

Initial Rapid Assessment Template for Identifying Risks, Monitoring Impacts, Assessing Needs for Intangible Heritage

This template is intended as a guide for people/communities/authorities/institutions/NGOs who need to undertake an assessment of the impact on the intangible heritage^[1] as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such assessments may be required in order to feed into any recovery planning or to seek support from governments, NGOs, or international organisations.

How to use this template?

This template has been prepared to serve only as a guide for a rapid assessment of the situation. The users are encouraged to contextualise it as per their situation and requirements. Everyone's situation will differ depending upon whether they are assessing the impact on a specific intangible heritage (e.g. dance schools, theatre, art forms) or a wider assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on an entire community or cultural groups. The approach however remains common in all cases: (1) establish your baseline; (2) assess impact; (3) identify immediate needs and priorities; and (4) monitor.

Note: Intangible heritage does not sit in isolation from tangible heritage (whether it be moveable or immovable). If the latter form of heritage is also an important aspect of the intangible heritage you are assessing, you need to also undertake an assessment of tangible heritage (please see links to these templates here).

Section I: Baseline information

To understand impact, you need a starting point to measure change, otherwise referred to as baseline information. Baseline information can be difficult to gather for intangible heritage, but it is possible to gather enough information to begin to understand the scale of impact. For this section you will need to:

1. List the specific forms of Intangible Cultural Heritage affected:
 - social – religious practices (including rituals, festive events)
 - traditional crafts
 - oral traditions
 - indigenous language
 - performing arts (dance, music, theatre etc.)
 - cultural practices relating to the natural world
 - any other.
2. Describe the context with specific reference to the affected people (communities, groups, individuals) and geographic areas. Think about:
 - What, if any, materials are required?
 - Who are the people involved?
 - If there are specific places needed for people to access and participate in the intangible heritage?
 - Any variability in practices due to seasons in which a certain art form is practised, guided by religious and agricultural calendars or affected by migration patterns etc.
3. Identify existing sources of information (for example any surveys, inventories, census data, professional associations that may hold membership data, knowledge experts) that can help you understand the context described above.

4. Where possible, collect data on revenue and incomes/livelihoods.
5. Identify all possible stakeholders who could play a role in protecting the intangible heritage of concern. If possible, record key contacts amongst the stakeholders.

Stakeholders may include but may not be limited to: government agencies, NGOs, community based organisations, individuals who run social media projects/platforms for intangible heritage or any other institutions that have specific mandate for documenting, protecting or supporting intangible heritage.

6. Identify possible stakeholders, such as community leaders, who could play a role in providing the correct and timely information before, during and after an outbreak.

Caution: Often people belonging to marginalised communities, engaged in non-formal and non-institutional cultural practices remain out of the picture while being most affected by the disaster. Their exclusion from data could potentially mean exclusion from support in future.

Section II: Identify impacts and risks

This section requires you to think about how to identify risks stemming from the current crisis and the likely impact they will have.

Note: Normally, such assessments rely on being able to talk directly to the affected communities. In a time of isolation and restricted movement in general, there will be challenges regarding access. This will be particularly difficult for communities where internet is poor or non-existent. In this situation, it is a matter of using your skills and knowledge of COVID-19 to identify who is exposed, who is likely to be vulnerable, and who may or may not have the capability and capacity to continue to practice their intangible heritage. You may wish to use the table below to help describe impact in a consistent way.

1. Describe the impact of COVID-19 in the communities whose intangible heritage has been affected. Have some groups within a community been more affected than others?
2. What is the disruption, reduction or restriction of access to or the participation in the intangible heritage being assessed? Consider the impact on:
 - health and wellbeing of skilled labour/artisans/knowledge bearers
 - availability of raw material
 - access to cultural or workspaces, machinery, tools, stocks
 - market access and linkages
 - transmission of skills (due to displacement, loss of livelihoods)

Where possible, include an assessment of loss of revenue, incomes/ livelihoods, or costs incurred as a result of COVID-19. Collect both qualitative and quantitative information.

3. Have any of the above impacts caused permanent loss of intangible heritage?
4. Who are the people/communities/authorities/institutions/NGOs that are affected by the practice of this intangible cultural heritage? Where possible, include number of organisations and type of intangible heritage they support.
5. Are any of the above protected by communities, international, national, local authorities? Are any unprotected?
6. Are there any other risks that need to be considered, that are likely to intensify the impact on the cultural heritage and needs of the people and communities including:
 - natural hazards
 - armed conflicts
 - any long-drawn-out crisis situations (drought, refugee crises, internal displacement).

7. Are there any specific strengths or capacities within the practising group/community being assessed that could contribute to sustainable recovery? At same time list vulnerabilities that might limit recovery.

BOX 1: For the purpose of describing the impact, you may refer to the following indicators. These levels of impact can even be used to do a quick assessment for identifying significant issues and prioritising actions.

Insignificant – No significant impact on people being able to access and practice their intangible heritage.

Minor – Little or minor impact on people being able to access and practice their intangible heritage. Temporary disruption that can be recovered through local/regional initiatives.

Moderate – Most people can access and practice their intangible heritage, but some communities particularly impacted. Disruption/loss/deterioration of some practices that would require external support to recover.

Major – Many people unable to access and practice their intangible heritage. Significant decline or loss of practices etc. at a national scale. Requires number of national agencies and possibly international support to recover.

Section III: Identify immediate needs and actions

This section should identify any immediate needs that if not considered, could either result in the immediate damage or the permanent loss of intangible heritage, and possible actions that could be undertaken to mitigate this risk. Some questions that may be used to identify and prioritise these needs are:

1. What are the immediate basic needs of the affected people?
2. If not mitigated, can it worsen the impact of COVID-19 (and other threats) on the people and communities practicing the intangible heritage of concern?
3. Is the identified practice currently having a negative impact on the community, or environment and mitigation must include ways to further reduce its negative impact? Example: using environmentally unsafe materials or observing discriminatory traditional practices.
4. To meet these needs, which actions would you take and in which order of priority?
5. What will be the resources and partnerships required to support the needs?
6. From where these resources could be accessed (identifying budget & human resource requirements will significantly improve chances of action for the identified needs).

Note: Needs are prioritised based on feedback & sourcing of data from different members of communities (to remove bias from information). Moreover, mitigation of risks identified may not be possible until constraints on movement are lifted.

Section IV: Monitor

This section should identify how you will continue to monitor the impact of COVID-19 and other hazards, safety, security risks in the future. It should include consideration of how you will undertake stakeholder engagement to keep your information up-to-date and how this information will be shared with those who may need the information to assist in recovery.

1. Describe changes in the safety and security context of the situation – including the spread of COVID-19, any identified hotspots, identified endangered communities/practices etc. This can capture, changing socio-political situation, stigmatisation of communities and cultural practices due to COVID-19 related rumours or assumptions. If possible, review the situation every week.
2. Monitor the stakeholders likely to be impacted by the unfolding outbreak situation. To assess the likely impacts, carry out a monthly review of:
 - local and global events
 - policies & commitments
 - seasonal changes
 - migratory patterns
 - religious and cultural events, calendars, festivals, etc.
3. Monitor how the stakeholders that are adversely impacted by the outbreak may engage differently with intangible heritage of concern over a period of time. Review the situation every month.
4. Identify networks, institutions, and platforms that are monitoring impact for coordinated actions and efforts.
5. Carry out a survey of schemes or grants available to support cultural bearers, artists and crafts persons during and following the COVID outbreak.
6. Identify elements of intangible heritage during or after the COVID-19 pandemic, that support livelihoods and provide psycho-social help.

^[1] By intangible heritage we mean “the traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts” (UNESCO 2003).

Intangible heritage includes not only inherited traditions; it also includes the current practices of diverse cultural groups. It includes the way in which knowledge (traditions, skills and customs) is transferred and transformed between generations or communities. Most importantly it is based in community, valued as heritage by the people, groups and communities who create, maintain and transmit it (UNESCO).

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