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Overview on the inventories of intangible cultural heritage in Africa: a desk-based study conducted in the framework of the project's inception phase

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“A journey of a thousand miles
always begins with a **first step**”

Lao Tzu

And....

Inventorying is the first step on
the journey towards
safeguarding



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Underlying principles of inventorying



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Article 11

Each State Party shall:

- (a) take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory ;
- (b) among the safeguarding measures referred to in Article 2, paragraph 3, to identify and define the various elements of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory, with the participation of relevant communities, groups and non-governmental organizations.

Underlying principles of inventorying



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Article 12 - Inventories

1. To ensure identification with a view to safeguarding, each State Party shall draw up, in a manner appropriate to its situation, one or more inventories of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory. These inventories shall be regularly updated.
2. When each State Party periodically submits its report to the Committee, in accordance with Article 29, it shall provide relevant information concerning such inventories.

Methodology

- 44 periodic reports
- 25 inventories from nominations files for the 2024 and 2025 cycles
- Financial assistance reports from 11 countries
- Legal texts
- Oral interviews



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Characterization of inventorying: on the absence of inventories

5 countries out of 44 mentioned in their periodic reports that they did not have an inventory.

This may reflect two situations:

1. Insufficient collaboration between the various stakeholders;
2. and the problem of leveraging data.

... and raises three questions:

1. Is the Ministry of Culture the only stakeholder likely to draw up an inventory?
2. What about the ministries in charge of health, research and higher education, for example?
3. What about the results of impact studies?



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Characterization of inventorying : on inventory accessibility

States Parties are free to define the principles of classification for their inventories. These classification systems, which can be easily understood by people without specialized academic training, should contribute to make the inventory as accessible as possible to the communities concerned and the general public.

However...



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Characterization of inventorying : on inventory accessibility



...in the digital age

1. Few websites make inventories accessible
2. And even when they do exist
 - Some are non-functional;
 - Even inaccessible
3. Some good examples
 - Google drive
 - UNESCO

Characterization of inventorying : on updating inventories

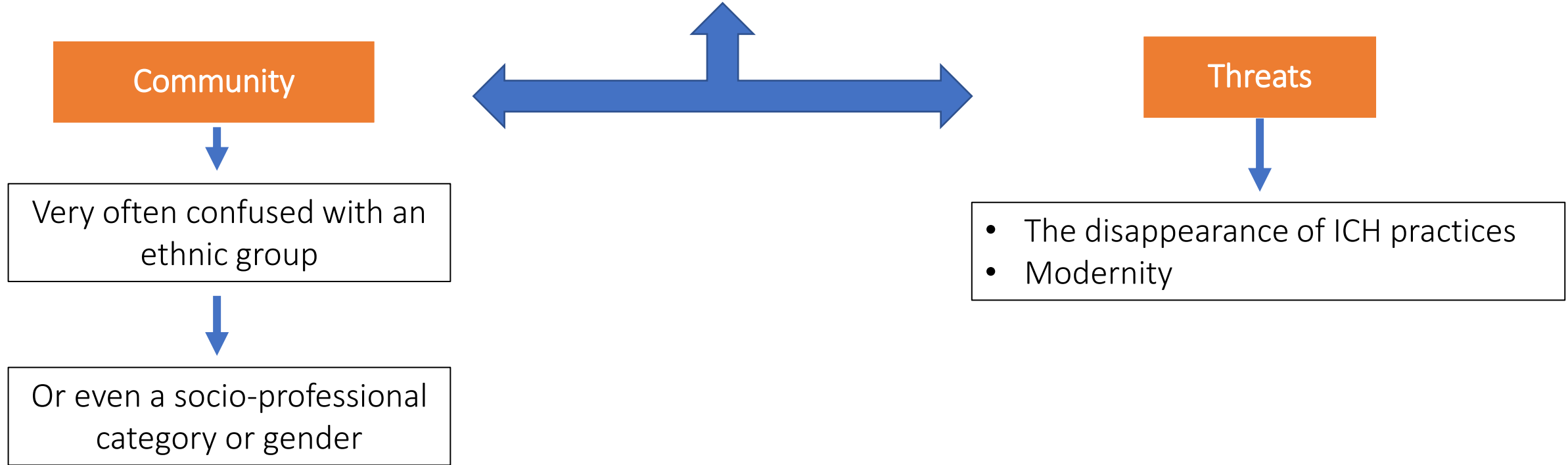
- 5 countries do not yet have an inventory;
- 3 countries have an inventory that is at least 10 years old;
- 5 countries have an inventory more than 5 years old;
- the remaining 31 have an inventory that is no more than 5 years old;

Not all countries have defined the periodicity for updating their inventories.



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Characterization of inventorying : challenges in identification



With regards to an element on marriage, for example, one State party says that the element is implemented exclusively by women, whereas the element consists of offering a gift to the son-in-law.

Disappearance is a consequence of a threat, not a threat. As far as modernity is concerned, intangible cultural heritage does not live outside the present day.

Characterization of inventorying : the quest for authenticity



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Some States Parties identify authenticity as one of the key criteria either of the inventory or of the intangible cultural heritage.

Whereas

The Guidance Note (38) recalls that criteria focusing on intangible cultural heritage elements that have an **exceptional** value, history, **authenticity**, dimension or scope are contrary to the spirit of the Convention.

Characterization of inventorying : about inventory evidence

The Committee's decision to inscribe an element may be based on the nomination's compliance with articles 11 and 12 of the Convention.

However, evidence of inclusion in the inventory may be summed up in simplistic tables, without signatures or information on the source.

In some cases, it's an inventory form for the item, whereas documenting the element doesn't necessarily entail that such element is included in an inventory.



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Characterization of inventorying : structuring the content of inventory forms



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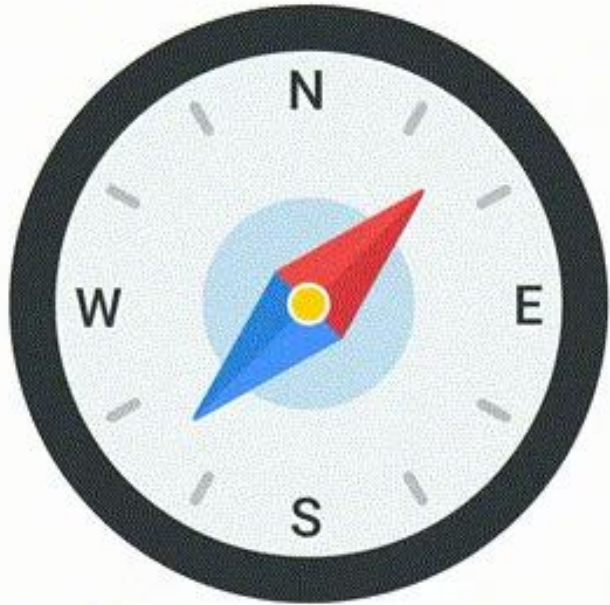
Inventory forms accompanying the nominations may have different structures. Under the Convention, there is no single inventory model or form.

A key feature of the inventory is its flexibility.

Nevertheless, a single framework for inventory forms may facilitate data processing and compensate for any omissions.

Conclusion

Useful resources:



Operational Directives for the implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage:

- https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ICH-Operational_Directives-10.GA_EN.pdf

Guidance note for inventorying intangible cultural heritage:

- <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/50279-EN.pdf>