

V. Pending Issues & Urgent Needs regarding the Safeguarding of ICH

- Q1. Is any of the intangible cultural heritage in your country in danger of disappearance or transformation?

The art and skill of Navigation is at the risk of being lost forever. Traditional navigation is rarely used especially in the urban areas. The knowledge of stars, weather, and sea conditions, and the capacity for making and interpreting sea charts is slowly at a risk of total disappearance.

The knowledge was mostly reserved for a group of special people called the rimedo. Even now you rarely hear the rimedo or hear of someone who is a rimedo. There were quite a few women known to have held the title of rimedo. Each rimedo keeps his teachings secret from the uninitiated, and imparts them only to his favorite children or other people who have a special talent for navigation. This would also contribute to the knowledge being almost lost.

In the olden days, not only the navigators have navigational skills but they were also knowledgeable about sea marks and where fresh water lens were located in the ocean depth.

- Q2. What are the reasons the heritage is in danger and what type of safeguarding measures have been taken? Please be specific.

With the latest in technology, traditional methods are less in use or not at all. We only have a few of the skilled navigators still alive so we are racing against time to get as much information so can be recorded before being lost. It is written in the HPO Legislation that a title of "Dri Kabeel", someone who possesses traditional knowledge and skills, will be created and shall be bestowed upon Marshallese men and women who are widely acclaimed to be the unsurpassed masters in their fields.

If a person chosen to become a Dri Kabeel accepts that title, that person shall agree to train on apprentice for a minimum of one year and maximum of five years in those skills and the knowledge for which the person has received

that title. After the apprentice has completed the training, the Dri Kabeel may take on an additional apprentice.

Another non-governmental organization that was established some years back, Waan Aelon in Majol (WAM), has been targeting mostly youths-at-risk and dropouts, teaching them how to build canoes and also how to sail them. This has been a successful program so far.

- Q3. What are the pending issues for safeguarding ICH in your country that you have found through interviews and the field survey?

There is still a lot of awareness-raising that has to be done, and especially working with the traditional and government leaders and educating them of the importance of safeguarding. Sometimes it takes something to happen before any action can be taken. After the ICH workshop that was conducted last year, resource people was identified, what intangible heritage is at risk were also identified, but there are still lots of work to be done before ratifying the ICH Convention.

- Q4. What kind of problems and difficulties were encountered during the safeguarding projects?

There were no major problems except for trying to get people to answer some of the questions. It is always difficult to get very detailed comments or answers from people especially in the outer islands. Each family, or can be clan, in the Marshallese culture, has traditional knowledge and skills that are considered secrets so there's always the unwillingness to impart with family "secrets".

- Q5. What future plans are there for the safeguarding of ICH (programme information)?

Since the resource people have been identified, we're going to establish the apprenticeship program and start with navigation. Apprenticeship will last a minimum of one year. Instruction commences with an explanation of the sea conditions (swells, choppy seas, etc.) between the islands and in the reading of sea charts. Furthermore, instruction will include an introduction to the

astronomy known to the rimedo alone, meteorology, and the knowledge of the “sea marks” of the individual atolls and the devices that go with them.

We are going to fund a project with the WAM Program which is to be carried out in some of the outer islands. This has been a very special program that has been working very closely with youth dropouts, and we want to utilize it to carry out our own program.

Q6. What type of contributions and cooperation from the international society is needed for the safeguarding of ICH in your country?

Mostly technical assistance, consultation, and providing IEC (Information, Education, Communication) materials to distribute to the Marshallese population. With collaborative effort of all stakeholders, this will make our campaign more effective, strong, and widespread. Dissemination of information is very relevant and should be consistent to keep and continue the momentum.

Q7. What role do you expect ICHCAP to play in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in the region in terms of programmes, projects, etc.?

If we're going to take on projects that will reach all the atolls in the Marshalls, we will need funding from ICHCAP, training on advocacy, and technical assistance. The other populated atolls in the Marshalls are far and scattered all around so it can be a little difficult to reach them.

Q8. Please include any requests and/or suggestions you have on this matter.

If more training can be offered on the advocacy of this project that will really help. Even though a field survey was done, we still need a lot more to go on before we can really have great results. This is a very broad issue that will require a lot of campaigning that will enable us to achieve our endeavor. Media can also be a very instrumental tool and if we can all work together in writing articles for the newspaper, and also do radio spots or program, and especially create video on safeguarding.

Q9. What should be considered to encourage or to ensure active involvement from the community in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage?

We will have to identify all resource and stakeholders so better result can be reached. One organization cannot do by itself but will need full commitment from all relevant organizations and individuals. We will need a lot of brainstorming in finding what would be the most effective activities that will really get the community interested and involved.