CASE STUDY 58

The Banoren practice: Approaches to inclusive and equal community participation

This case study[[1]](#footnote-1) presents an example of an intangible cultural heritage religious practice known as Banoren. Practiced by the descendants of enslaved people from Echal brought to Astror in the latter part of the 17th century, the element blends Echal’s religious beliefs and traditions with the predominant religious practices of Astror. Enslaved people from Echal on plantations and estates used the names of Gods to mask the name of their gods Echal while paying homage to Astror’s gods, and placating them to seek their advice, intercession, guidance and in healing rituals. This ‘masking’ was a means of ensuring that the ruling class of Astror did not stamp out the practice. Accordingly, hymns and texts are used in tandem with ancestral veneration, chanting and “trumping” (a groaning sound made by participants while moving their bodies) as they move against evil or malevolent spirits. Spirit possession often occurs as participants receive direct communication from spirits while in this state.

In the fictional territory of Capitol in Astror, Banoren religion is practised mostly by the members of the poorer groups of the society to celebrate births, bless newly constructed homes, ward off evil and ill-health, to seek spiritual advice or to thank ancestors. The Banoren practice has an established hierarchy: The leaders of the practice are referred to as “Chief” who are authorized to call for ceremonies, direct practitioners, oversee healing ceremonies and can enforce rules and regulations for followers when necessary. Leadership is along strict gender lines as only a male can assume the leadership role. At the same time that individual’s ascension to leadership can be subjected to spiritual advice from ancestors. Male “Chiefs” are ordained after having gone through lengthy periods of understudy and a formal initiation ceremony. Banoren ritualistic ceremonies are led by either a male “Chief” or a female, referred to as a “Mother”. However, it is the male “Chief” who is head of the group of worshippers, while the “Mother” is the individual who leads group in the group services. Membership of in the Banoren is similarly delineated along gender lines where males are referred to as “Brother” and females are referred to as “Sister”.

A case arose in Capitol where a male candidate was to be ordained as a “Chief” in the Banoren. While he had relatives who had previously held posts as either “Chief” or “Mother” and he had undergone the required periods of understudy and initiation, there were concerns by some group members that he had shown effeminate tendencies from when he was a boy and there were rumours that he was homosexual. This created several problems for Banoren’s leadership as Astror’s dominant traditional society frowned upon homosexuality, particularly male homosexuality. Additionally, members also felt that a suspected homosexual “Chief” would not be a strong and wholesome leader, especially when it came to dealing with sensitive matters such as spiritual warfare and healing. While understanding the concerns of the fellow members, the current “Chief” insisted that not only was the said individual properly trained and experienced in the Banoren rituals, but that he had been selected by guiding spirits whose instructions had to be followed. Additionally, the “Chief” issued instructions that any dissenting members would face expulsion from the group.

Three members of the group, fearing that this suspected homosexual’s ordination would have dire consequences for the perception and work of the group, decided to retain a lawyer and challenge his ordination in the Supreme Court of Capitol. The leadership of the group responded by securing their own legal team which referenced Capitol’s Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms Act which stated that the member who was to be ordained could not be discriminated against because of his sexuality.

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#### For Unit 7: Involving the communities concerned

On the obstruction of participation of community on the basis of discrimination.

Group Discussion

Break into two groups: one group is to present on how you think the situation would have ended had the court ruled in favour of the Banoren. The other group will present on a scenario where the court ruled in favour of the dissenting member of the Banoren. Apply the questions listed here to the presentations of your small groups:

* Who decides who should or should not participate in the Banoren rituals?
* Who participates and why?
* Who is left out and why?
* What needs to be done to ensure equal opportunities are created and there is support for all to participate?

Facilitators’ notes

See Slide 16 on Community Complexities and the subsequent slide on Gender and Community Involvement.

This case study is a good illustration of certain complexities within a community, and makes participants think about what needs to be done to ensure equal opportunities and support for all to participate, without discrimination.

#### For Unit 8: ICH and sustainable development

On inclusive social development, in enhancing cultural diversity and accepting difference without discrimination.

Group Discussion

Break into two groups, one group to present on how you think the situation would have ended had the court ruled in favour of the Banoren, while the other group presents on the scenario had the court ruled in favour of the three dissenting members of the group.

* Does the element’s informal governance systems and practices encourage or discourage social inclusion?
* What role can national legislation and the judicial system play in ensuring inclusive practices in such informal power systems such as socio-religious institutions?
* What other strategies can be employed by the Banoren and its members to ensure social inclusion in the long run?

Facilitators’ notes

See slide 7 on how culture is essential for inclusive social development

This case study can be used to bring across the point of encouraging social inclusion, and how doing so will promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development (SDG 16). The example’s conclusion, involving its national judicial system, also further underscores SDG16’s access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. That said, the case study also highlights the cultural complexities and sensitivity needed to ensure social inclusion for all groups against traditional practices.

#### For Unit 10: ICH policies and institutions

On how a country’s judicial system can support or obstruct the participation of ICH through the national judicial framework.

Group Discussion

Break into two groups, one group to present on how you think the situation would have ended had the court ruled in favour of the Banoren, while the other group presents on the situation that the court ruled in favour of the three members of the group. In either situation, present on the role of the judicial system, and what implications this has for the safeguarding and community participation in ICH.

In addition, consider the following questions:

* What are some of the ethical principles as reflected in the Operational Directives that could be cited? (E.g. OD 181 on eliminating gender based discrimination)
* What other national frameworks can help to ensure a socially inclusive approach to ICH participation and safeguarding?

Facilitators’ notes

National frameworks can help (or obstruct) in taking an inclusive (non-discriminatory) and ethical approach to transmission and safeguarding, ensuring equality in community participation. In this particular conflict, it is interesting to point out to participants that the case addresses two camps of the same community. As such, even with a supportive court decision which rules in favour of the Chief’s inclusive decision, this may not the end solution to the dilemma that occurs within the same ICH community. Encourage participants to think of the provisions, regulations and policies and institutions involved as facilitating good safeguarding, but that communities, groups and individuals remain at the heart of the practice of ICH and such conflict may not be resolved by policy and regulation alone.

1. . This case study is fictional but informed by real life examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)