
Discussion

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Madam Irina Bokova (Director-General of UNESCO), Representatives from UNESCO regional Offices and NATCOMs, Experts, Scholars, National and International Practitioners and Communities in the Asia-Pacific Region, and Our Hosts the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea:

It gives me great pleasure to be able to present here today on this auspicious occasion. Distinguished participants and Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to thank the organisers for supporting my attendance at this forum and to congratulate ICHCAP on its success in being established as a Category 2 Centre in the Asia-Pacific region and for bringing us together at this forum to provide an opportunity to exchange information, communicate, and network.

My presentation will relate the need for the development in the area of intangible cultural heritage inventories and seek the endorsement of Pacific regional collaboration and a regional strategy to strengthen ICH activities at the community level and at the policy-formulation and implementation levels in the Pacific. I will make reference to other regional capacity-building and institutional-strengthening initiatives in the Pacific that could link to established best practices

in the Asia-Pacific region.

My name is Adi Meretui Ratunabuabua, *Adi* means 'of chiefly status'. I am here as a Pacific delegate representing one of the twenty-two Pacific island countries and states in the vast Pacific Ocean. The Pacific is a diverse region of many cultures and island states, and under the Secretariat of the Pacific community, the Pacific includes the following:

American Samoa, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Futuna, Guam, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Northern Marianas, Palau, PNG, Pitcairn Island, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Wallis.

In our cluster are also Australia and New Zealand, the two larger states of the sixteen UNESCO Member States in the Pacific, but neither is classed under the categories of small island states or least developed countries as are the many of the other island states I have mentioned.

Many of our indigenous cultures in the Pacific made sense of the world through our rich oral histories, songs, chants, and dances. However, many of our histories are recorded and taught through the languages of the colonisers who came from Britain, Germany, France, Spain, Indonesia, the Philippines, and more recently America to name but a few.

The Pacific region is still coming to terms in agreeing on definitions for the actual number of regional languages spoken, as opposed to dialects, which are dependent on anthropological arguments framed within French or English definitions.

The Pacific region faces challenges in the heritage sector, and these challenges have been highlighted in the UNESCO Pacific World Heritage Action Plan as having the attributes that follow.

Very Small Land Areas and Populations (Although Very Large Sea Areas)

Consider the following factors:

- Our heritage management agencies are small, and they are tasked to handle many functions while having very limited resources.
- Distances between countries are enormous, and travel can be a significant cost for heritage activities.
- Communication difficulties among isolated areas affect implementation timetables.
- Decisions concerning cultural revival activities require extensive consultation because most land (and sea) is held under customary ownership.

These factors relate to implementing the ICH Convention. From my experience in joining the Fiji Department of National Heritage, Culture and Arts, I was tasked in 2003 to speak as the Pacific spokesperson at the UNESCO General Conference during the adoption of the ICH Convention in Paris. At that historic meeting, the Pacific announced that it welcomed and supported such an important Convention. However, since 2003 of the sixteen UNESCO Member States, only five have adopted the Convention. This highlights the capacity gaps in the Pacific to implement the processes required to ratify the Convention, which in turn, limits the ability to develop and apply strategies to implement the ICH Convention.

The UNESCO Pacific Office in Apia has been working hard to bring States Parties together to address capacity gaps for policymakers at national levels, and at a regional meeting in the Kingdom of Tonga in 2011, which was held in collaboration with ICHCAP, the following recommendations were identified and endorsed by Pacific participants, stating that they should:

- promote the 2003 Convention by encouraging ratification,
- increase awareness and participation among the Pacific Member States of UNESCO in sharing information and networking through ICHCAP's activities and by inviting Pacific Member States to become involved with the Centre,

- strengthen ICH safeguarding in the Pacific by sharing information and preparing nominations for the UNESCO ICH lists,
- continue to discuss a strategy and action plan for ICH Safeguarding in the Pacific, and
- disseminate a report of the second network meeting in cooperation with participating Member States of UNESCO and interested parties.

The recommendations thus highlight the pressing need to strengthen the technical capacity of decision makers who set policy for implementing ICH strategies in the region. This would then create an enabling environment for communities, which through capacity-building and awareness programmes, would identify and revive the ICH that might particularly be in danger of disappearance due to modern demands on daily living and survival.

One suggested way to raise the profile and awareness of ICH would be through sharing best practices in the Asia-Pacific region and by working to establish national Living Human Treasures programmes.

This was highlighted at the UNESCO World Craft Council Meeting held in Fiji in 1999, where there was a call to establish a Living Human Treasures programmes in the region and to encourage youth ambassadors schemes. This saw Fiji commencing on a 2006 pilot programme to establish a LHT system and to raise the profile of LHTs in Fiji, and we are happy to share our experiences as well as the successes and challenges in the name of sharing information.

It is suggested that an Asia-Pacific programme could be developed to encourage and assist States Parties to establish a secretariat with a least one person as a focal point for LHT systems that could then act as a catalyst to establish national inventories and to establish biennial national and regional LHT awards to recognise excellence.

Two Potential Land-Based Initiatives

The promotion of traditional knowledge in preparing for natural disasters for food security skills revival and awareness of disaster risk management and practices particularly for food preservation, planting and fishing, calendars and practices

linking to education for sustainable development through ministries of education. It is recommended that this could be done within the community and through developing curricula in formal education systems.

Documenting and reviving traditional house-building skills and architecture and recognising ICH practitioners to link to the World Heritage Convention and having a regional inventories that acknowledge and observe protocols for communities to access traditional knowledge would contribute to national education for sustainable development activities through formal education systems.

Maritime

As a huge expanse of the Pacific is covered by ocean and many skills are fast disappearing, a maritime revival programme and activities linking the ICH convention, the World Heritage Convention, and the Convention on Biological Diversity through collecting oral histories and mapping cultural sites related to reviving indigenous navigation skills and boat-building skills and linking both to multinational proposed world heritage sites, such as the Marae Taputapua Tea and the many newly established navigation societies in the Pacific working with Ministries of Education, Culture, and Environment, would go a long way in safeguarding these traditional skills.

Pacific Islands Museums Association

Assisting with regional coordination to implement these activities could be done in partnership with the Pacific Islands Museums Association, which is a regional, multilingual cultural organisation based in Vanuatu that has a strong network of cultural centres and museums in the Pacific region that collaborate to build capacity that focus on developing the culture sector in each respective member country.

SPC Regional Culture and Education Strategy

These activities also link to other regional initiatives and plans, including those through the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), which is an intergovernmental agency, and the Council of Pacific Arts and Culture, which was developed and endorsed by the Ministers of Education a Regional Culture and Education Strategy in 2010 in Papua New Guinea during the Pacific Island Forum Ministers meeting.

Educating for sustainable development, identifying LHT, and reviving skills may act as catalysts for making inventories and recognising ICH at the local and national levels and could further enhance regional collaboration in the Asia-Pacific region.