

UNESCO'S ACTIVITIES FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

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ABSTRACT One of UNESCO's main activities in the field of culture concerns the promotion and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. For this purpose, the Member States of UNESCO have elaborated the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which was adopted in 2003 and entered into force in 2006. Intangible cultural heritage consists, according to Article 2.1 of that Convention, of practices and expressions that are handed down within groups and communities from generation to generation, that are in constant evolution and that give a sense of identity and continuity to these groups and communities. UNESCO was and has been involved in a number activities related to intangible cultural heritage in the Horn of Africa, not only in Djibouti and Ethiopia that already ratified the 2003 Convention, but also in Eritrea and Somalia that are considering ratification. Some of these UNESCO activities are aimed at raising awareness about the 2003 Convention, others were designed to reinforce or create, in line with the objectives of that Convention, conditions under which practitioners and tradition bearers may continue to enact, to develop and to transmit their traditional expressions and practices.

Key Words: UNESCO; Intangible cultural heritage; The 2003 Convention; Safeguarding; International cooperation; Horn of Africa.

Adopted by the Member States of UNESCO in 2003 and entered into force on 20 April 2006, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, or the 2003 Convention, is one of UNESCO's seven international standard-setting instruments in the field of culture (UNESCO, 2008). The intangible cultural heritage is defined in the Article 2.1 of that Convention. That definition underscores that the practices and expressions that make up the intangible cultural heritage are constantly recreated and that they are transmitted from generation to generation; it further emphasizes that intangible cultural heritage is crucial for the sense of identity and continuity of the communities and the groups concerned. In its Article 2.2, the 2003 Convention presents the following non-exhaustive list of domains in which the intangible cultural heritage is manifested; oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, as well as traditional craftsmanship.

The 2003 Convention advocates—first and foremost—the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, which is presented in the Preamble of the Convention as an often seriously endangered heritage. A large number of safeguarding measures are enumerated in Article 2.3 of the Convention, and all of them—including, for instance, documentation—are meant to ensure the viability of the intangible cultural heritage. Safeguarding under this Convention is in the first place the responsibility

of each and every State Party (Articles 11, 12, 13, and 14); they are also requested to fully involve the communities and groups who enact and transmit this heritage in its identification and management, and to respect their traditional practices (Article 15). States Parties to the Convention have to take the necessary measures to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage present on their territory and they have to identify it and to register it in one or more inventories, as a preliminary safeguarding measure. They are also recommended to take a number of administrative and legal measures, such as—among many others—the adoption of a general policy aimed at promoting the function of the intangible cultural heritage in society, the designation or establishment of one or more bodies for organizing safeguarding activities, fostering research as well as raising awareness using formal and informal education.

At the international level, the 2003 Convention establishes two lists: (1) the Representative List of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity (Article 16), which aims to celebrate and to give visibility to the diversity of the intangible heritage of groups and communities all over the world; and (2) the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding (Article 17), which is meant to present intangible cultural heritage whose viability is threatened and for which safeguarding measures are feasible.

The 2003 Convention is managed by two organs: the General Assembly of the States Parties which is its sovereign organ, and the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, a 24 member body which is elected by the General Assembly from among the States Parties. The tasks of the Committee include the examination of requests for inscription on the two Lists of the Convention, the examination of requests for international assistance and the identification and presentation of best practices concerning the implementation of the Convention.

The 2003 Convention was not prepared over night; its adoption, in fact, was the culminating point of 30 years of reflections, studies and preparations. It was only slowly that the international community came to realize that the heritage of communities and groups all over the world consists not only of built and natural heritage, or of movable objects, but also of traditional expressions and practices of a less material but living and no less real character. Important intermediate steps in UNESCO's action were the adoption in 1989 of the Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore, the creation in 1997 of the distinction of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, and the adoption of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of 2001. UNESCO organized, in the early years of the 21st century, a large number of preparatory meetings of experts that paved the way for three sessions of an intergovernmental meeting that eventually produced—in June 2003—the final draft of the text of the Convention (Blake, 2006; Smeets, 2008; Aikawa-Faure, 2009). In the framework of the Masterpieces programme, in total 90 elements—15 of them from sub-Saharan countries—were proclaimed a Masterpiece in 2001, 2003 and 2005 (UNESCO, 2006a).

With 112 States Parties as of 17 May 2009, the rhythm of ratification of the 2003 Convention is one of the highest for UNESCO standard-setting instruments.

The pace of implementation so far has also been impressive; the Inter-Governmental Committee convened six times between 2006 and 2009 mainly in order to prepare Operational Directives that must guide the implementation of the Convention. It further started the accreditation of NGOs having competence in the field of intangible cultural heritage, as well as the procedures for inscribing intangible heritage elements on the above-mentioned two Lists. In addition, various countries have already benefited from the international assistance for preparatory and safeguarding activities. The Operational Directives entered into force after their approval by the General Assembly of the States Parties to the Convention in June 2008 (UNESCO Intangible Heritage Section, Culture Sector, 2006–2008).

OVERVIEW OF SAFEGAURDING ACTIVITIES IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

The countries of the Horn of Africa—i.e. Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia—have been aware of the value and the function of the intangible cultural heritage present in their territory from well before the adoption of the 2003 Convention and had already undertaken numerous national level activities addressing that heritage. It is worth noting that both Ethiopia and Eritrea submitted in 2004 a candidature file for an element of their intangible cultural heritage to be proclaimed as a Masterpiece. Ethiopia proposed a file for the “Gada institution” and Eritrea a file on “Customary laws in Eritrea”; neither of these proposals was retained by the jury that advised UNESCO on the proclamation of Masterpieces. Concerning the 2003 Convention, Ethiopia was the first in the Horn of Africa to ratify it in 2006, followed by Djibouti in 2007. In order to provide information about this Convention, UNESCO has convened a series of sub-regional meeting for African countries. Most recently, representatives from Eritrea and Somalia were invited to attend such a meeting in Pretoria on 26 and 28 March 2008 (UNESCO, n.d.).

With a view to assist the countries in the Horn of Africa in safeguarding their intangible cultural heritage, UNESCO has undertaken a number of activities described below which were or are funded through different mechanisms. Some of them were funded from the regular budget of UNESCO, which is approved on a biennium basis by the organization's General Conference, and part of which is decentralized to UNESCO's field offices, among them the Addis Ababa office which covers Djibouti and Ethiopia, and the UNESCO Nairobi Office, which covers Eritrea and Somalia, (together with Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda). Apart from the regular budget, UNESCO solicits extra-budgetary funding for specific projects that are in line with UNESCO's programme and objectives and that are designed in cooperation with the national and regional authorities and with advice from NGOs, universities and individual experts. Many of such projects have been funded through Funds-in-Trust of donor countries; the Government of Japan and of Norway have been particularly interested to support UNESCO activities related to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the Horn of Africa. A third source of funding is UNESCO's Participation Programme that allows national commissions for UNESCO to undertake activities that correspond with priorities and

objectives of UNESCO.

I. Djibouti

Between 2006 and 2009 UNESCO managed—first from its office in Addis Ababa and later on from UNESCO Nairobi Office—a project called “Safeguarding traditional games of the Afar and Somali people in the Horn of Africa,” which was executed in Djibouti. Most people in Djibouti, particularly the young people in the cities, no longer have active knowledge of their traditional games. It was known, however, that some older nomads were still playing their traditional games. UNESCO was requested by the Djibouti authorities to design a project, aiming to revitalize traditional games by setting up an environment in which traditional games can be identified, documented, enjoyed and promoted.

The project focused on some major traditional board games of the region, which include “*Bub*,” “*Riyo ka dhalis*,” “*Shax*” and “*Koos*” in Djibouti. Games were selected as they traditionally have formed an integral part of the intangible heritage for nomadic society, present opportunities for members of a community to come together, and since they may be beneficial for the development of strategic thinking. The implementation was coordinated in Djibouti by a steering committee involving the Association Paix et Lait, the Department of Culture under the Ministry of Information, Culture, Posts and Telecommunication and the Institute



Fig. 1. Djibouti young men playing “*Riyo ka dhalis*” during the launch of the project “Safeguarding traditional games of the Afar and Somali people in the Horn of Africa.”

of Social Sciences within the Centre for Studies and Research in Djibouti (CERD).

Through the project, which was funded by the Government of Japan, the activities described below were undertaken.

a) Research: In 2007 and 2008, CERD conducted fieldwork in various parts of Djibouti, aimed at identifying rules and their variations for each of the above mentioned four games. The research also explored their origins and their functions in the nomadic societies of Afar and Somali speakers in Djibouti. The information collected served as the basis for a kit and a manual, which were prepared by the Association Paix et Lait.

b) Production of a kit and a manual: After experimenting with several designs, the Association Paix et Lait produced—through the help of Djiboutian woodworkers—40 copies of a model kit in the shape of a wooden briefcase. It contains three board games (*Bub*, *Riyo ka dhalis*, and *Shax*) and pebbles to play with, which were collected on the beach. Another result of the fieldwork was a manual explaining the rules, with some variants of the three board games and the ball game *Koos* (Centre for Studies and Research in Djibouti & Association Paix et Lait, 2009), which was prepared in the three languages spoken in the country, namely Afar, French and Somali. The kit and the manual were distributed to all high schools and the ministries in the country.

c) National tournament: A series of preliminary tournaments was organized at the regional level in June and July 2007, to select finalists amongst 300 players for a national tournament. The national tournament itself took place on 31 December 2007, with 113 players involved. The steering committee of the project prepared and organized the tournament. The knowledge of some of the tradition bearers identified through this tournament was solicited for the finalization of the research by CERD; they also participated as trainers in the school workshops mentioned below.

d) School workshops: Using the above-mentioned kit, the Association Paix et Lait organized five workshops (one at the University of Djibouti and four in high schools in different parts of the country, namely in Alisabieh, Balbala, Dikhil and Tadjourah) in order to teach students how to play some of their traditional games as well as to discuss the value and the function of intangible cultural heritage practices and expressions. Students were encouraged to continue playing the game as part of after-school or extra-curricular activities.

The project managed to reach out to different stakeholders—tradition bearers through fieldwork and the national tournament, school children through workshops, the national authorities through the distribution of the game kit and other information materials, and by gaining practical experience in managing an intangible heritage related project in cooperation with non-governmental organisations. The sustainability of the results achieved by the project depends largely on whether

the national authorities will be able to maintain and further develop the network created. In this regard it is encouraging that the Department of Culture prepared, at the end of the project in April 2007, a draft safeguarding plan on traditional games in Djibouti. This plan includes the continuation of the national tournament under the auspices of the Department of Culture, and to establish a system for recognizing tradition bearers, and the documentation of traditional games which had not been covered by the project with a view to present them in a national inventory of intangible cultural heritage in the sense of the 2003 Convention.

II. Eritrea

In order to provide an opportunity to discuss the 2003 Convention, and in particular to encourage the Eritrean authorities to consider ratifying it, UNESCO Nairobi convened, in cooperation with the National Commission of Eritrea for UNESCO, a national consultation meeting in Asmara from 8 to 10 April 2009. The discussion is in an early stage and the authorities would now have to decide on a body or bodies responsible for the eventual implementation of the 2003 Convention, examine the implication of ratification on the legal framework under preparation for the conservation of heritage, as well as conduct further consultations with communities and regional institutions. As part of the effort to make the information available to the citizen, the national authorities of Eritrea are currently preparing the official translation of the text of the 2003 Convention into one of the official national languages, Tigrigna.

While Eritrea is not a state member to the 2003 Convention, the country has its own mechanism and institutions to safeguard and promote the intangible cultural heritage present in the territory. For example, the Cultural Affairs Bureau manages three groups which promote performing arts in the country. Research related to traditional practices and knowledge, for example on festivals (Abbebe Kifleyesus,



Fig. 2. A scene from the national consultation meeting on the 2003 Convention in Asmara (April, 2009).

personal communication), is conducted by the Department of Anthropology of the University of Asmara, and oral traditions are documented at the Research and Documentation Centre, which is a national institution.

So far no intangible heritage safeguarding activity was funded by UNESCO in Eritrea. The country benefited, between 2000 and 2007, however, from a Learning and Innovation Loan from the World Bank, which provided around 5 million USD, to undertake the so-called Cultural Heritage Assets Project (CARP), which aimed at safeguarding the cultural heritage of Eritrea. The main component of this project concerned living heritage; the Cultural Affairs Bureau of Eritrea, for instance, identified and documented oral traditions of different parts of the country, which resulted in the publication of a book on traditional stories in Tigré, Saho, Nara and Tigrigna (Negassi Gebredingle Tefer, personal communication).

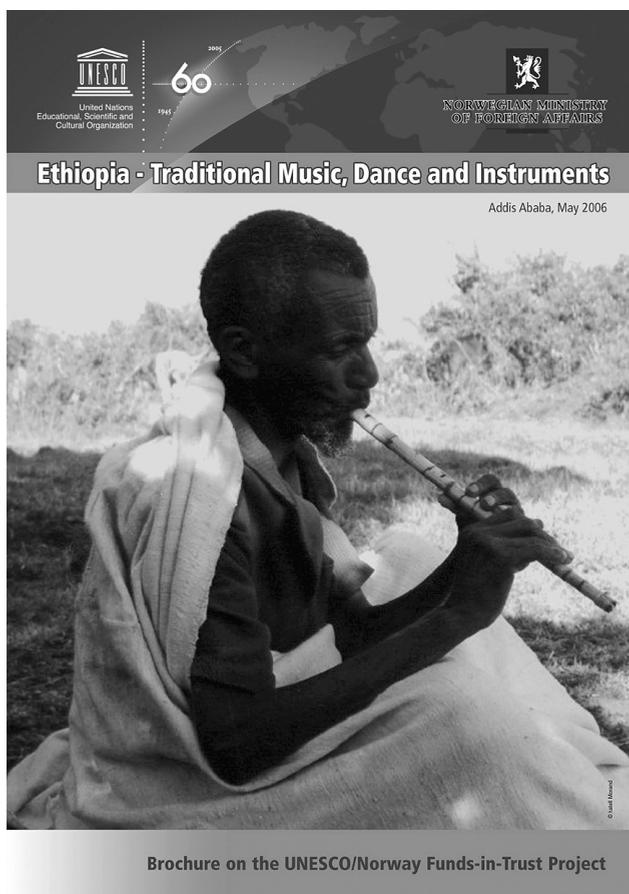


Fig. 3. The project brochure in Amharic for the UNESCO/Norwegian Funds-in-Trust cooperation project “Ethiopia—Traditional Music, Dance and Instruments.”

III. Ethiopia

In order to provide a forum for discussing the 2003 Convention and its implementation, particularly inventory making, UNESCO Addis Ababa and the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH) jointly convened a meeting in Addis Ababa on 19 and 20 October 2006 for various stakeholders in Ethiopia (UNESCO Addis Ababa & ARCCH, 2007). The meeting was also attended by a representative from Djibouti and it received a written contribution from an expert representing Somalia; a researcher from IPHAN (Instituto de Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional) in Brazil also participated the meeting as a resource person. As part of the preparation for this meeting, UNESCO Addis Ababa had requested ARCCH to take stock of the situation concerning the identification and the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage—particularly about policies, institutional organization, past activities including inventorying—at the regional level. This study was based on field visits by ARCCH to the regional state of Amhara, Harar, Oromia, Southern Nations and Nationalities and People Region (SNNPR) and Tigray (Haile, 2006). During the meeting, the participants emphasized the importance of establishing inventories, and of good coordination amongst various institutions—such as ARCCH, the universities with a department in the field of culture, the regional bureau of the Ministry of Culture and NGOs active in the field of culture.

Following this meeting, ARCCH decided to establish national inventories based on ethno-linguistic groupings. In 2007, a team of anthropologists from ARCCH undertook fieldwork together with the regional bureau of the SNNPR amongst 16 ethno-linguistic groups in southern Ethiopia (namely, Arbore, Ari, Atse, Bannam Biraile, Bodi, Dassanech, Deme, Hamar, Karo, Kewegu, Maale, Murile, Mursi, Nyangatom, and Tsema). The result of the fieldwork then became the first inventory of intangible cultural heritage in Ethiopia. It was published in Amharic and in English (ARCCH, 2008), and is organized in terms of domains that correspond closely to that listed under the 2003 Convention. This project received financial assistance from UNESCO Addis Ababa, and the UNESCO's Participation Programme received through the National Commission of Ethiopia for UNESCO. The plan of ARCCH is to continue the inventory exercise for other groups in the country.

In 2005, UNESCO Addis Ababa launched a project “Ethiopia—Traditional Music, Dance and Instruments.” This project, by far the largest of UNESCO's projects in the field of traditional music, and which is financed by the government of Norway, involves Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian experts on traditional music and dance and such Addis Ababa based institutions as ARCCH, the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) and the Yared School of Music, the National Archives and Libraries in Ethiopia (NALE), as well as regional cultural bureaus and individual experts. The objectives of the project are: (1) to collect and document traditional music and dance expressions in different parts of Ethiopia through fieldwork and research; (2) to contribute to the training of Ethiopian students and further empower Ethiopian institutions to safeguard traditional music and dance traditions; and (3) to inform the general public about the existence,

the beauty and the value of the traditional music and dance expressions.

The project was designed in the spirit of the 2003 Convention, with components relating to identification, documentation, inventory making, training and promotion. While the progress of the project is described elsewhere in details (Ohinata, 2009), it can be summarized in terms of identification and documentation through fieldwork in various locations within Ethiopia, the preparation of training materials (syllabi and a Reader for university) on ethnomusicology, training of university level students (at IES and the Yared School of Music) in the basics of ethnomusicology, and the preparation of a sound archive within NALE. The project, which is scheduled to close at the end of 2009, has seen an increasing number of Ethiopian experts, who received training on ethnomusicology, to apply the newly acquired knowledge in their career—by undertaking independent research related to ethnomusicology, by including musical traditions in their teaching or by taking up a post which concerns archiving materials related to traditional music and dance. Following the training, the Institute for the Study of Culture, Language and History in Awasa started in 2008 a research programme on traditional music and dance in southern Ethiopia.

Another recent project of UNESCO in Ethiopia concerns the establishment of the Sherif Harar City Museum in Harar. UNESCO Addis Ababa was asked by the Harari People's National Regional State to help upgrade a private museum—the Sherif Private Museum—into a public institution based on artifacts collected by Mr. Abdulahi Ali Sherif since 1991 (Tarsitani & Abdulahi, 2009). His collection includes objects related to material culture predominantly of Harari people, but also of Amhara, Argobba, Gurage, Oromo and Somali people living in the same region. The collection consists of numerous coins, jewelry, traditional furniture and utensils, basketry, textiles, armaments, as well as hundreds of manuscripts, and music recordings. Over the years, Mr. Sherif developed his own conservation methods, particularly for metal objects, benefiting from knowledge transmitted by his father who was an ironsmith. The collection has continuously been growing, thanks to personal acquisitions by Mr. Sherif and to donations made by members of communities living in Harar. Since 1998, the residence of Mr. Sherif served as the Sherif Private Museum, and the need to upgrade this private museum had become acute since the place was so overcrowded with not enough space left for display or for properly storing the collection. Since it was a private home it was not set up to receive visitors on a regular basis. Furthermore, there was no information material for the public, and—even worse—the collection lacked a systematic inventory.

In order to assist in the creation of the Sherif Harar City Museum, UNESCO—first through its office in Addis Ababa and later from Nairobi—managed the project with financial assistance from the Government of Norway (the Harari cultural bureau and Mr. Sherif also received financial assistance for the same purpose from other donors, including the Embassy of France, the Embassy of the USA, the Embassy of Sudan and private persons). The main activities of the project are described below:

a) Establishment of an institutional agreement: The first step of the project was to establish in May 2006, an institutional agreement between the Harari regional government and Mr. Sherif—with the intermediary of UNESCO Addis Ababa—to address the following issues: (1) the public status of the museum; (2) the provision of a building and staff; (3) the commitment of a regional budget for the running of the museum; (4) the duration of the loan of the Sherif collection; and (5) the use of possible revenues.

b) Conservation plan: The project envisaged to establish a conservation plan by assessing the status of endangered objects under the Sherif Collection. The Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA) assessed the general conservation needs of the Sherif Collection in November 2006. As to a more specific conservation plan, the CHDA experts considered that an inventory had to be completed first. The Harari regional authorities and Mr. Sherif were advised on practical steps towards establishing such a plan which may be prepared in the future. Following the assessment by CHDA, four fire extinguishers were purchased to increase the security of the museum. The main door and all ground floor windows, where the museum is located, were provided with padlocks. For humidity control, cooling fans were also installed in the storage room and the exhibition area.

c) Inventory: An important part of the project concerned supporting the inventorying of the Sherif Collection. The CHDA was entrusted to provide two specialized training sessions, using the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Object ID checklist system, to Mr. Sherif and two staff of the regional cultural bureau. The Sherif Harar City Museum by now has inventoried some 1,500 objects and work is ongoing to cover the rest of the collection and new objects as they arrive.

d) Renovation of Ras Tafari House: the Cultural Bureau provided, after resettling around 10 families, the use of the ground floor of Ras Tafari House, which is situated within the walled historical area called Jugol in Harar, to house the museum. The project contributed in June 2007 to the renovation by the Cultural Bureau of part of the premises within the compound.

e) Exhibition development: Mr. Sherif received advice from CHDA concerning the organization of exhibitions, after which he developed his own plan. The project also contributed to acquiring display shelves. At the end of the project an exhibition was mounted, displaying cultural objects of various ethno-linguistic groups of the area.

f) Training on guiding: Nineteen persons attended a training workshop organized on 20 November 2008 on “Security at museums” and “Care and handling of manuscripts,” based on UNESCO’s cultural heritage protection handbook series, available in Amharic and in English (UNESCO, 2006b; 2006c). The training also provided an opportunity for the participants to be familiar with

the collection since some of them will work as guides. The participants included staff of the Cultural Bureau, members of the Sherif family, and other Harar-based experts in the field of heritage conservation.

g) Opening: The permanent collection of the Sherif Harar City Museum was formally opened on 24 December 2008 in the presence of the President of the Harari regional state. Representatives of all *afocha* (neighborhood organization) and of other community groups and prominent elders were also invited. Community members continue to entrust artifacts to the care of Mr. Sherif. The number of visitors is reported to increase. At the time of the preparation of this article, the entrance fee is ETB 20 for non-Ethiopians, ETB 5 for non-Harari Ethiopians and free of charge for the residents of Harar.

Through the project the city of Harar, the centre of which is inscribed on the World Heritage List, acquired an institutional basis and enhanced technical capacities for safeguarding material heritage and intangible cultural heritage of the region. The Sherif Harar City Museum is relevant for the implementation of the 2003 Convention in the region, since it is one of the hubs for promoting research on traditional practices, for archiving documents and audiovisual materials related to traditional expressions and knowledge, and for conserving objects using traditional know-how.

IV. Somalia

Before the civil war, the main characteristic of Somalia's cultural life was the wealth of its intangible cultural heritage, particularly in the domains of the performing arts and oral traditions. The country also had functioning museums, theatres, libraries and archives as well as arts institutions and cultural industries. Over two and half decades of civil war, however, has resulted in the devastation of the cultural infrastructure and in a severe loss of Somali national heritage. All



Fig. 4. Impromptu performance of poems during the consultation meeting in Garisa in Kenya for the Japanese Funds-in-Trust cooperation project "Safeguarding traditional Somali performing arts."

institutions related to culture such as theatres, libraries, archives and museums have been damaged, and many documents and countless artifacts have been lost, destroyed or looted. Regrettably, many talented cultural practitioners such as artists, poets, playwrights, and writers have fled the country and are now dispersed around the world. The country is suffering from an extensive loss of collective memory in the field of culture and from absence of bearers of cultural traditions.

In 2006, UNESCO carried out a needs assessment for Somalia in the field of culture. This assessment was consequently validated by a meeting of experts “Rehabilitation of Somali Culture,” held in Nairobi in June 2007 (UNESCO Nairobi, 2008), with the participation of experts from all regions of Somalia as well as from diaspora communities in Djibouti, Kenya, Sweden, the UK and the USA. The meeting recommended a set of activities, including the identification and documentation of a wide range of Somali artistic and cultural expressions and traditions, the establishment of cultural policies, the rehabilitation of sites and monuments, as well as support for the revitalization of cultural organizations and the promotion of Somali culture through fairs and festivals.

In response, UNESCO Nairobi has undertaken a number of activities that include the sending of an expert mission in 2007 to assess the conservation needs of the mosque in Zeira, the translation of the UNESCO’s Cultural Heritage Handbook series into Somali (UNESCO, 2009a; 2009b) and the support to the cultural institution Halabuur Centre, a cultural institution promoting Somali arts and literature. Furthermore, UNESCO Nairobi is currently managing a project, financed by the Government of Japan, “Safeguarding Somali traditional performing arts,” which is designed in the spirit of the 2003 Convention. According to preliminary research conducted by the National Museums of Kenya, the main types of Somali traditional performing arts include the recitation of poems (such as *Gabay*, *Jisto*, *Geeraar*, and *Buraambuur*), singing and dancing, as well as theater performed at weddings and at other social gatherings (Kiprop Lagata, pers. com.). Traditional performing arts can be still observed in daily life of Somali people, including in the diaspora communities, where they play an important role in bringing different groups together during reconciliatory processes, as was the case during the national reconciliation meeting held in Mogadishu in June 2007.

The project, which started in May 2008, aims to (a) identify performing art traditions of Somali people with a view to safeguard this heritage; (b) highlight the role that cultural practices might play in reconciliation processes in post-conflict Somalia; and (c) contribute to the rehabilitation of Somali culture. Since the prevailing political instability makes it difficult to design operational activities within Somalia, the project focuses on the North Eastern Province of Kenya where there is a large Somali population, among them many recent refugees. This transnational project is possible thanks to good cooperation between the national authorities of Kenya and Somalia.

In April and May 2009 experts from the National Museums of Kenya undertook fieldwork in the North Eastern Province of Kenya to identify Somali traditional performing arts. In July 2009, an expert, one from each of the three regions of the country (“Somaliland” “Puntland,” and “Central and South”) travelled to Kenya to discuss the 2003 Convention and future actions in favour of safeguarding

the intangible cultural heritage in their respective regions. Extant audiovisual materials on Somali traditional music are also collected from record shops in Nairobi. They will be deposited for archiving and safekeeping, in the first instance in the National Museums of Kenya; copies of some of the audiovisual materials will also be made available to different institutions in Somalia and in Djibouti.

REGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND COMMON CHALLENGES

Activities of UNESCO in the Horn of Africa relative to safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage take various approaches, such as identification and documentation through fieldwork, inventory making, the establishment of an institutional facilities (such as a sound archive or a museum), the preparation of teaching materials, and publication. This is in line with the 2003 Convention, which advocates a wide range of measures, from policy development (including safeguarding plans), to the creation of institutional mechanisms, educational activities and actions aimed at raising public awareness.

The UNESCO projects described in this article provide opportunities for the countries of the Horn of Africa to gain practical experience in designing and carrying out safeguarding activities in the sense of the 2003 Convention, whether they have ratified it or not. Such projects often highlighted the need to consider ways for institutions to work together within the country, be it between national bodies or with regional and local institutions, or individual experts. Indeed, all countries have already a wealth of information concerning traditional practices and expressions of communities. A key is whether the national authorities would be able to harmonize such information to develop an effective coordination mechanism—including archiving systems—at the national level.

Some of the projects highlighted the fact that traditional practices and expressions often are spread across political borders. For example, traditional games of the Afar and Somali people are also practiced in countries neighboring on Djibouti, and traditional performing arts of Somali people can be found not only in Somalia but also in Djibouti, Ethiopia and in Kenya. It is hoped that these and other projects, designed in conformity with the 2003 Convention, may contribute to better mutual understanding and more respectful contacts in a post conflict Horn of Africa. The Operational Directives of the 2003 Convention so far are silent—apart from an encouragement to jointly submit multi-national nominations for the two Lists of the Convention—on the issue of safeguarding trans-border elements. When the Inter-Governmental Committee under the 2003 Convention addresses this issue, hopefully in the near future, the Horn of Africa will be able to make a sound contribution by presenting concrete examples of how multi-national safeguarding may be envisaged.

Common challenges facing the countries in the Horn of Africa are lack of adequate funding and infrastructure for institutions in the field of culture, relatively inexperienced human resources, an unstable political situation in part of the region, delicate balances between ethno-linguistic groups in other parts of it, and inconsistent political support for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. All

of this only amounts to a very good reason for ratifying the 2003 Convention, or to closely be involved in its implementation on the national, regional and international levels. This is not only because of possible financial assistance through the Funds of the 2003 Convention, but also because of networking opportunities for cooperation at the international level, for building capacities for safeguarding and for sharing good practices. Living traditions are indeed important for the identity of the communities and groups that are directly concerned. Their relevance, however, as a source of creativity for the cultural diversity of the world at large, cannot be stressed enough either; for this reason, too, such heritage from all parts of the world deserves attention and recognition at the international level.

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