collaborative projects with national and International organizations. Ongoing project of APSARA is doing a policy for Sustainable Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in Angkor region and other region under its jurisdiction. The purposes of this policy are as follows:

- Safeguard the Intangible Cultural Heritage within the Angkor World Heritage Site and other sites under the jurisdiction of the APSARA Authority.
- Recognize the right of all people to their cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, and the duty of all people to safeguard and respect their heritage.
- Raise awareness about, and ensure compliance with, UNESCO Convention pertaining to the Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage, both tangible and Intangible, particularly, to raise awareness within APSARA Authority and the wider public of the importance of intangible cultural heritage and Cambodia's obligation to safeguard this heritage.
- Ensure respect for intangible cultural heritage which form a unique part of Cambodia's rich heritage and is a source of national identity.

The projects that APSARA Authority is conducting at Angkor provide an opportunity to work closely with the villagers of the region, and to involve them in the identification, recording, and safeguarding of the significant part of the heritage of Angkor Area. This reinforces that Angkor is a place of living cultural heritage, where the communities provide an essential live and enduring component of the broader heritage values of the region. Community participation is critical for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. The APSARA Authority will endeavor to develop regular and systematic consultation with local communities in regard to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, and recognizes that community participation is vital for the identification, documentation, research, preservation, promotion, enhancement, transmission and revitalization of intangible cultural heritage.

### References

- Ang, Ch., Thompson, A., Eric, P., *Angkor: A Manual for the Past, Present and Future*, APSARA/UNESCO, Phnom Penh, 1995.
- Im, Sok. *Angkor: Living Heritage Site, Report for Living Heritage Site Programme, First Strategy Meeting, SPAFA, Bangkok, APSARA, 2003.*