

Strengthening the Capacities of State Parties under the Mechanisms of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

-- The 2018 Training Workshop Held in Pyongyang, Democratic People's Republic of Korea as a Case

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Abstract

The Training workshop held in Pyongyang, Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 2018 was a special landmark for the implementation of the 2003 UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, in terms strengthening the Capacity-building of a Member State on community-based inventorying. This was for the first time that the fund of International Assistance was manipulated by a UNESCO Field Office, and the training workshop was cooperated between the Member State and Field Office. Despite of the special cultural and political contexts of the concerned Stat, this case was worth seriously re-examining in many aspects.

Keywords

2003 Convention; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Safeguarding; Capacity-building; Inventorying.

1. Introduction

As part of the International Assistance Project--- Strengthening the Capacities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereafter DPRK) [1] for Community-based Inventorying of Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereafter ICH) and for Elaborating Nomination Files under the Mechanisms of the 2003 Convention---a training workshop was organized in Pyongyang by UNESCO Beijing Office and National Authority for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (hereafter NAPCH), DPRK in 2018, within the framework of UNESCO's global Capacity-building Strategy for the implementation of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereafter Convention) [2] with financial support from the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund.

According to "DECISION 13.COM 1.BUR 3.5," [3] considering the domestic growing interests of nominating elements to the Convention's Lists and Registers and the lack of expertise and relative weak capacities in the implementation of the Convention, the DPRK's proposed project was structured with a twelve-month action plan, and aimed to strengthen the capacities of national stakeholders to inventory intangible cultural heritage and prepare nomination files under the current mechanisms of the Convention. The proposed project contained two components: 1) a training workshop on preparing nomination files; 2) a preliminary recap session on the main concepts of community-based inventorying. In collaboration with UNESCO Beijing Office, the training workshop in 2018 announced a substantial advancement of the proposed project. It should be noted that, as requested by the concerned State Party, the UNESCO Beijing Office [4] would be responsible for the coordination and monitoring of the project activities (44% of the requested amount). It was for the first time that the funding of International Assistance was manipulated through the coordination between a UNESCO

regional office and a State Party. In a sense, the project was carried out on an experimental basis, and relevant experiences gained from its implementation would be of great value in terms of the perfection of the mechanism of International Assistance under the 2003 Convention.

2. Context and Objectives

2.1. Country Context

Since there were too few materials available online or in publications relating to the State Party, the relevant information of national administrative and legislative management of ICH was hardly known to the outside audiences. However, prior to the current training workshop, there had been two UNESCO workshops receiving International Assistance under the Intangible Cultural Fund: one in 2013 and another in 2016. With reference to the two previous inscriptions of elements nominated by DPRK: Arirang Folksongs in 2014 and Kimchi Making in 2015, especially by comparing two versions of the extracts of the national inventory [5] attached to the nomination forms, one could possibly notice the great impact that the 2013 UNESCO workshop had upon the evolution of the national inventory of DPRK. Given the current rules of procedure for the possible inscription of an element, there were at least two years of waiting period for any nominations. Therefore, it could be concluded that the inscription of Arirang Folksongs happened before the 2013 UNESCO workshop, and the one of Kimchi making happened after it.

The documents attached to Arirang Folksongs contained limited information of the State Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage of DPRK: only name of the element, Year of inclusion, communities, groups or individuals, geographical distribution, responsible agency, and person were provided in a simplified way. However, the updated version of the national inventory could be found from the extract attached to the nomination form of Kimchi Making, incorporating the basic structure of ICH-02 form [6] for the nomination to the Representative List: information related to section B, C, D, E, as well as that from section 1 through 5 were provided in a substantial and detailed manner. This was something that may be considered as the achievement of the 2013 UNESCO workshop in a sense.

It could be learnt that NAPCH should be identified as the responsible body for the management of intangible heritage in the territory of DPRK. There were several elements selected and included in the State Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage, at the request and proposal of social groups, working people's organizations and governmental organizations representing the public at large. In conformity with Article 12 [7] of the Convention, the State's Inventory was updated by NAPCH on a regular basis, with the participation of concerned communities, groups, and individuals.

To facilitate the governmental bodies, enterprises, organizations, and local authorities as well as communities and individuals concerned in the practice and transmission of intangible cultural heritage, DPRK had taken a number of measures to promote the safeguarding of ICH elements through training, media dissemination, exhibition, publication, workshop, legislation and so on forth. As a result, the awareness of the importance of ICH in general at the national level was raised.

2.2. Objectives of the Training Workshop

The current training workshop focused on sharing knowledge about the purposes and procedures of nominating ICH elements to the lists of the 2003 Convention: List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in need of Urgent Safeguarding (hereafter Urgent Safeguarding List), Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (here after Representative List) and Register of Good Safeguarding Practices (hereafter Good Safeguarding Practices).

Based on the success of the previous inscriptions to the Representative List submitted by DPRK, as well as two UNESCO workshops supported by the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund, this training workshop sort to a deepened understanding of the Convention and its Operational Directives [8], and therefore sort to further reinforce participants' knowledge of the requirements and criteria of relevant nominations or proposals. Topics such as joint nominations with other countries, how to apply for international financial assistance, and the importance of integrating sustainable development and inclusive approaches in nominations were also covered and indispensable components of the current training.

In addition, the workshop also included, in the first two days, sessions to refresh participants' knowledge of community-based inventorying, the key requirements of the nomination process. This was of particular importance for those who had not attended previous workshops. The good preparation by the participants prior to the workshop, namely thorough reading of the Participants Text on Community-based Inventorying beforehand, largely decided the result of the training workshop.

3. Framework and Content of the Training Workshop

3.1. Preparation of the Workshop

The preparation of the current training workshop was conducted through the coordination of the officers from Regional Office. Since it was the first time for one of the facilitators to do a workshop, the guidance and planning of the experienced one was another key factor to determine the success of the current training. Having studied the nomination of International Assistance requested by DPRK, as well as two final reports by the previous facilitators, the facilitators proposed a draft provisional program, which was later commented and complemented by the officers from Regional Office.

After an intensive process of corrections and discussions, a final 7-day provisional program was submitted to the DPRK partners. However, as the opening day of the workshop drew near, some changes had been made to the provisional program: a field practicum was re-organized into day 2 and its venue and content were also changed; day 3 was cancelled because it was the official day for the participants to study.

As a result, the old version was finally replaced by the current one: the original departure day for facilitators was re-organized by a half-day training, and some sessions were re-tailored. Thanks to the tracking document created by the coordinator, the two facilitators remained posted and updated with the progress and development of the provisional program. This was very helpful for the facilitators to prepare documents that were highly relevant to the purpose of the training.

Based on the information exchanged by UNESCO coordinators with DPRK partners, the case studies focusing on China were mainly prepared by one of the facilitators, with a perspective based on his experiences serving as an Evaluation Body member; While another took a comparative approach, citing good and useful examples based on her observation over the global efforts and practices in ICH. It should be admitted that this combination did fulfill the need and expectation of the attended participants.

3.2. Description of Participant

The participants attended the training workshop were selected by NAPCH, with a consideration of their knowledge, experiences and positions relating to their roles to be playing in the safeguarding of ICH at the national level. The gender ratio of the participants was imbalanced, comparing to the previous workshops: there were more female participants present in the 2016 training workshop. Only 6 females attended the current workshop. As the DPRK organizer explained, the criteria for selection of candidates are based on their potential roles in the future

inventorying and safeguarding of ICH at the national and local levels. In this sense, very few females were qualified to be selected as participants of the workshop.

Out of the 24 participants, 6 females [9] are: NAM Hye Ryon, staff, Department of Intangible Cultural Heritage, NAPCH; CHOE Un Hye, researcher, Section of ICH Research, KNHPA; RI AE Ryong, Section leader of the Chukjon Polyclinic of Mangyongdae District; PAK Kyong Ran, head, Section of Traditional drinks, NAPCH; PAK Song Sil, Section leader of the Pyongyang Municipal Koryo Medicine Hospital; PAK Suk Yong, Researcher, Section of ICH, Pyongyang Municipal National Heritage Preservation Agency. Among the rest of participants, most of them were heads of ICH sections at the provincial level, or experts and researchers from provincial offices for national heritage preservation. Part of the participants had attended the previous workshops. Several young faces could also be identified among the participants.

3.3. Framework and Content of the Program

The general structure of the training workshop, see Table 1.

Table 1. The structure of the workshop

Day	Content
1	Session 1: Introduction to the program Session 2: Introduction to the Convention and Key Concepts Session 3: Perspectives from DPRK on inventorying Session 4: Community-based inventorying
2	Session 5: Visits for the field practicum, with group work on basic inventorying questionnaire
3	Session 6: Safeguarding and inventorying Session 7: Inventorying where no system exists Session 8: Documentation and inventorying
4	Session 9: Nominations: an overview Including joint nominations Session 10: Introduction to the Urgent Safeguarding List and Representative List nomination forms Session 11: Examples of selected nominations with critiques
5	Session 12: Group work on the mock nomination Session 13: Case studies of good practices from the Asia-Pacific Session 14: The Register of Good Safeguarding Practice: its objectives and criteria
6	Session 15: What are safeguarding plans and how do they relate to the nomination process? Session 16: Safeguarding Step by Step Session 17: Group work on nomination forms
7	Session 18: Quiz for knowledge on nominations & evaluation

4. Strong Points and Challenges

4.1. Organization

The close and efficient cooperation between UNESCO Beijing Office and DPRK counterpart was the solid basis for the orderly organization of the workshop. The DPRK partners seemed to have a full trust over UNESCO staffs from Beijing Office. In addition, the responsibilities for each side are clear: UNESCO Beijing Office plays a coordination and management role based on past experiences to: oversee the budget, prepare the agenda of the workshop, coordinate with international facilitators and DPRK counterparts, and monitor the pilot inventorying; NAPCH is in charge of local logistics including venue for workshop, accommodations, documents translation and in-site interpretation, in cooperation with the Education Commission, Korean National Heritage Preservation Agency (KNHPA), the General Bureau of Public Catering Service, the Sci-tech Complex and other institutions.

4.2. Translation and Interpretation

The participants were highly diligent and hardworking. They did cherish the opportunity to receive information about the safeguarding of ICH from the international community. However, the training of participants would not be possible without the relatively accurate translation of course materials prepared by the facilitators. Their efficiency was impressive, almost every document from the repertoire had been translated into Korean, highly in conformity with the original forms and structures. In addition, although the original plan of simultaneous interpretation had been altered into a consecutive one, the effect of training in terms of ideas conveying was not worsened but strengthened, according to participants' feedbacks comparing to their previous experiences. Thanks to all the involved translators and interpreters, the narratives presented by two facilitators and their related understanding by the participants had always remained on the same page.

4.3. Participants' Contribution

Participants' attentions and concentrations all through the presentations and sessions were the source of the facilitators' confidence in the conduct of the workshop. They always followed facilitators' guidance closely, asking relevant questions from time to time. This was something unusual to a training held in DPRK, for the cultural norms might constrain the interaction between insiders and outsiders. It was also true that the previous two successful workshops had strengthened the Capacity-building in the country. Therefore, most participants seemed already familiarized with terminologies and concepts from the Convention and its Operational Directives. This may be the reason that their questions were not always basic but sometimes in-depth ones. For instance, during the session introducing the good safeguarding practices, one participant asked about a question: did the proposal to the Register needs to be included in the national list before its submission to the Secretariat? By revealing something we took for granted and would not even think of, this unexpected question might lead researchers into the deeper reflection of the relationship between the mechanisms of the Lists and Register under the Convention.

5. Challenges of the Training Workshop

5.1. Information was too Limited

Although the modules of the training were prepared by an experienced facilitator, the limited information about the background of the country and the potential audiences prevents the creation of an accurately targeted training program. The facilitators could only, based on their own perceptions of the requests of the State Party, prepare materials they thought that would be most useful and needed for the participants. In addition, without a clear conception toward the participants' knowledge about relevant mechanisms under the Convention, the facilitators' teaching could only be carried out firstly on an experimental basis. And then, after the constrained interaction with the participants in the training, their further modifications and adjustments over the training materials would be possible. This was in a way harmful to a more efficient conduct of the workshop.

5.2. Monitoring by Officials from National Authority

Due to the cultural environment of the State Party, the workshop had been always monitored by officers from national-leveled organizations. There were several times when the participants tried to speak or answer questions, an officer would step out and intervene their speeches, and then the speakers became totally muted. Situations would become even worse or somehow frustrating, when the female participants' efforts to speak were prevented by male officers in the room, in particular because of the cultural norm of men's dominance over women and women's comments were naturally ignored by men.

6. Conclusion

Since it was the third time that DPRK requests International Assistance to hold training workshops for Capacity-building, a considerable progress had been made in terms of national inventorying and implementation of the Convention. In particular, the understanding of the Convention and its Operational Directives, as well as the awareness of the importance of ICH at the national level in general had been enhanced, as we had witnessed from the evolution of nomination files from Arirang Folksong to Kimchi Making. However, contrary to the nature of the Convention to be a flexible international instrument, the domestication or adaptation of it in DPRK is far from ideal. A rough impression is that the State Party followed the mechanisms under the Convention in a narrow way, for instance too much attention had been paid to the Representative List, and other mechanisms such as Urgent Safeguarding List and Good Safeguarding Register been ignored.

As mentioned above, the national inventory of DPRK followed the same structure of ICH-02 form, Copying criteria from Section B through E, as well from 1 through 5. This was not wrong because a national inventory needed to be built upon some building blocks. However, judging from questions frequently raised by participants during workshop, they seemed to be troubled by a concept from the participant text on “inventory where no system exists,” “distribution frequency” from the identification of an element. In fact, this was a misunderstanding of the requirement for the relevant section of the form, which most likely resulted from the process of translation. The original description of the table was “Physical location (s) / distribution”, followed by “frequency of enactment of the ICH element.” However, the participants misjudged the two parts and put them together, thus creating a new term---“distribution frequency.” Based on this observation, it might be concluded that the participants had accepted the content too rigidly, without any clear and deep reflection upon it. This perhaps could explain nothing, but it did reflect a fact that might be true to the country: the flexibility of the Convention was not fully understood here; instead, the Convention was accepted in a monolithic manner. This was an important issue for the further development and reflection of the Convention, not only for researchers but for the Secretariat, in that the standardization of the safeguarding practices implemented by States Parties should not be the direction for the sustained development of the Convention.

To conclude, the general evaluation of the workshop could not be made without the careful re-examination over the participants’ concerns and puzzles about the mechanisms of urgent safeguarding and good safeguarding practices. This was in fact an interrelated issue that could be linked to the country’s enthusiasm and concentration over the Representative List. It was known that DPRK had up to now two elements inscribed on the Representative List. No evidence proved that the country had made any efforts in searching for a possible inscription of any element onto the Urgent Safeguarding List. This signaled the Convention for the country only served for the purpose of celebrating its accomplishment in preserving intangible heritage present in its territory at the international level. Therefore, only ICH elements that enjoyed full vibrancy would be presented to the international community. This attitude was confirmed by the country’s interests over a possible proposal to the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices, which might be considered by the country as an advanced level superior to the Representative List.

In addition, having noticed the serious concern of the multi-national nomination from the DPRK side, as well as the peace-making progress happening in the Korean Peninsula, it was suggested that the Secretariat should offer more guidance and assistance to DPRK, and further encourage Republic of Korea to take part in any possible international cooperation between the two Parties, in term of a joint nomination over a shared intangible cultural heritage. Considering the intensive focus toward the peace-making plan in the area that had amounted to so far, this could

be an opportunity for the international visibility of intangible cultural heritage could be promoted at the global level.

References

- [1] Information on <https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/democratic-peoples-republic-of-korea-KP>.
- [2] UNESCO 's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted at its 32nd session of the General Conference in 2003. It was formally put into force in 2006.
- [3] Information on <https://ich.unesco.org/en/decisions-bureau/13.COM%201.BUR/3.5>.
- [4] UNESCO Beijing Cluster Office was established in 1984. It is responsible for UNESCO's projects and work in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, the People's Republic of China, and the Republic of Korea. Information on <https://en.unesco.org/fieldoffice/beijing/about>.
- [5] The Convention is a permissive document, and the majority of its articles are worded in nonprescriptive language, allowing governments to implement it flexibly. However, drawing up inventories is one of the specific obligations outlined in the Convention and in the Operational Directives for its implementation.
- [6] The form for nominations to the Representative List. Information on <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ICH-02-2023-EN.doc>.
- [7] Article 12 of the Convention is about "Inventories," it defines the State Party shall draw up, in a manner geared to its own situation, one or more inventories of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory.
- [8] Article 7 of the Convention stipulates that one of the functions of the Committee is to prepare and submit to the General Assembly for approval operational directives for the implementation of the Convention.
- [9] It should be noted that the percentage of female participants continued to grow with the series of training workshops being held in DPRK, which signaled the domestic awareness of ICH had been promoted.