



Source: Tapash Paul/Drik

First Aid to Cultural Heritage In Times of Crisis

#culturecannotwait

In cooperation with



A FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT

Background

The earthquakes in Haiti (2010) and Nepal (2015) led to multifaceted humanitarian crises that are remarkably similar to the ones we are witnessing in Syria and Somalia, where protracted conflicts have killed as well as displaced people.

Such complex emergencies¹ often result from a combination of man-made and/or natural hazards, and pre-existing social, political or economic factors that cross-cut each other. They are characterised by extensive losses, security risks, political and civil disturbances, and hindrances to humanitarian assistance. In short, complex emergencies are multi-causal and require coordinated international or national responses, which go beyond the mandate or capacity of a single agency.

¹Ifrc.org, (2015). *Complex emergencies - IFRC*. [online] Available at: <http://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/disaster-management/about-disasters/definition-of-hazard/complex-emergencies/> [Accessed 10 Feb. 2015].

Protecting cultural heritage under these circumstances is extremely challenging; yet amidst turmoil and anguish, the affected communities strive to protect their cultural heritage, as it provides hope, a connection with the past, and a sense of identity.

Offered within the framework of ICCROM's multi-partner programme on Disaster Risk Management, FAC is aimed at strengthening national capacities for protecting cultural heritage during complex emergencies. It emphasizes cooperation and coordination with other mainstream emergency response actors, and identifies areas of joint programming between culture and humanitarian sectors to promote recovery and risk reduction.

After the course, participants are invited to submit proposals to carry out projects in their respective countries. The short-listed proposals get seed grants from the [Cultural Emergency Response Programme](#) of the Prince Claus Fund, the Netherlands. The aim is to improve emergency preparedness and response for cultural heritage and put people at the centre of cultural first aid globally.

I. What's Cultural First Aid?

Commonly used in the field of medicine, "first aid generally consists of some simple, often life-saving techniques that most people can be trained to perform with minimal equipment."² Drawing a parallel to this definition of first aid, ICCROM chose to use the term in reference to initial actions taken to secure and stabilize endangered cultural heritage during a complex emergency³. Such situations demand protection measures that are easy to implement, and most of the time, do not require sophisticated equipment or special conservation materials.

Within a disaster risk management plan, first aid would reside in the domain of emergency response. Yet unlike the humanitarian response where reaction time, such as the first 48 hours or 72 hours, is considered to be crucial for saving human lives, first aid to cultural heritage can be introduced after the basic relief support (e.g., food, water, shelter etc.) is in place. Regardless, rapid response can help contain damage to cultural heritage.

The main objectives for providing first aid to cultural heritage (both, tangible and intangible) in a complex emergency situation are to assess the damage caused, stabilize or secure heritage to prevent further damage or loss, and promote recovery.

A Cultural First Aider is a person who has the necessary knowledge and skills to document as well as protect cultural heritage during a complex emergency.

She/he is:

- proactive yet sensitive to human needs,
- respectful of the local context,

²Medical News Today, (2014). *What is first aid? What is the recovery position?*. [online] Available at: <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/153849.php> [Accessed 10 Feb. 2015].

³Within the cultural heritage field, this term is also used in reference to the stabilization measures taken to protect archaeological objects and structures once they are excavated (Watkinson, D. & Neal, V. (1998) **First Aid for Finds**. London: Rescue/UKIC Archaeology Section).

- capable of building trust and understanding amongst people who have different views,
- able to develop and implement first aid operations for protecting cultural heritage in coordination with other relief agencies,
- able to constitute and manage teams, and
- capable of assessing and mitigating future risks in order to ensure early recovery.



II. Philosophy and Guiding Principles

Culture cannot wait, the credo of the FAC training, stems from the idea that culture in all its forms provides a thread of continuity for communities uprooted by disaster and helps them to overcome the trauma of loss and displacement. It therefore, cannot be separated from humanitarian assistance. Actions taken to secure and recover cultural heritage should closely align with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence⁴.

In order to support this idea in actual practice, ICCROM has identified a set of guiding principles and a framework of actions that closely follow those prescribed for the humanitarian response:

⁴ OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles. (2011). [pdf] Available at: https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OOM-humanitarianprinciples_eng_June12.pdf [Accessed 13 Feb. 2015].



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1. People centred first aid

Giving preference to people's needs and enhancing their ability to secure and recover their own heritage is integral to the design and approach of FAC.

Heritage places are often used to provide refuge to the displaced people during crises. Cultural first aid should take such basic needs into consideration and facilitate the work of providing relief. Moreover, statistics indicate that in most disasters, local communities are the first to respond and secure their cultural heritage. For example, during the 2012 conflict in Northern Mali, privately held ancient manuscripts were kept safe through traditional inter-communal networks. Often, communities have time-tested coping mechanisms and a wealth of knowledge (e.g. traditional building methods) that could be utilized in reconstruction and recovery. Involvement of the local communities is, therefore, essential to the planning and implementation of first aid to cultural heritage.

2. An inclusive attitude and respect for diversity

First aid should embrace an inclusive outlook for recognizing elements that constitute the cultural heritage of the disaster struck-area.

As individuals and as professionals, cultural first aiders can unintentionally make subjective value judgements leading to the selective recognition of cultural heritage, and thereby increase the existing inequalities in the affected area e.g. traditionally institutional responses have centred on protecting iconic or monumental heritage, whereas vernacular heritage has been largely overlooked. To avoid this, FAC training provides necessary skills for developing an inclusive approach for providing assistance

3. Context specific response

Careful assessment of the complex emergency context is the mandatory first step for providing first aid to cultural heritage.

Every emergency has a certain context. Its careful assessment allows identification of immediate needs in relation to the main actors and their respective capacities to protect cultural heritage. Assessment of the context also helps in identifying pre-existing risk factors that could increase damage to cultural heritage in a given crisis situation. For example, the

on-going conflict in Syria has led to the deterioration of law and order in the country, which in turn has contributed to the systematic looting of cultural sites.

4. Interlock culture with humanitarian assistance

First aid to cultural heritage should be provided within the framework of humanitarian relief and recovery.

Acknowledging that in any crisis situation, saving human lives is the number one priority, and that people affected by disasters have the right to receive assistance for ensuring the continuity of their cultures, the FAC training emphasizes interlocking of cultural and humanitarian responses. Actions for securing cultural heritage should be thus, initiated in coordination and close cooperation with relevant government and humanitarian response agencies e.g. *cash for work* programmes launched by humanitarian organizations could be used to clear debris around cultural sites.

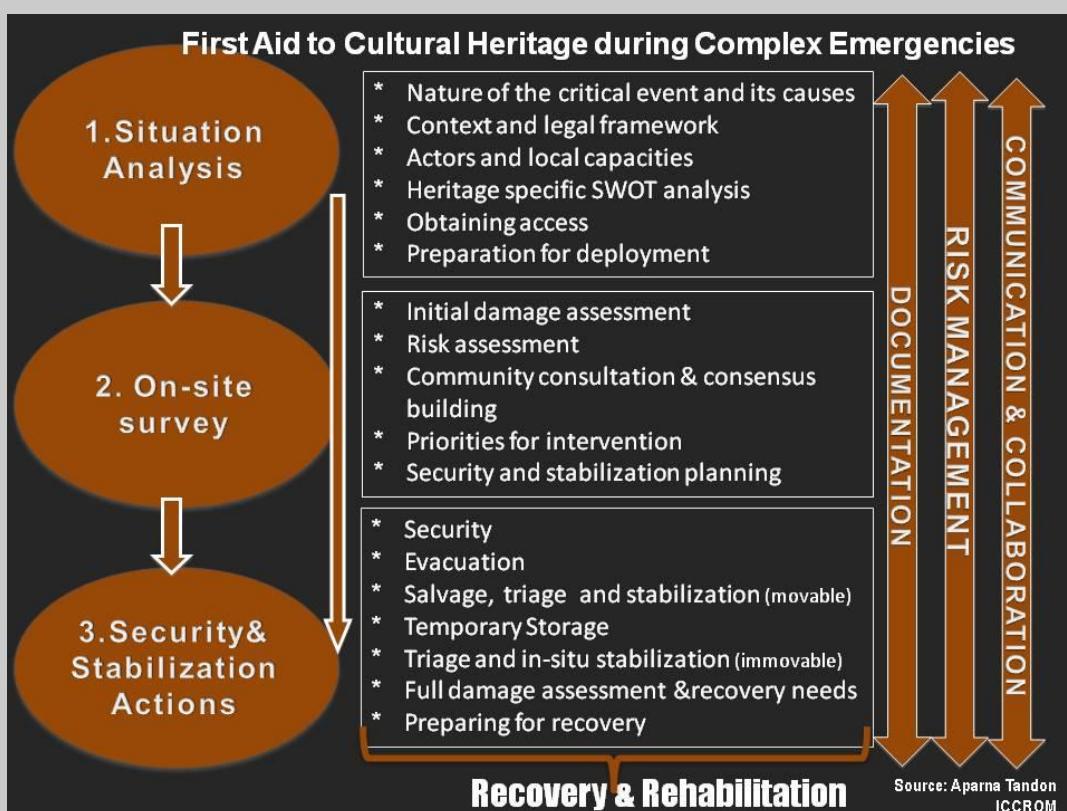
5. Do no harm

First aid actions should prevent further damage and promote recovery.

One of the main objectives for providing first aid to cultural heritage is to prevent further damage by assessing, mitigating and preparing for future risks. For example, while setting up a bombproof temporary storage for cultural collections, ensure that it is not exposed to the other risks such as flooding or looting.

III. Framework for First Aid Actions

Based on the guiding principles listed above, FAC has developed a framework for providing first aid to cultural heritage (see diagram below). As most emergencies are context specific, actions mentioned below (except steps 1 and 2) do not follow a particular sequence and can be tailored to the ground situation.



Step 1. Situation Analysis

To be undertaken off-site, situation analysis is an important first step for providing first aid to cultural heritage. It involves analysis of the critical event in relation to the local context. This includes the identification of: pre-existing risk factors that might increase damage to cultural heritage; potential safety and security risks for deploying first aiders in the affected area, and actors and stakeholders who could assist in providing cultural first aid.



Step 2. On-site Survey

Following the situation analysis, on-site survey involves a **first assessment** of the direct and indirect impacts of the disaster on cultural heritage. It also includes the identification of the risks that the affected cultural heritage is exposed to, which could lead to more damage and hamper recovery. The outcomes of an on-site survey include:

- a) An initial idea of site-specific damage;
- b) immediate needs at the site (for example, the need for security to prevent potential looting or road clearing for safe passage around the site);
- c) permissions/agreements needed for intervention;
- d) community consultations and reaching consensus on priorities;
- e) priorities for intervention;
- f) associated costs;
- g) first aid project plan;
- h) resources (funds, people supplies and equipment);
- i) monitoring and evaluation criteria.





Step 3. Security and Stabilization Actions

Based on the priorities identified, decisions can be made to secure or stabilize the endangered cultural heritage sites, buildings and collections. The actions comprising this step are only undertaken after the initial assessments have taken place and permissions from the relevant local authorities have been secured. Moreover, these actions are context dependent and do not follow a particular sequence. The outcomes of this step help in developing a full damage assessment report⁵, which includes needs as well as costs for recovery and reconstruction of tangible cultural heritage.

Note: For protecting intangible heritage, actions such as field recordings or craft rejuvenation trainings are needed, which are beyond the scope of FAC training.



⁵ First aid interventions lead to a complete assessment of damage caused to cultural heritage as they involve thorough condition assessments that feed into the process of identifying advanced conservation treatments for recovery and associated costs.

Security involves taking initial action to reduce further man-made threats to the affected site or collection, following an on-site survey. For example, while working at the affected site, placing a guard on-site during working hours and/or after hours; providing temporary cover; or re-locating objects to a safe area on or off-site. More advanced treatments can include caging of large and heavy objects such as a sarcophagus, stone sculptures or lifted mosaics, or backfilling an exposed archaeological site. However these actions should be implemented only after thorough risk assessment has been carried out.

Evacuation comprises packing, transportation and relocation of cultural objects to another temporary location. It involves systematic documentation and safe handling of objects/items during transfer from one location to another. It should be undertaken only if: the present location is considered to be unsafe; there is an alternate and safer storage area available and the required logistics are in place to support the operation. This action has legal implications and should be taken after due consultation with the owner(s) of the institution/site.





Salvage, Triage and Stabilization

Similar to evacuation, salvage usually implies careful retrieval of objects or building parts from any wreckage, building collapse or an otherwise contaminated environment such as a flooded area. It involves documentation of the location from where objects/building parts were recovered. In case of a partial or full collapse of a historic building, salvage includes sorting of rubble, wooden members or stones or bricks that could be used for the reconstruction. Salvage is usually accompanied by triage and stabilization.

Triage is a system of prioritization that takes into account degree of damage, vulnerability of the object to other potential sources of damage, and value(s) associated with it provided they are clearly defined. However, defining values is inherently complex and in most emergency situations, some value definition should be carried out during the on-site survey.

Stabilization can involve a number of measures such as surface cleaning, rinsing, controlled drying or making customized supports for salvaged objects and building parts. If carried out, the stabilization treatments should be carefully recorded and condition of the object before and after the treatment should be documented (within given means).

Temporary storage

Both evacuation and salvage can involve setting up of a temporary storage, as the original location might be unsafe. Setting up such a space includes a documentation plan for locating objects and appropriate fixtures and furniture in order to mitigate future risks.



In-situ stabilization

After carrying out triage, this action is undertaken to stabilize heavy objects, archaeological remains or building parts that face the imminent threat of a collapse or could be damaged from another source, which cannot be avoided. Examples include: shoring of walls, temporary structural supports, erecting temporary shelters, covering exposed surface etc. As mentioned above, a systematic triage, condition assessment and documentation should accompany in-situ stabilization.





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