

## IV. Information Building and Sharing

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All the institutions that shared their experiences and knowledge with this survey are positively engaged in information building in the relevant fields, and in all cases, they resort to such hard tasks solely for the benefit of the general public who may come as researchers, disseminators of knowledge, arts creators, or even as mere knowledge and information seekers. Therefore, they are invariably engaged in sharing the fruits of their labour with the unlimited cliental they are bound to gather during the course of time. This then will require and compel them to be on the alert to the possible problems that can arise.

Undoubtedly the enhancement of the awareness of the different classes of people of their rights and duties will be a major function of the relevant officials in the various Institutions. This is one of the major roles played by the Institutions like the Office of the Intellectual Property Rights Authority (IPRA) when they plan regular awareness programmes for the benefit of different categories of people in the society who may in some way or the other be either a victim or a culprit in the instances of infringements that may occur. Yet they cannot escape by merely making people aware of the dangers of infringements. Instead, they will have to be ready with mechanisms, rules, and regulations to prevent infringements from happening and taking actions if or when such cases occur. These institutions have been increasingly engaged in these activities as international laws had entrusted the said responsibility to them by way of making them partners to the international treaties and charters on the relevant subjects. In addition, the IPRA is functioning in the advisory capacity to the other state institutions on IPR matters.

The Department of National Archives of Sri Lanka (DNASL) is one of the most important institutions engaged in information building and sharing them with others as has been elaborated above. However it has to be noted that it is the custodian for all judicial purposes of the legal copies of all the publications in the country. . Hence one will see that while allowing the general public to gain access to these documents. all the necessary precautions have been taken to ensure the safety of these documents, Yet, unlike other institutions that undertake field surveys to gather ICH information and creations from a grass-roots level, it does

not embark on such collection exercises since the materials it has total mandate on are brought to them by printers, creators, authors, or government institutions in keeping to the legal requirements or occasionally by donors who opt to deposit their valuable historical or cultural materials with the state's repository of national archives.

The department itself has pre-determined rules and regulations governing the use of these valuables, and in the case of private donations, there are the stipulations governing the use of such materials through agreements between the two parties. Therefore, it could be presumed that there is no room whatsoever for infringements to occur. What is most important here is the fact that the materials collected at the DNASL are meant for public use and hence for sharing the knowledge. The main functions expected of this institution clearly highlight its obligations to the general public who would expect them to facilitate getting essential information or even to lay claims on their due rights. The variety of functions assigned to them clearly show how they are tied to the services to the public.

At the same time, it will be seen that this institution is assured to improve its collections every day with the compulsory addition of new materials. Therefore, the information building of the DNASL is guaranteed, and any problems will be related to the necessary resources, manpower, trained skills, physical space, and facilities required to look after the collection and conserve the same for future generations. The trust and confidence the general public has on this institution is owed mainly to its legal obligations, and the public tends to prefer it for safekeeping valuable documents. Even electronically recorded materials like CDs, tapes, and DVDs can now be found deposited with them. At present, this institution has among its wide variety of collections the following audio-visual materials that form a genuine ICH collection

- Colour slides of temple paintings
- Cassettes and tapes of folk music, some Sinhala music tapes
- Some videos containing speeches of Executive Presidents, culture of Sri Lanka
- Microfilm of published newspapers in Sri Lanka.

This institution, well aware of its public duty and obligations, undertakes more and more public awareness programmes to educate the people on their rights and duties. This is proved by the increasing regular awareness programmes undertaken by the DNASL.

The Department of National Museums (DNM), as the main repository of the

tangible cultural heritage of the nation, collects its pieces through various means, such as field collections, donations, purchases, and occasionally deposits made via court orders. Therefore, the material under its custody and protection are all public wealth and accessible to the public for viewing, educating, and even using them as models, but with permission. This institution also collects intangible cultural heritage, such as folklore and traditional knowledge for research and educational purposes, and this heritage is also open for public use. These are all mechanisms of information building and sharing activities adapted by the institution within their means.

The capacity of the DNM in the information building and sharing activities is enhanced by the very fact that it has a network of provincial museums to cater to the needs of the local communities and to display the cultural properties of significance to those localities. This indeed is a great step in making the community conscious of its heritage and of the need to preserve and conserve the heritage for future generations. The DNM has also widened the scope of its mandate by establishing subject-based museums and periodical museums to provide wider and fuller awareness to the visitors on the various themes on which the museums are arranged. These measures are very useful in making the public conscious of the validity of their cultural heritage and the need to take maximum care to protect and preserve them as a symbol of pride and value of their history and culture.

The media institutions under the care of the state are the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation, and Independent Television Network. They are the main centres responsible for propagating and building awareness of the heritage that society is blessed with, and hence, they are responsible for information building in the most lawful manner and setting examples and standards for others to follow. The activities and programmes designed by them not only fulfil that objective but also help promote new talents and research for new materials. Therefore, engaging in electronic media can be considered very powerful for the agencies in information building and sharing.

Another important set of institutions related to information building and sharing are the national, provincial, rural, and schools libraries as well as the specialised libraries attached to departments, universities, hospitals, and others since they perform a role no other can. Since libraries principally perform the same function of providing facilities to improve knowledge, a lot can be achieved through them if they are properly managed. More importantly, national libraries do perform a greater service through the bigger and better resources available to them. This is especially true when more knowledgeable manpower is available at their disposal.

The National Library and Documentation Services Board (NLDSB) is outstanding,

owing primarily to the mandate given by the very Act that created it. According to the brochure, the mission of the NLDSB is attractive. The NLDSB is a repository of cultural heritage. People have access to benefit from the source materials within it, and it cannot be denied since there is no mandate to do so. However, common law is applicable to them as well and precautions are being taken to ensure that what is deposited is legally admissible.

Taking into consideration the many activities embarked on by now by this institution, and more precisely after taking over the responsibility of hosting the activities of the National Committee of ICH Council of Sri Lanka, the NLDSB can be credited with the honour of living up to its ideals and objectives of assisting Sri Lanka to become a culturally enriched and intellectually advanced nation

An area where information building and sharing activities have an important role to play is in the native medical system where much of the knowledge still remains with traditional practitioners and passed down orally from generation to generation, mostly from father to son or son-in-law. This body of knowledge needs to be collected and tested to provide it modern recognition, but at the same time, it has to be protected from being pilfered.

The suspicion the bearers of this body of knowledge has about the possible and imminent danger of multinationals grabbing the patent rights to this valuable wealth of knowledge they had been preserving for such a long period of time cannot be ignored at any cost when considering past experiences of the world where certain wealthy countries that had never seen even the colour of a margosa tree (neem) had robbed the patent rights for neem products from their true owners.

Action has been taken by the government of Sri Lanka since about 1956 to popularise native medicines and the government had initiated steps to establish hospitals, dispensaries, and even research centres meant for native medical practices though one cannot claim that everything is smooth and is on the right tracks to guarantee that no more dangers will ever recur in the future. However, it has to be accepted that information building sharing activities are not running as smoothly as we would like. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the responsible agencies to get into action and to make the world a better place for the very valuable and productive traditional knowledge to come into the open to benefit all humanity and not a few developed countries.