

Foreword

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Traditional medicine takes different forms in different regions, and the documentation and preservation of traditional medical practices and knowledge is part of our efforts for safeguarding intangible heritage and recognizing and promoting cultural diversity. In the same vein, UNESCO has inscribed the Andean cosmovision of the Kallawaya in Bolivia, a body of ritual knowledge and artistic expressions intimately linked to religious beliefs, which also include traditional healing practices, on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Traditional medicine, which includes healing practices and knowledge, could be considered more than just static traditional knowledge, as it helps us lead healthier lives naturally. It is also important to note that references to safeguarding traditional healing practices is not just included in the 2003 Convention but also in the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007). By recognizing and preserving traditional healing practices for therapeutic purposes in areas beyond the reach of modern medicine, we can help ensure our universal rights. According to the common definition by the World Health Organization, traditional medicine is “the sum total of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness.” As such, traditional practices cannot be easily defined without reference to diverse social and cultural contexts and knowledge.

Today, traditional medicine is facing the threat of extinction. Natural medicinal materials and herbs are disappearing due to climate change, desertification, and deforestation. Furthermore, traditional medicine is losing ground to modern medicine, as it is deemed non-scientific or unstandardized. Even if traditional medicine has a scientifically proven treatment for a certain disease, it is easily distorted in the commercialization process and often undermines the sustainability of communal life. For instance, when a naturopathic or dietary treatment that has been passed down in a community becomes known to be effective for a

disease, the therapeutic materials used in the treatment are recklessly consumed regardless of the communal background, which can lead to destroying the community and the surrounding environment.

Traditional medicine should coexist with modern medicine as they are complementary. Traditional medicine plays an important role as a means of treatment for people outside the reach of modern medicine. It also gives new hope to those suffering from diseases that modern medicine cannot yet cure. In some developing countries, traditional medicine is easily accessible and obtainable at little or no cost and thus is much more popular than modern medicine. Traditional medicine also embodies wisdom that has been transmitted through generations based on our ancestors' perceptions and experiences about their lives and environment. Traditional medicine, therefore, should be recognized as valuable intangible heritage worthy of safeguarding.

This book begins with the introduction to traditional medicine around the world and describes the relations between traditional medicine as traditional knowledge and the 2003 Convention as well as discussions on safeguarding traditional medicine. The book was jointly published by ICHCAP as the content publisher and #Heritage Alive as the editor. As a UNESCO category 2 centre established in accordance with the 2003 Convention, ICHCAP has been engaged in publication projects for intangible heritage, including the ICH Courier, to increase the visibility and public awareness of intangible heritage in the Asia-Pacific states. It is always a great pleasure for ICHCAP to work with NGOs enthusiastically working in the field for safeguarding intangible heritage.

ICHCAP considers this publication a new challenge and a major step forward, as it is aimed to introduce traditional medicine of the world beyond the Asia-Pacific region. It is also noteworthy that the book will be first presented during the twelfth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage to be held in Jeju, Korea. In this regard, we would like to thank the editorial board of #Heritage Alive led by Editor-in-Chief Eivind Falk and the members of ICHCAP for their contributions to the successful publication of this book.

We hope that this book helps readers discover knowledge about traditional medicine and the value of endangered traditional knowledge and also understand the need for the sustainable safeguarding of the environment that surrounds us.