**CONVENTION FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE
INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

**Expert meeting on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and climate change**

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**Policy development, partnerships and capacity building for
living heritage in the climate emergency**

This document summarises the key findings of research and consultation for the Guidance Note, identifying three basic areas of action and five challenges or opportunities for climate action under the 2003 Convention. Climate change continues to unfold with expanded impacts that will increasingly impinge on all aspects of life. In 2021, UNESCO’s The World in 2030 Public Survey identified ‘climate change and biodiversity loss’ as the top challenge nominated for all regions and all demographics, and one of the four leading challenges for 67% of all respondents.[[1]](#endnote-1) Within the category of climate loss and biodiversity, the topic that attracted the most concern was ‘increasing natural disasters and extreme weather’. Adapting to climate change, for most people in most parts of the world, will consist primarily of limiting risk around natural hazards and contending with the slower changes that challenge entire ways of life.

Living heritage will play a key role in the way we all address and adapt to a changing climate. The holistic vision of the 2003 Convention positions intangible cultural heritage centrally in future planning for and modelling of the role of all forms of cultural heritage in climate change adaptation. To achieve this, the 2003 Convention will need to: a) develop and promote a clearer and more accessible understanding of intangible cultural heritage that can be brought into conversation with climate change adaptation as swiftly and as robustly as possible; and b) provide guidance to stakeholders at all levels on how best to integrate intangible cultural heritage into their strategies for climate change adaptation.

There is no clear forecast for the manner in which climate change will unfold globally or impact regions in different ways, and policies, guidelines and tools relating to climate actions for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage will also need to be capable of considerable flexibility and open to ongoing modification. While these guidance and tools developed should aim to offer a template that is global in scope, that template will be most effective if it can then be adapted to the needs of specific regions. Particular regions are confronted by broadly similar hazard and climate change experiences, threats and vulnerabilities, and allowance should be made for an organic process of development of regional or thematic networks of practice.[[2]](#endnote-2)

The three broad areas of action and five challenges or opportunities for climate action discussed below provide direction for the development of this suite of instruments.

**Key areas of action**

1. **Promote and enhance the role of living heritage in climate change adaptation**

Living heritage has a critical positive role to play in the adaptation of societies and environments to climate change and the management of its impacts through identifying, assessing and monitoring climate change; limiting climate-related impacts; promoting and facilitating societal and environmental adaptation to climate change. Stakeholders of the 2003 Convention, particularly communities, are important mediators in climate adaptation processes. Appropriate mechanisms and forums that promote the role of living heritage in climate change adaptation and provide for new dialogue with scientific knowledge systems and exchange on strategies for climate change adaptation are crucial for realizing this potential.

1. **Promote and enhance the role of living heritage in climate change mitigation**

Climate change mitigation is an important opportunity for local communities and Indigenous Peoples, who are rarely if ever major sources of emissions, to demonstrate the potential contribution of their knowledge and experience. Local and Indigenous fire management regimes, low carbon agricultural heritage systems, and the management of natural carbon sinks are demonstrated forms of mitigation. Stakeholders might wish to further promote the scope for learning from and scaling up this living heritage for mitigation.

1. **Improve measures for safeguarding living heritage in the climate emergency**

Living heritage has been an important source of resilience to both slow transformations in local environments and rapid-onset emergencies, and will prove vital for communities and the safeguarding of their heritage in the climate emergency. Understanding sources of vulnerability to climate change impacts for communities and their living heritage is a pressing priority to equip stakeholders with the knowledge and means to support and strengthen the necessary safeguarding measures.

**Challenges and opportunities**

####  Partnerships

Much of the necessary institutional commitment for an effective integration of living heritage and climate change adaptation is already in place. Stakeholders to the 2003 Convention should play a significant role in assembling partnership networks with other UNESCO Conventions, with key emergency and climate change institutions, and with other institutions and initiatives already engaged in integrating climate change and living heritage. Existing mechanisms for partnership with and representation of local communities and bearers of living heritage will need to be further enhanced or strengthened.

The process of policy development, communication and implementation needs to be led by the 2003 Convention if it is to substantially address heritage, but partnerships with some of the key institutions, instruments and individuals identified in the review of relevant policy frameworks (LHE/24EXP THEMA-CLIMA/4e) will be critical to the success of this process.

1. **Improving coordination among heritage conventions and stakeholders**. Building on recent initiatives such as the Spirit of Naples Call for Action, collaboration with other UNESCO heritage conventions and programmes is essential to ensure that living heritage is appropriately identified and addressed in their climate change and emergency policies. This is also an opportunity to reconsider and harmonise conceptual approaches to the distinctions between natural and cultural heritage, and between tangible and intangible expressions of cultural heritage, which often hinder our ability to understand and communicate processes of cultural practice and transmission, and to model their capacity for climate change adaptation.
2. **Addressing climate change adaptation within an emergency framework**. Whether addressing slow-onset changes or more rapid hazard-related emergencies, the strategies developed to limit the impacts from climate change on living heritage might benefit from the approaches of the frameworks for emergency management or disaster risk reduction. There are lessons and strategies for living heritage safeguarding that are available for adoption from the full spectrum of emergencies, including conflict, pandemic disease, and natural and human-induced hazards. Partnerships with UNDRR and other emergency frameworks should be a priority.
3. **Deepening engagement amongst living heritage stakeholders.** Existing mechanisms for partnership with the living heritage community, including bearers and practitioners, researchers, NGOs, institutions and States Parties, will need to be enhanced or strengthened. A number of individual forums that provide a platform for local knowledge systems, and especially those of Indigenous communities, are already in place across many of the sectors mapped in the review of relevant policy frameworks (LHE/24/EXP THEMA-CLIMA/4e). The guidance note may demand further rethinking of the form and composition of a forum or forums specific to the 2003 Convention, and coordination with existing forums will be required.
4. **Investing in strategic partnerships.** A large number of potential partners are positioned adjacent to or beyond the heritage and climate change sectors. In addressing the living heritage needs of displaced communities, for example, obvious partners might include the IOM, UNHCR, IUCN, UN Women, UNDP and UNICEF.
5. **Promoting regional partnerships.** Climate change will unfold unevenly in different environments, dominated by hazards and challenges specific to particular regions or economic conditions. Effective implementation of policy, and the sharing of common experiences and successful strategies, may be substantially enhanced by assisting in the organic development of these regional or thematic partnerships, for urban settings, the Arctic region or for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), for example.

#### Research and case studies

Further research is needed on climate change dimensions of living heritage safeguarding under the 2003 Convention, to better inform policy development. Specific areas of research that might benefit from promotion by the 2003 Convention include: the vulnerability to climate change impacts of future transmission of living heritage; the interdependence of tangible and intangible forms of heritage in a climate change context; the relationship between living heritage and livelihoods in a climate change context; a clearer foundation for living heritage climate change action in the context of human and cultural rights frameworks; and the challenges of climate change impact and possible dislocation to place-based forms of living heritage.

Case studies allow stakeholders to follow and understand key issues unfolding in real time with real communities in real locations. The very large number of published case material already gathered in published collections and listed in the bibliography appended to the literature review ([Appendix 1](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/65029-EN.pdf)) provides a platform for commissioning a more focused series of case studies that combines existing documentation with lived experience, authored or co-authored by practitioners or communities and designed to illustrate issues addressed in the Guidance Note, communicate policy more effectively, and inspire further conversation and reflection.

#### Policy guidance and advocacy

One policy tool that is already available on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and climate change are the Operational Directives for the implementation of the 2003 Convention, notably Chapter VI. What is now needed is further guidance and tools to address the issues and seize the opportunities at the junction of living heritage and climate action. Moreover, there is the need to embed these in the existing policy architecture and process of policy development, and ensure that these can be enriched or adapted, if and as appropriate, to suit the scope and needs of intangible cultural heritage and the 2003 Convention.

The development of a guidance note on climate action for intangible cultural heritage could address the following issues:

1. **Explaining and promoting intangible culture heritage terms and concepts**. While the concept of intangible cultural heritage or living heritage is particularly well suited to the task of integrating local knowledge systems and climate change adaptation, the terms need to be deployed and disseminated to greater effect, particularly in conversation with emergency, disaster risk reduction and climate change specialists, as well as amongst other heritage professionals.
2. **Key issues at the intersection of intangible cultural heritage and climate action.** The guidance note could address key issues at stake for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and climate change, drawing on the desk-based research and expert consultations being undertaken. This may include, for instance, issues related to understanding the roles and risks for intangible cultural heritage in the context of climate change. For instance, on the one hand, the significant role that living heritage may play in supporting societal adaptation and community-based resilience, through livelihood strategies, social cohesion and mutual assistance. On the other hand, how does the relationship between tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage contribute to transmission or place it at risk. Likewise, how does intangible cultural heritage become exposed or vulnerable to different forms of emergency and climate change impacts.
3. **Proposals for safeguarding and leveraging intangible cultural heritage for climate action.** Further guidance is needed for States and other stakeholders on how best to integrate intangible cultural heritage into their strategies for climate change adaptation.This may include proposals for key awareness raising and experience sharing, partnerships, capacity building, in synergy with other key actors and programmes in the field.

#### Safeguarding

Under the framework of the 2003 Convention, climate change awareness should be integrated into safeguarding plans and measures at all levels. This may include community-led research, inventories and (if appropriate) nomination files under the Convention. States Parties should be encouraged to collect and collate information about climate change dimensions of living heritage, and the management of these processes in the periodic reporting process. For example, through the development of specific indicators as part of the periodic reporting process in the reflection year (2025). Information could be shared via platforms on Periodic Reporting or the Article 18 mechanism.

#### Capacity building

Tools and training programmes are needed to assist partners in implementing policy, designing programmes or modifying frameworks to suit local conditions. The emphasis should be on modular programmes capable of adaptation to a wide range of conditions and demands that will vary with communities, regions and environments, and vulnerability to climate change. The tools and training programmes are opportunities for a two-way or dialogic process of learning amongst the community of the Convention’s stakeholders. Experience can be drawn from the global capacity-building strategy under the 2003 Convention. Capacity building may include:

1. **Training through modular courses.** Capacity building should be delivered through a series of training courses under the global capacity-building strategy, ranging from basic principles of intangible cultural heritage in climate change and emergencies, addressed to the full range of stakeholders, through to flexible modules that target particular groups and needs, and that are capable of being adapted locally to specific circumstances.
2. **National forums, networks and alliances.** National-level capacity building for climate actions will require strategic alliances between regional UNESCO offices, national heritage, emergency and climate change institutions and agencies, and practitioners and communities. The 2003 Convention can assist in this process through capacity building and the promotion of an online platform to share approaches and experiences in this field and support networking.
1. UNESCO 2021, 14. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. See the early indications of the value of regional approaches described by Seeger (2001). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)