Unit 24

audio recording in inventorying

Published in 2016 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 7, place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France

© UNESCO 2016



This publication is available in Open Access under the Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 IGO (CC-BY-SA 3.0 IGO) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/igo/>). By using the content of this publication, the users accept to be bound by the terms of use of the UNESCO Open Access Repository (<http://www.unesco.org/open-access/terms-use-ccbysa-en>).

The images of this publication do not fall under the CC-BY-SA licence and may not be used, reproduced, or commercialized without the prior permission of the copyright holders.

The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors; they are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.

lesson plan

Duration:

3 hours

Objective(s):

After completion of the unit participants should be able to use audio recordings in community-based inventorying. Participants will gain skills to select appropriate audio equipment, apply some essential audio recording tips, handle microphones, generate clear and audible audio recordings under a variety of conditions and store recordings safely.

Description:

This unit outlines some of the fundamentals of audio recording, including tips on choosing equipment, use of microphones, basics of organizing and storing audio data and making use of audio recording of community-based inventorying projects. The focus is on the appropriate steps to take to ensure that the end result is clear and audible.

There is a high level of detail to ensure the facilitator has the necessary resources at hand; however, the facilitator should decide the appropriate level of detail for participants. The unit is participatory in approach, involving community members and encouraging participants to adopt the role of co-facilitators.

Proposed sequence:

* Audio recording: pros
* Choosing equipment
* Headphones
* Microphones
* Choosing a spot
* Participatory audio recording
* Preparing to record
* Recording interviews, music and dance
* Storing and backing-up recordings
* Guidance from technical personnel on use of equipment for the workshop. This is particularly useful for facilitators who lack sufficient expertise to guide the participants
* Audio recording exercise: Divide the participants into groups with each group including one or more community representative to be interviewed, or practitioners to be recorded. Elements involving music and oral traditions are ideal. The exercise provides experience and builds confidence for dealing with recording during the field practicum
* Playback and critique of audio recordings by the group

**Supporting documents:**

* PowerPoint presentation Unit 24

Notes and suggestions

Facilitators may wish to amalgamate this unit with the unit on interviewing.

Unit 24

audio recording

Facilitator’s narrative

###### SLIDE 1.

Audio recording

###### SLIDE 2.

In this presentation …

###### SLIDE 3.

Audio recording: introduction

This slide provides a basic introduction to why audio recordings are important. With images and video recording becoming easier to access on mobile phones and cameras, people are shifting to video recording as a primary form of recording and documentation. However, it is important to stress the benefits of audio recording, in particular why a good audio recording is better, more useful and preferable in many contexts.

###### SLIDE 4.

Audio recording: pros

Some benefits of using audio recordings are listed here. A good video recording also requires good sound. Oral traditions, music and many aspects of ICH are reliant on sound. In many cases, audio recordings supplemented by still images can provide a complete document at comparatively reasonable cost. The use of audio recordings for access and dissemination can also be discussed here.

###### SLIDE 5.

Choosing equipment

Audio recording devices used in the field today record and store material in a digital format. Cassette recorders and digital audio tapes are increasingly uncommon and are often replaced with small hand-held devices that utilize either small internal hard drives (e.g. on a computer) or flash media (e.g. compact flash, secure digital, SD).

The choice of recording device will be contingent on balancing price and audio quality needs (this unit does not include a description of different models). While technology is changing rapidly, the fundamentals of audio recording remain the same. This section highlights some of the essential skills.

Try to ensure that the device used does not record in a proprietary format. Most devices will record in mp3 or.wav formats. WAV files are the preferred format, although they take up more space. A device that can record at a minimum of 48 khz 24 bit is ideal.

Models that display recording levels are also useful. These indicate when the recording is overloading, prompting the user to move further away from the source.

###### SLIDE 6.

Headphones

Headphones allow the person recording the sound to hear exactly what the microphone is picking up (or not recording in some cases). The use of headphones should be mandatory for recording audio. They enable users to understand the sound balance and room tone, and ascertain what sounds are being picked up at a distance. For example, although you may be recording in what seems a quiet spot, only by using headphones can you tell if traffic or voices in the distance are loud enough to be heard, or if seemingly quieter noises, such as the rustling of leaves, may be loud enough to create interference. Providing headphones to the person being recorded or other community members also increases the sense of participation, making them more comfortable with the process and the exercise more inclusive. Many people tend to remove headphones once recording has started; however, keeping them on can alert users to changes in the environment, breaks in connection, loss of battery power and so on. Sharing headphones around a group is also a good way to open up the recording process, rather than restricting it to a single person.

###### SLIDE 7.

Microphones

Microphones, whether analogue or digital, are the critical link in the recording chain. They determine the quality of the recording and are often, therefore, the most expensive piece of recording equipment. The sensitivity of the microphone ensures not only clarity, but also the quality of the voice or sound and the ambience of the space, all of which are essential. The person being recorded also has a moral right to expect that recording is done as faithfully as possible.

Good-quality microphones are attached to recorders through a variety of connectors; however, small handheld recorders are usually connected via a mini-jack. Even if a recorder has a built-in mic, it may also have the facility to attach a microphone. If the microphone is built in, the recorder will need to be used as if it were a microphone.

###### SLIDE 8.

External microphones

An external microphone is more likely to produce a better quality sound recording. However, many handheld devices now have good microphones. Another advantage of the external microphone is that it can be placed in close proximity to the subject, while the person recording sits further away, where they are less distracting and/or inappropriate. However, being away from the recorder means that you cannot monitor the recording or make adjustments. An external microphone is also beneficial in the case of video cameras. Sound is recorded separately for all high-quality video. Thus, a good understanding of audio is also necessary for video recording.

###### SLIDE 9.

Microphone positioning

A recording can be ruined by bad mic placement. If the interviewee is too far from the microphone, extraneous noise will be introduced into the recording, making the audio sound hollow or boomy. If the microphone is too close to the interviewee, it will pick up heavy breathing, dry mouth noises or popping sounds that occur with words that begin with the letter ‘p’. In the case of music, a microphone placed too close to the source will result in overloading and distortion.

When recording groups, position the people in an arc about 3 metres wide, then place the microphone 3 metres away on the centre line, facing the centre.

Before recording, listen to the sound through the headphones with your eyes shut and see if you can tell by listening alone where each sound originates. This result will indicate whether the mic is accurately capturing the ‘stereo image’ of the group.

It may be useful to have a recorder with headphones and a microphone attached to enable participants to come up and hear the differences.

It is advisable to use a stand or small tripod to fix the microphone. It may also be possible to place the mic on the ground. Avoid holding handheld devices when recording, as the sounds made by hand movements will be captured.

###### SLIDE 10.

Choosing a spot indoors

It is not always possible to choose the location when recording an ICH element. The performance may take place indoors, outdoors or at a specific site. Where options are available the chief criteria are to select a place free of noise and external disturbance that provides a good recording. When recording indoors, remember that hard and polished surfaces cause sound to reflect, and soft furnishings and people absorb sound. As an experiment, listen to the ambient sound of a room both with and without people.

###### SLIDE 11.

Choosing a spot outdoors

In outdoor recordings, wind and traffic are the greatest hazards, along with the inability to control the recording environment. Once again, use headphones to check whether the microphone is picking up wind disturbance. Remember to use sponge or furry windshields for outdoor recording. These fit over microphones to shield them from wind noise. In the absence of windshields, place a sock or other substitute over the microphone.

###### SLIDE 12.

Participatory audio recording

The method and plan for participatory audio recording depends on several issues, including the proportion of community representatives in the workshop, the level of literacy and exposure to recording and so on. Participants should take on the role of co-facilitators, while community members should take the lead in making the recording and deciding what to record. Try to identify community members keen to make recordings and provide them with the opportunity to practice, so that they gain sufficient confidence to undertake recording during the fieldwork practicum. The wide availability of digital technology in all parts of the world, including rural areas, makes this an attainable goal.

Community members should receive copies of recordings made. Training community members to make recordings themselves should be a fundamental aspect of community-based inventorying. Planning an inventorying project should include provision for equipment to be used by the community to inventory their own ICH.

###### SLIDE 13.

Preparing to record

Preparation for starting a recording includes removing sources of noise to the extent possible and explaining the source of recording to the participants so that they are more aware of the process. The aim is to reduce disturbance, but convey the natural ambience of the environment. The recording should be clear, but not recreate a studio setting. It is useful to make a test recording and listen to it prior to starting.

###### SLIDE 14.

Recording interviews

A significant amount of inventorying and documentation includes interviews. This slide presents a few tips, though further details are available in the unit on interviewing.

###### SLIDE 15.

Recording music and dance

Much of ICH involves music and dance in performance or ritual. This slide presents a few tips. Instruments, especially drums, are a challenge to record and require microphones to be placed at a greater distance to avoid drowning out other sounds and voices. Mic placement differs substantially in such cases from that used to record speech.

###### SLIDE 16.

Storing recordings

Storing digital audio files for archival or inventory purposes is not necessarily straightforward. The preservation of digital information hinges on three factors:

* *interoperability*: creating digital files in standard, non-proprietary formats that can be opened on any computer using freely available software which will be supported over time;
* *redundancy*: storing files in more than one place and creating multiple back-ups on secure media;
* *migration*: shifting files to new media before the old media degrade and/or become obsolete, and shifting files to new standard file formats before the old formats are no longer supported.

The current standard format is WAV files, thus it is useful if recordings are made in this format.

###### SLIDE 17.

Backing-up recordings

* Save audio files on multiple external hard drives.
* Create at least two copies of the audio files for each interview on CD or DVD discs using two different brands of high-quality, blank media.
* Keep storage materials in more than one physical location. Store CD and DVD discs in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight.
* Check files and media regularly. Transfer files to new media if any problems are suspected.
* When the time comes, migrate immediately – do not delay.
* If possible, deposit recordings in an archive for long-term preservation and access by the general public, researchers and, most importantly, the community.

Unit 24

Exercise 1: Audio recording

#### Objective:

The aim is to familiarize participants with the audio equipment to increase their confidence before they embark on the fieldwork practicum.

#### Time:

This exercise could take 1 hour to 1 hour and 30 minutes if the schedule permits.

#### Materials:

One audio recorder for each group, or to be shared as resources permit. Microphones if needed.

#### Procedure:

Group Work:

The participants should be divided into groups, each including a practitioner, and equipped with a recorder, microphones and headphones.

Each group should record a performance such as a song, story or form of oral expression, or include an interview with a practitioner. The recording should be 5 minutes long or longer if time permits. The recordings should be played back for the group to critique, led by the facilitator or a technician if one is present for the workshop.

The presence of an audio technician would be useful for this exercise.