

Progress report (October 2024)

Strengthening capacities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement

Benefitting country(ies)	Global, Cameroon
Type of funding	Earmarked voluntary contribution to the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund received from Azerbaijan
Amount	\$100,000
Implementing period	01/11/2021 - 01/06/2025
Reporting date	October 2024

1. Background & Summary

In the framework of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO has explored the role of living heritage in emergencies, including conflict and disaster situations. In 2020, the General Assembly of States Parties to the Convention adopted operational principles and modalities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies, which offers guidance to national and international stakeholders on how best to engage and safeguard living heritage in various types of emergency contexts ([Resolution 8.GA 9](#)). The operational principles and modalities emphasize the dual nature of living heritage in emergencies, both as being directly under threat and as a valuable resource that communities can draw on to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies.



*Figure 1 Workshop participants in Minawao refugee camp, Cameroon
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In this context, UNESCO is undertaking this project to strengthen the capacities of communities to safeguard and mobilize their intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement. The project involves undertaking the following activities:

Activity 1.1: Develop training materials to strengthen capacities to undertake community-based needs identifications. The materials are in line with the training approach of the global capacity-building programme and provide practical information on the steps to follow when undertaking a community-based needs identification in situations of conflict and forced displacement. They take into account the Operational principles and modalities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies.

Activity 1.2: Test training materials and approach developed. The materials and training approach will be tested with communities affected by conflict and forced displacement through workshops in a pilot country. Cameroon was selected as the pilot country based on identified needs in consultation with UNESCO Field Offices.

Activity 1.3: Conduct community-based needs identification to identify how the intangible cultural heritage has been affected and its potential to be mobilized by communities for resilience and recovery: Participants from the workshop will participate in a community-based needs identification to assess how their intangible cultural heritage has been affected by displacement, prompting reflection on notions of damages and loss with regard to their intangible cultural heritage. The needs identification will furthermore identify elements of intangible cultural heritage that can play a potential role in resilience and recovery. The findings from this exercise will feed into the training materials and handbook to learn from.

Activity 1.4: Integrate lessons learnt into handbook for actors in the humanitarian field. Based on the lessons learnt and insights gained from the pilot activity, a handbook is being elaborated to unpack the specific considerations for operationalizing the principles and modalities in situations of conflict and forced displacement and a methodology for undertaking community-based needs identifications. The handbook is targeted to national and international actors working in the humanitarian sector to enhance their understanding of the role of intangible cultural heritage in their work.

2. Project implementation (2023-2024)

Development of training materials (Activity 1.1)

Two new training units were developed to enhance capacities on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement:

- **Unit 65 ‘Basics in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement’** aims to equip participants with an understanding of the impact of conflict situations on intangible cultural heritage as well as the role that intangible cultural heritage may play in such contexts. It also aims to deepen participants' understanding of how to apply the operational principles and modalities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergency situations to contexts of conflict and forced displacement and according to the different stages of an emergency management cycle.
- **Unit 66 ‘Conducting community-based needs identifications for intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement’** builds on Unit 65 and provides participants with the different steps undertaken in a community-based needs identification to assess the specific needs for intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement. It takes participants through the different stages of undertaking a community-based needs identification through practical exercises to design and contextualize a methodology to their needs, covering also key ethical principles and frameworks for undertaking work in humanitarian contexts.

The training materials will be translated into French and uploaded on the Secretariat's materials repository.

Testing of training materials and community-based needs identification (Activity 1.2 and 1.3)

The training materials were tested through a capacity-building workshop from 9 to 12 October 2023 in the Minawao Refugee Camp, in the Mayo-Tsanaga department, in the Far North region of Cameroon. The workshop was organized by the Living Heritage Entity in collaboration with UNESCO's Multisectoral Regional Office for Central Africa in Yaoundé, in partnership with the Sub-Office of the United Nations Refugee Agency (hereinafter UNHCR) in Maroua. The objectives were to build the capacity of refugee and host communities in Camp Minawao to identify the impacts of conflict, forced displacement and settlement in the camp on the safeguarding of their ICH and, above all, to implement the methodology for identifying the safeguarding needs of their intangible cultural heritage. Fieldwork was carried out to test the methodology in five smaller working groups

representing a cross-section of the ethnic communities living in the camp, as well as the host communities. A key recommendation coming out of the workshop was to encourage the partnership between UNESCO and UNHCR, showing the effectiveness of working together to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage of refugee communities to strengthen their resilience and wellbeing.



Figure 2 Participants in the training workshop held in Minawao Refugee Camp, Cameroon

Development of handbook for humanitarian actors (Activity 1.4)

The lessons learnt from the training workshop were used as a basis for the development of a handbook for humanitarian actors on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement. The lead consultant engaged for the development of the training materials also led the development of the handbook with the aim to sensitize humanitarian actors to the key issues at stake for safeguarding living heritage in conflict situations, as well as what concretely can be done in such contexts. The draft handbook is being peer reviewed by a group of humanitarian actors for feedback. Publication is planned for 2025.

3. Challenges and how they were addressed

The project initially encountered a delay in 2022/2023 in the selection of the pilot country. Initial consultations had led to the identification of Sudan for the potential pilot. However, following the outbreak of war in 2023, this was no longer possible due to security concerns. Cameroon was subsequently identified as a suitable pilot country, given the high number of refugee and displaced populations in the country.

Challenges during the workshop in Cameroon included language difficulties. While the training materials were only available in English and French, the two main vernacular languages in the camp were Hausa and Fulfulde. Other workshop participants were enlisted in the workshop to support interpretation into English and French. There were also challenges around the level of understanding of the 2003 Convention and its key concepts. For most participants, they were unfamiliar with the key concepts of the Convention and so a working session was required to familiarize them first to the language and vocabulary of the Convention.

For the development of the handbook, some delays were encountered to ensure consultations with key humanitarian actors. This was deemed essential to ensure that the materials developed corresponded to the needs and demands of humanitarian workers, integrating relevant frameworks and language. This work is ongoing for the finalization of the handbook.

4. Direct Beneficiaries, Key Partners and Other Stakeholders

Direct project beneficiaries for the training workshop in Cameroon included refugee communities, but

also from host communities, humanitarian actors, camp administration, camp security services, decentralized state structures in the Mayo-Tsanga department (culture, environment, education, health) and the Ministry of Arts and Culture.

The handbook will address national and international humanitarian organizations working with displaced populations. This may also include UN organization and international bodies working in related areas (i.e. OCHA, UNCHR, ICRC). Moreover, the project will also involve intersectoral cooperation with other Conventions and programs at UNESCO relevant to the safeguarding of culture in emergencies.

5. Communication and Visibility

In line with the communications strategy, a news article was published on UNESCO's website.¹ In addition, UNESCO organized a side-event on "Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement", on 7 December 2023 on the occasion of the 18th Session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage held in Kasane, Botswana.

The roundtable, with a special focus on Africa, drew upon the experience of recent UNESCO activities, including the capacity-building project in Cameroon, to demonstrate how refugee communities may turn to their living heritage practices and cultural expressions, such as traditional musical practices, to foster dialogue, mutual understanding and reconciliation between different groups. The event brought together communities involved in these activities, as well as humanitarian actors, to highlight the importance of integrating intangible cultural heritage into emergency management plans and programmes for recovery.

The event, moderated by UNESCO, first took stock of the panelists' experiences of the role of living heritage in improving dialogue among refugee and host communities. Then, the session explored how to strengthen the integration of ICH in humanitarian action and responses in contexts of conflict and forced displacement

Opened via video address by H.E. Ms. Adriana Molano Arenas, Deputy Minister of Culture of Colombia and facilitator of the 2003 UNESCO Convention, the speakers included Mr Martin Andrade, UNESCO Consultant and lead author of the capacity-building materials, and Mr Ben Bello Mahmoudou, Community-based protection associate, UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), who participated in the pilot activity. The event was closed by H.E. Mr Bidoung Patt, Minister of Culture and the Arts of Cameroon.

¹ See <https://ich.unesco.org/en/news/safeguarding-living-heritage-for-resilience-and-recovery-at-minawao-refugee-camp-in-cameroon-13496>

“For communities, living heritage is what makes the difference between living and being alive.” Mr Martin Andrade, UNESCO Consultant, Colombia



Figure 3 Panelists and moderator from the side event on December 2023.

The activity was also presented as a good example during an international partner coordination meeting convened by UNESCO on 30 September 2024. The meeting focused on strengthening international coordination and response to safeguard culture in emergencies and presented the pilot project with UNHCR in Cameroon as a good example of a joint activity between UNESCO and humanitarian actors that could be replicated in other contexts.