



The Role and Tasks of Non-Governmental Organisations related to the Safeguarding of ICH

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Let me first share with you my joy of being in Seoul and, second, thank our hosts, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific, for its kind and generous invitation to participate in the Conference and give me the opportunity of sharing some of my views on the role and tasks of NGOs on the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH).

Although this is my first visit to Korea, I feel very comfortable being here. Indeed, I have for some 25 years been involved in the safeguarding of ICH, and especially in the past 10 years where I have been active at international level. I have in numerous occasions run across people from Korea involved in this venture. When I say people, I mean Government representatives, experts, academics and NGOs too.

Last year, I attended in Manila a UNESCO regional meeting, gathering representatives from some 43 countries of the Asia and Pacific region. It was a real pleasure to see the permanent concern in this part of the world to make the traditional and the contemporary meet, to balance the tangible and the intangible dimension of your people's heritage.

The European world, where I come from, has so often set aside its heritage

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and traditions to leap into modernism. This explains its present struggle and difficulty to foster, especially amongst the younger generation, values that have woven throughout history the fabric of our societies.

As head of Traditions for Tomorrow, a non-governmental international network with headquarters in Switzerland near Geneva, my field of action has mostly been Central and South America. Since 1985 Traditions for Tomorrow has accompanied indigenous people and some minority groups, especially afro-descendants, in the safeguarding of ICH. The projects we got involved in cover numerous expressions of ICH and means of communication: music, dance, oral tradition, language, creed, traditional means of government and conflict resolution systems, holistic healthcare, intercultural education, media, etc.

As a go-between identifying financial support for numerous field-projects developed at community level, and also supporting the defence of cultural rights of these groups, our NGO has gradually developed models of mechanisms and strategies for empowerment that are now shared by other NGOs and grass-root groups.

Besides its field work in some 12 countries, Traditions for Tomorrow has been active at international level since 1992 when, as an NGO it established official relations with UNESCO. At UNESCO we got involved in the World Decade for Culture and Development, in the two consecutive International Decades for Indigenous People, in the 2003 Convention from its drafting phase until now, taking part as NGO observer in meetings of the General Assembly of State Parties and of the Intergovernmental Committee which has proposed Traditions for Tomorrow for accreditation by the next General Assembly, and finally also in the process of the 2005 Convention on the protection and the promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions.

As one of the 9 NGOs members of the NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee, we have since 2005 contributed to promote the role and place of civil society organisations with the UNESCO secretariat and Member States. Finally, through its ECOSOC consultative status Traditions for Tomorrow has also been active in the field of Human Rights mostly dealing with Indigenous peoples, and at the World Intellectual Property Organisation on the definition of intellectual property rights for traditional knowledge, cultural expressions and genetic resources.

I would like in the time that I am given this morning to focus on three main points:

- 1) the increasing role of the non-governmental community in the safeguarding of ICH,
- 2) its task at local (meaning national) level, and
- 3) at international level, where I will also briefly address the issue of communication and networks.

I. The increasing role of NGOs in the safeguarding of ICH

You may have noted that I have decided not to address the issue of defining NGOs. This question will probably remain forever as a mystery of civilizations, civilizations with an 'S' since NGOs have throughout history existed in one way or another.

Civil society has now become part of Government and 'World governance', particularly following the 2004 Cardozo Report on the relations between the UN and Civil society.

Civil society involvement as a response or as an alternative to globalization has nowadays established NGOs as a counterpart of other governing bodies of the World community: governments, parliaments, the private sector, the academic circles, churches and other spiritual congregations, etc. When talking about the famous 'PPP' - public-private partnership - civil society organizations are omnipresent.

Cécile Duvelle yesterday mentioned : *"NGOs are key factors in bridging the gap between local communities and governments."*

Just a month ago, in Abu Dhabi, at the closing session of the Convention Intergovernmental Committee meeting, Mr Matsuura who was delivering one of his last speeches as Director General of UNESCO, mentioned, I quote: *"... the pivotal role of civil society and particularly NGOs who are key actors in our efforts to bridge the gap between local communities and governments."*

To try and understand why 'pivotal', let's enumerate briefly the main participants in the process of safeguarding ICH, besides NGOs. We first and above all have the holders of that heritage, referred to in the 2003 Convention as 'communities, groups and, in some cases individuals'. They are at the core of the architecture set up for the safeguarding. Then we have the States subject to binding obligations under the Convention, for those who have ratified it. Finally, come the experts and research centres.

What Mr. Matsuura underlined so clearly in Abu Dhabi is that without the NGOs, which have that capacity to reach the holders of ICH, the practitioners - we mean the 'communities' - it would be very difficult for States to implement the safeguarding of ICH. However immensely valuable and legitimate their knowledge, neither could experts and researchers contribute to the process what NGOs can contribute, are doing and will continue doing.

Why? Please let me give you an example. I visited last September in the Amazonian Basin of Northern Ecuador a Cofan Indigenous community. We were discussing one of their major concerns, besides the rampant destruction of their territory by oil and gas extraction companies. That is the gradual disappearance of traditional knowledge and practice of shamanism. Amongst other factors, schooling, consumerism, migration, and the influence of the nearby Colombian conflict are contributing to this very preoccupying problem.

Our NGO is now discussing with the Cofan people's authorities about implementing a strategy to strengthen the role of shamans as traditional leadership to protect the environment and foster sustainable development, besides safeguarding their heritage. Because NGOs have been supporting at least for the past fifteen years the struggle of Indigenous people in the area to ascertain and protect their territory, they have gained a level of trust amongst the people, which enables them to envision today other possible field cooperation such as the one mentioned on the shaman issue.

Government representatives and experts, or academics, would not as easily have reached such confidence, built year after year between NGOs and the people. What I want to say is that working with holders of ICH is a process, some times a long-term process. ICH means in most cases entering a very intimate zone of a group or of an individual.

I often recall this experience of a young Kuna Indian in Panama. Kunas live on an archipelago on the Caribbean Coast of Panama. Traditions for Tomorrow was sponsoring an initiative by youngsters to investigate their oral tradition. One of them, wanting to interview a very knowledgeable elder on an island about 1 hour $\frac{1}{2}$ away paddling in his canoe on high sea, travelled once. The old man was not feeling well and could not receive him. A month later after a second attempt, the old man very busy repairing his fishing nets excuses himself and the young boy paddles back to his home. When a few weeks later, the boy tries for a third time, the wise man greets him on the beach and tells him : *"Please come in : I'll tell you all you want to know because now I know that you really want to learn from me."*

Although in this case we are not talking about an NGO, often, have I noticed that without trust it is very difficult to undertake a deeply-rooted process of safeguarding ICH.

NGOs have a vitalising effect over communities. They are not suspect of wanting to take out some benefits from their cooperation with ICH holders. Concern and solidarity is what motivates them. This is what the practitioners acknowledge; yes, a 'pivotal' role in bridging the gap with holders of ICH. Government representatives or experts have more difficulties in building this special relationship which, based on our own experience with holders of ICH, we consider vital to undertake our work.

We know of some of the risks of safeguarding ICH. They were often expressed, like for instance at experts meetings preparing draft operational guidelines for the Intergovernmental Committee: freezing ICH by folklorisation - or lets turn it differently: interrupting the evolutive process of ICH - ; worst still, the commercial overexploitation of ICH for national promotion or tourism purposes. This is something that, on the field, we are often confronted with, when communities believe that developing ecotourism will be an el Dorado that is sometimes for them difficult to resist, but which negative consequences they can only underestimate.

There again, it is the confidence relationship that they have shared with NGOs when closely cooperating over the years that make that conscience raising process possible.

Let me finally conclude this first part of my statement by referring once again to the 2005 Convention, so important to us all, given the fact that it is very complementary to the ICH Convention: Article 11 of the 2005 Convention calls for a 'fundamental role of civil society in the implementation of the Convention'.

By analogy, and because both Conventions are a contribution to the Cultural Diversity solemnly claimed for by the 2001 Universal Declaration, it is understood that civil society organizations are as fundamental to the 2003 as they are to the 2005 Convention. This being said, let's now try to analyse what the tasks of NGOs are, first at local level and then at international level.

II. Tasks at local level

Although the nature of this Conference is international, prior to presenting tasks of NGOs in safeguarding ICH at an international level, I will share with you my views on what seems to me to be even more important, i.e. tasks at local level. As you see, I am not talking about national level, but local.

The reason is that the 2003 Convention has a particularity which makes it rather exceptional in the spectrum of international binding instruments. If the burden for action under the Convention is on State parties - the signatories to the Treaty - the key role for its implementation is in the hands of the communities.

For example: no ICH element will be put either on the representative list or on the Urgent safeguarding list without the consent of the communities, holders of this element. This shows that the drafters of the Convention have clearly put the weight of the safeguarding at the local level. This is therefore why NGO intervention lies fundamentally at local level.

Three tasks for NGOs at local level; two connected with the Convention and a third more *sui generis*:

- 1) participation in the inventories
- 2) education, awareness raising and capacity building
- 3) accompanying communities

1. Inventories

In Switzerland, where Traditions for Tomorrow is also active at national level in implementing the 2003 Convention, the Federal Department of Culture together with the National Commission for UNESCO gathered a group of NGOs to define what the future national inventory of ICH would be. NGOs active in traditional music, costumes, handicraft, traditional art festivals, and international cooperation were called in.

Why? Because, without such NGOs it is most likely that holders of ICH being approached by administrations - either national or regional - would be missing the appropriate tone and/or message to make the practitioners aware of the importance of contributing their element to a national registry.

Approach to register as an administrative duty rather than through a community based trickle-up sensitization process would probably not have been as successful.

It is important to mention at this point that, especially in developed countries, there isn't always a clear-cut difference between NGOs and practitioners. The latter are often organized as an NGO composed of individual practitioners or local groups. They are often themselves direct interlocutors to government entities.

Nevertheless, NGOs that are not practitioners nor communities can play an important role in motivating holders of ICH to register their elements, bringing them to understand that an ICH element is not in and of itself strong enough to be safeguarded. Getting it recognized by being on an inventory can be the first step to make possible its strengthening and revitalisation. We, there again, find this confidence relationship, which I earlier mentioned, as vital.

In the same way, I also earlier mentioned the need for holders' consent for an element to be put on one of the two UNESCO ICH lists. NGOs should similarly push national governments to require such consents for regional or local inventories. They will in that manner protect the sovereignty of practitioners and their control over these elements of ICH. It is totally understandable that, would it be just for confidentiality purposes, a community might find legitimate not to register one of its traditional expressions. NGOs can be the guarantor of such decision.

One of the main weaknesses of ICH is that it is *sui generis*, and has always existed naturally. Also because ICH in most instances exists only when expressed, holders don't necessarily understand the necessity to safeguard it, would it be just by inventorying it. NGOs, because they are close to the holders, can more easily make them aware of the advantages of such registries.

Finally, depending on inventory procedures established by National or regional administrative bodies, it is sometime important for NGOs to help communities go through the filing procedures, sometimes complex, especially for grass-roots groups that can encounter some difficulties following the registration requirements.

2. Education

Article 14 of the Convention compelling State parties to develop activities in education, awareness-raising and capacity-building to safeguard ICH is very

important. Given the fact that ICH, as already mentioned, has a great part of informality, non-formal and informal educational activities are essential.

If raising awareness for example through formal education at primary and secondary school level is welcomed, non formal means of sensitisation are as important. There, NGOs, for instance, in connection with museums have an important role to play. ICOM, the International Council of Museums is making efforts in documentation and orientation in ICH for its members.

In Switzerland, the National Commission for UNESCO together with local civil society organizations is setting up a pilot-project linking World Heritage sites with ICH expressions in, for example, handicraft and oral tradition. Such activities which clearly need to be relayed by local NGOs will on one hand strengthen the awareness of practitioners on the value of their intangible heritage, and on the other hand develop in the public a conscience for the respect of such expressions.

Capacity building, mentioned also in Article 14, not only refers to capacities in term of expressions of ICH but also in management capacities. NGOs have indeed often been active in training ICH practitioners in managing expressions of their ICH. With the development of tourism especially, such skills have shown to be essential, as earlier mentioned, to avoid diluting the meaning of intangible heritage by income generating activities. Once again in Latin America, Traditions for Tomorrow has more than once been confronted with such reality, sometimes hard to resist for local groups, in need of improving their material conditions. Nevertheless, they could easily find in the 'selling' or the commercial exploitation of their traditional expressions only short-term and above all negative solutions.

An NGO, that we support in the State of Morelos in Mexico, the 'Coordinara de grupos culturales indígenas y populares de Morelos' has amongst its goals the sensitization of local groups to the risks of attracting tourism through traditional expressions and changing thereby the meaning and purpose of these expressions. Many of those expressions are dances that accompany rituals or celebrations connected with nature or with the agricultural cycles. Temptation to turn those elements into attraction is high, especially because within reach of Mexico City. There, awareness raising is not so much on a threat of ICH disappearing, but rather ICH to be transformed and turned into something which could sooner or later, be completely different from what it is meant to be. Because this NGO is composed of the groups themselves, we see that it has more legitimacy than anyone to convey this message to its peers.

3. Community accompanying

Safeguarding ICH is a lot about a culture of dynamics. NGOs are an appropriate vehicle to mobilize ICH practitioners in such dynamics. An NGO we have been working with for a number of years around Puno in Southern Peru, the Asociación Chuyma Aru de apoyo rural has generated dynamics in over fifty Aymara Indian communities around the Peruvian side of Lake Titicaca.

Their focus has been on music and dance related to the agrofestiv Andean calendar. Intercommunity exchanges have been organized, with special attention to youth and traditional authorities. Secrets and signs from nature to decide on when to undertake agricultural activities have been gathered on such occasions, then published and interactively disseminated.

Such process was undoubtedly made possible by the fact that this NGO was also initiated by people from the villages, and that its activities were totally trusted by the campesinos.

Dynamics amongst ICH holders, especially in marginalized or minority groups, requires in order to be successful a high level of trust. Experts or researchers, needless to say government entities, are rarely in the best position to develop these type of dynamics. It becomes more and more obvious that in some societies, practitioners are inclined to retain their knowledge, anxious as they may be of some misuse by those they would transfer the information to, either for intellectual property reasons, notably when dealing with traditional medicine, or for abuse by academics who have shown little concern in some instances to cite their sources or hand back the result of their investigation to their informants.

III. Tasks at international level

1. Within the scope of the 2003 Convention

Article 9.1 of the Convention calls for 'NGOs with recognized competence in the field of the intangible cultural heritage to act in an advisory capacity to the Committee'.

During the discussions at the 2003 Convention Intergovernmental Committee meetings on the tasks to be assumed by advisory bodies to the

Convention, it was mentioned that NGOs, because of their special nature which I have described earlier on, were to play an important role in the implementation of the Convention by its Governing Bodies.

NGOs, pursuant to the operational guidelines, once the Convention will be in its full implementing phase, can be invited to:

- 1) examine requests by State parties for an element to be put on the Urgent safeguarding list
- 2) examine programs, projects and activities that are considered as best practices under Article 18 of the Convention,
- 3) examine requests of international assistance from the International Fund in excess of 25,000 US\$, and
- 4) evaluate the impact that safeguarding plans will have had for elements on the Urgent safeguarding list.

At present, we are in a transitory situation, since NGOs that have been selected by the Intergovernmental Committee for accreditation by the General Assembly should be accredited at the next session of the General Assembly in Paris, next June.

However, it seems important at this point to recall some of the discussions that have taken place both at the Intergovernmental Committee meetings and at the 2nd session of the General Assembly in 2008. One should keep in mind the 1972 Convention on World Heritage with respect to the role of NGOs. ICOMOS, IUCN and ICROM are the three NGOs, each mentioned in three instances in the text of the World Heritage Convention.

The result of their examination for requests by State parties to include a site on the World list carries a heavy weight in the decision of the World Heritage Committee. This has given a crucial role to these NGOs, sometimes putting them under pressure from States.

When drafting the 2003 Convention, it became clear that Member States would give a different look at the future architecture of the safeguarding of ICH. After adoption of the Convention and its entry into force, discussions during the Intergovernmental Committee meetings confirmed these orientations. Participation of NGOs to the meetings was the subject of long and sometime quite unexpected discussions. Definition of the advisory functions confirmed that States were inclined to favour the role of experts, research centres, expertise centres, to the detriment of NGOs.

The 2008 General Assembly of State parties took a stand somewhat more

favourable to NGOs following more closely the text of Article 9.1 recognising the advisory capacity of NGOs. Finally, in Abu Dhabi, last month, when advisory bodies to the Committee examined for the first time requests to include elements of ICH on the Urgent safeguarding list and for the funding of projects in excess of 25,000 US\$, it seemed that in this transitory period still existed some uncertainties on the future role of NGOs in the implementation of the Convention.

We understand that the implementation of the Convention is still at an early stage. Time will tell as to whether the emphasis that the General Assembly put on the role of NGOs will be confirmed or whether the consultative functions will be more and more in the hands of experts and less in consultation with civil society organisations. The risk is that the Convention could lose part of its 'democratic' nature, as some had endeavoured calling it.

2. A tool for communication and networking

Turning back to the subject of this conference, the task of NGOs at international level in contributing their information tools to the safeguarding of ICH is a priority. Especially, a number of NGOs in developing countries have little access to means and experiences in safeguarding ICH. Exchange of experiences and information are essential in such an ambitious task.

Information technologies are to be put to work for safeguarding ICH. In this respect, safeguarding means registering, disseminating, documenting etc, but more than anything creating channels of communication between practitioners from one part of the globe to another. Especially since the representative list of Article 16 does not ambition to create a World inventory of ICH.

Taking the example of martial arts for which I have learned that Korea has a strong interest, an NGO such as the World Martial Arts Union with headquarters in Chungju should, It seems, to be the appropriate vehicle for gathering knowledge and insuring the appropriate networking. Although public support at national and international level is important for such mission, who better than groups active in this field could better undertake it?

There are of course a number of other good examples such as ICOM, I already mentioned, the International Council on Traditional Music (ICTM), the International Council of Organizations for Folklore Festivals and Folk Art (CIOFF). Regional and sometimes national NGOs are also very useful in

registering both elements of ICH and experiences.

Sector networks (dance, music, language, oral tradition, rituals, costumes, etc.) play an important role in getting groups at the planet's four corners to share global evolutions in their field and also local experiences which can benefit all.

In that respect NGOs are, from my point of view, the best equipped to undertake such responsibilities.

IV. Conclusion

As a matter of conclusion, I wish to draw your attention on the fragile situation that NGOs are facing. On one hand they cherish their independence. From this independence they draw their legitimacy and their specificity. They expect not to depend from government support. On the other hand their resources are always scarcer, especially in periods of budget cuts and economic crisis.

If stakeholders in safeguarding of ICH are really anxious to develop a truly efficient strategy to confront the growing risks that our living heritage is facing, including NGOs both in their decision making processes and policies at local, national and international levels, seems an absolute and urgent priority.