

Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Context of Disasters

Summary of the Research Projects conducted in the Asia-Pacific Region

Research on ICH Safeguarding and Disaster Risk Management (2020–2023)

Research on ICH Affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic (2021–2023)

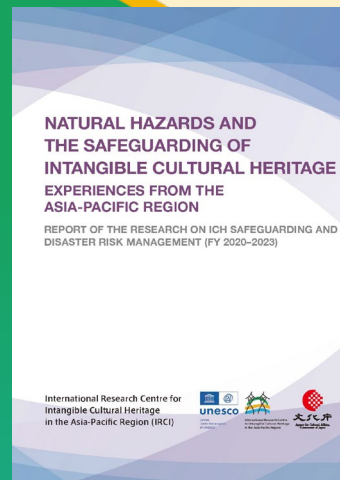
PROJECTS

IRCI has recently completed two research projects focusing on ICH and disasters.

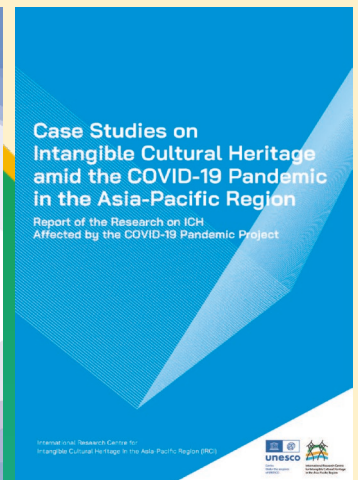
Research on ICH Safeguarding and Disaster Risk Management (2020–2023) examined the relationship between ICH and DRM, focusing on a wide range of natural hazards in the Asia-Pacific region. It explored the risks and effectiveness of ICH in the DRM process, considering different disaster types and ICH domains, and conducted case studies to understand specific community situations and develop action plans for safeguarding and mobilizing ICH in disasters. It also encouraged collaboration between ICH and DRM experts in the research process.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ICH was first assessed through this project in 2021, which subsequently led to the development of another project, **Research on ICH Affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic** to be implemented in 2022 and 2023. The case studies highlighted the capacity of ICH to adapt to the changing pandemic situations and contributed to building knowledge to respond to future crises.

This policy brief presents the essence of the findings of these two projects, which have been published as respective project reports: *Natural Hazards and the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage: Experiences from the Asia-Pacific Region* (March 2024) and *Case Studies on Intangible Cultural Heritage amid COVID-19 Pandemic in the Asia-Pacific Region* (April 2024).



Natural Hazards and the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage: Experiences from the Asia-Pacific Region
(March 2024)



Case Studies on Intangible Cultural Heritage amid COVID-19 Pandemic in the Asia-Pacific Region
(April 2024)



KEY FINDINGS and RECOMMENDATIONS

ICH practises and transmission are disrupted by various changes caused by disasters, including evacuation, displacement, break-up of communities, damage to and loss of tools, equipment, materials and important places for the practice, and the loss of markets and opportunities to perform ICH.



The nature of the impact of disasters on ICH is now better understood, and some tools are available to assess the risk and vulnerability of ICH to disasters. However, the situation of ICH after the disaster varies considerably, depending on the local setting and pre-existing conditions. Further research is needed to refine the assessment tools.

ICH has important roles to play in disasters, actively contributing to mitigating impacts and damage, and enhancing community resilience and post-disaster recovery. In many cases, however, traditional knowledge and practices that are effective for DRR are not fully recognized as cultural heritage by the communities concerned. Therefore, there is a need to promote and safeguard effective disaster knowledge and practices as ICH.



Further collaboration between ICH and DRR stakeholders will create synergies to enhance DRR efforts by integrating local and indigenous knowledge into DRR strategies, thereby strengthening community resilience.

When ICH is upheld and actively practised in the affected communities, they tend to be able to cope with the difficulties caused by disasters and find some ways to continue their ICH practice, demonstrating the resilient and adaptive nature of ICH.



Ensuring the viability of ICH is of paramount importance. ICH must be effectively safeguarded in everyday life, so that its practice can overcome the difficulties caused by an emergency and be transmitted to future generations.

The development of community-based action plans for safeguarding ICH and mobilizing it for disaster risk reduction is crucial, given the limitations of national and international frameworks to address case-specific situations at the community level.



It is important to ensure the active participation of the communities in research and assessment processes, and in the development of ICH safeguarding plans as well as DRM strategies that incorporate ICH.



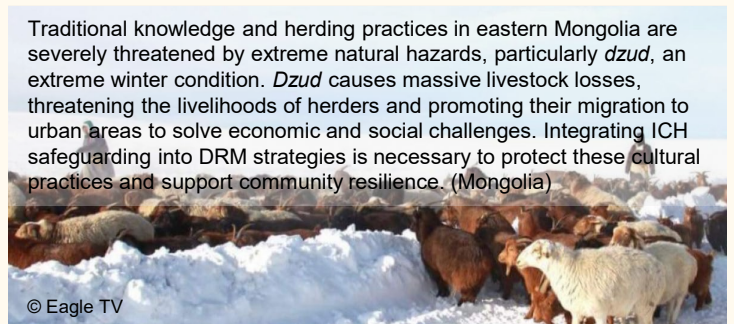
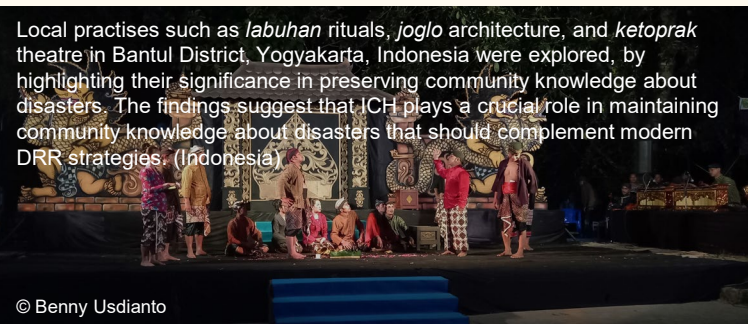
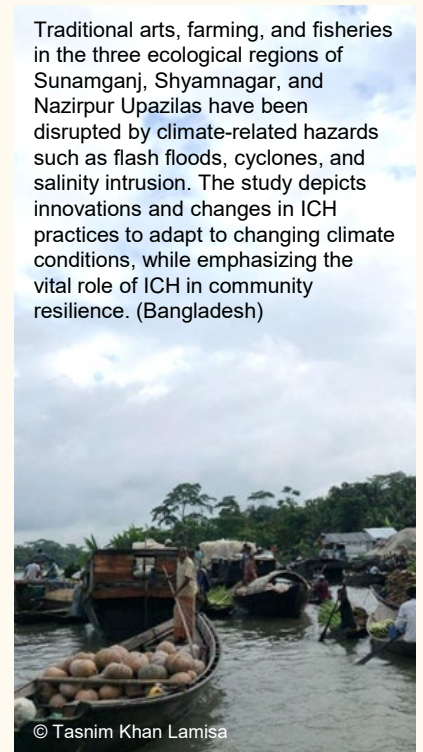
The central role of the community should be further promoted for its sustainability and resilience and for addressing the impacts of climate change.


Research on ICH Safeguarding and Disaster Risk Management


Project Summary and Case Studies


The project 'Research on ICH Safeguarding and Disaster Risk Management' explored the relationship between ICH and disaster risk management (DRM) in the Asia-Pacific region, focusing on disasters caused by natural hazards. Case studies targeting various ICH elements and local communities were conducted in cooperation with researchers in ICH and DRM in the Asia-Pacific region, emphasizing the dual aspects of ICH being vulnerable to disasters and serving as a resource for community resilience and disaster risk reduction (DRR) including preparedness, response, and recovery. A matrix was developed as a tool for assessing the impact of disasters on ICH and its role in the DRM process in consideration of different disaster types and ICH domains.

The report provides insights into the intersection of ICH and DRM in the Asia-Pacific region, offering practical examples and strategies for safeguarding ICH in the face of natural hazards.



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Understand the risk to ICH in DRM process
Understanding the potential disaster risk and the vulnerability of ICH will be the first step to safeguarding ICH. Carefully look into ICH being composed of **people** (practitioners, knowledge sharing and transfer, occasions to perform), **place** (stage, studio, gardens, resource environment, etc.), and **objects** (tools, instruments, facilities, etc.). Then, consider what aspect of ICH would be affected in what ways, and at which stage of the disaster. Disaster risk assessment can be done as part of ICH inventory and included in safeguarding plans.
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ICH and Disaster Risk Management
ICH such as oral traditions, performing arts, and traditional knowledge can enhance community cohesion and resilience, and inform disaster preparedness. Traditional architecture, engineering, subsistence and resource management strategies, and food technologies are effective and accessible tools for DRR. However, ICH elements that are effective for resilience are threatened not just by rapid lifestyle changes but also by the top-down DRR frameworks. Further collaboration is required to integrate ICH safeguarding and DRR.
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Community Engagement for Sustainability and Resilience
Community engagement and community-based actions are crucial for sustainability and resilience. Traditional knowledge and practises should be effectively incorporated into DRR frameworks to enhance community resilience. At the same time, community-based disaster knowledge and practises should be further promoted as ICH.

Research on ICH Affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic

Project Summary and Case Studies

The Research on ICH Affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic project documented the practices and transmission of ICH during the COVID-19 pandemic by conducting nine case studies in cooperation with researchers across the Asia-Pacific region. The case studies illustrated how ICH was affected not only by the direct effects of the deadly virus but also by social countermeasures that prohibited travel, gatherings, festivals, and ceremonies. The research revealed not only negative impacts that disrupted the practice of ICH but also positive and innovative responses, including the revitalization of traditional crafts, increased marketing of ICH using online tools, and increased opportunities for transmission facilitated by stay-at-home policies. The results of the project serve as an important resource for understanding the transformation, resilience, and inherent adaptability of ICH in the midst of global challenges and provide insights for future efforts to safeguard ICH in crises. The findings underscore the importance of collective action to protect and nurture cultural heritage during and beyond pandemics.



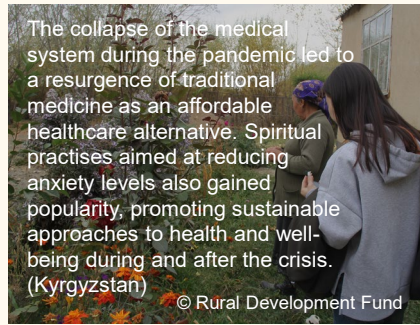
Traditional potters and weavers in Fiji experienced economic hardship due to tourism declines and lockdowns during the pandemic, leading to frustration and discouragement in continuing their practises. However, some practitioners adopted digital platforms during the lockdown to market their products online. (Fiji)

© Elizabeth Edwards



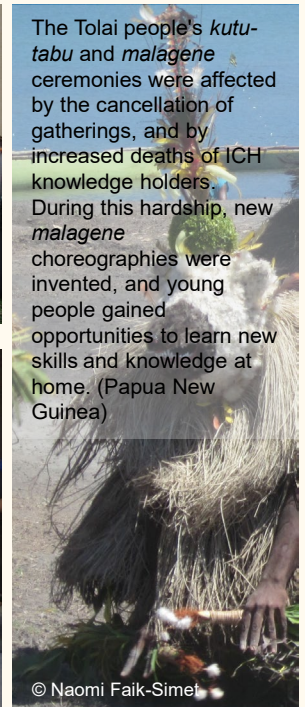
Sales of traditional *nitik batik* in Yogyakarta declined, as the pandemic created economic hardship in addition to consumer's preference for inexpensive goods rather than luxury items. Artisans adapted to the situation by producing smaller and more affordable items, such as face masks with new motifs to attract customers. (Indonesia)

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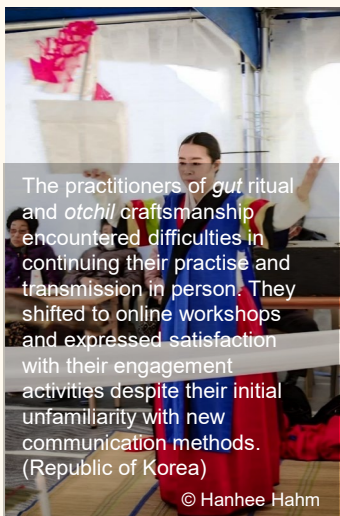
The collapse of the medical system during the pandemic led to a resurgence of traditional medicine as an affordable healthcare alternative. Spiritual practises aimed at reducing anxiety levels also gained popularity, promoting sustainable approaches to health and well-being during and after the crisis. (Kyrgyzstan)

© Rural Development Fund



The Tolai people's *kutu-tabu* and *malagene* ceremonies were affected by the cancellation of gatherings, and by increased deaths of ICH knowledge holders. During this hardship, new *malagene* choreographies were invented, and young people gained opportunities to learn new skills and knowledge at home. (Papua New Guinea)

© Naomi Faik-Simet



The practitioners of *gut* ritual and *otchil* craftsmanship encountered difficulties in continuing their practise and transmission in person. They shifted to online workshops and expressed satisfaction with their engagement activities despite their initial unfamiliarity with new communication methods. (Republic of Korea)

© Hanhee Hahm



Practitioners of traditional Iranian handicrafts, such as *soozandoozi*, *givehdoozi*, and *sofalgari*, particularly women who own their workshops, invested in training, introduced new designs and used the extra time during the pandemic to expand their networks of practitioners, trainees and customers in Iran and abroad. (Iran)

© Persian Garden Institute for Living Heritage



Artisans of traditional crafts in Kutch, India expressed job losses due to order cancellations, limited access to raw materials, and reduced opportunities to sell products in person. However, these challenges fostered solidarity within the craft sector, leading to more collaboration and support for artisan communities. (India)

© Ritu Sethi



Reduced frequency of apprenticeship training and shortage of raw materials were challenges for Mongolian ICH. However, some positive trends were observed, such as the increased interest in traditional culinary practices and medicines. Families were encouraged to engage in traditional games to promote respiratory health and physical activity. (Mongolia)

© Sarul Arslan



Musicians of *Charyapada*, *Baul*, and *Sufi* songs continued their practises at home despite restrictions and social distancing measures. By using mobile phones and social media platforms, they broadcasted their performances and broadened their opportunities to connect with their fans in distant locations. (Bangladesh)

© Saymon Zakaria

Disruption

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted ICH practices and transmission. The loss of knowledge holders, coupled with restrictions on social gatherings, including the cancellation of festive events, severely disrupted the continuation and transmission of ICH practices. It also caused disruptions in supply chains that provide materials and products essential for ICH. ICH activities and products tied to tourism lost opportunities.

Revival of Traditional Practises

The pandemic provided opportunities to revitalize ICH. Lockdowns became a great opportunity for family members to engage in traditional practices such as food preparation and games, which also facilitated the transmission of ICH. Traditional healthcare knowledge using natural and local resources gained attention as a remedy for curing and preventing the disease, both physically and mentally. In particular, younger generations forced to stay in their hometowns by the restrictions on people's movement came to engage and participate in the local craft production and rituals.

Adaptation

The pandemic encouraged ICH practitioners to seek new initiatives to continue their ICH practice by actively adapting to changing situations. Artisans sought new marketing strategies such as online shops and experimented with their products innovated for online marketing. Performances and festivals that could not attract a large number of people were recorded and streamed online, reaching a wider audience, including local citizens who had not previously been involved. New approaches and ways of practising and transmitting ICH in difficult times demonstrate the flexibility and resilience of ICH.

Related Publications by IRCI

Research on ICH Safeguarding and Disaster Risk Management

PROCEEDINGS OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND NATURAL DISASTERS
7-9 December 2018, Sendai, Japan

International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI)

Proceedings of the Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on Intangible Cultural Heritage and Natural Disasters
(March 2019)



Statements and Recommendations for Safeguarding ICH in Disasters and Mobilising ICH for Disaster Risk Reduction

Executive Summary

The Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on Intangible Cultural Heritage and Natural Disasters was convened in Sendai, Japan, 7-9 December 2018. The workshop was organized by the International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI) as its research project for FY 2018. In cooperation with the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties (NRI), the workshop was attended by more than forty intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and disaster risk reduction (DRR) specialists, policy makers, and observers from Australia, Bangladesh, China, FI, Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Korea, Vietnam, and Vietnam within the Asia-Pacific region. Participants from Australia, the DRG (DRG) in Fiji and three UNESCO Category 2 Centres in the field of ICH (DCHAC (DCHAC) and (DCHAC))

Summary

Following the discussions held at this three-day workshop, the workshop participants made a series of statements and recommendations. While these are specifically intended for ICH and DRR researchers they are research at factors across all the interaction of culture and DRR. Workshop participants noted the following features of the relationship between ICH and DRR:

- ICH-related DRR strategies have been developed, refined, and transformed over centuries, reflecting long-term relationships between people and their environments.
- ICH practices, such as religious rites, ceremonies, dances and rituals, and other community-based activities, are an effective tool for DRR, including post-disaster recovery.
- Certain ICH elements have been identified as playing a highly specialised role in DRR and community resilience, such as traditional weather and hazard indicators, and traditional food preservation.
- Traditional forms of building, engineering and agricultural knowledge that rely on the use of local materials and techniques can be effective in both reducing disaster risk and supporting and strengthening community resilience.
- ICH embodied in museums, archives and other commemorative institutions and objects, locations and practices is a collective memory of disasters.
- The effectiveness and applicability of ICH in support of DRR depends on a range of factors, including the nature of the hazard, the scale of disaster, and the social context in which they occur.

Statements and Recommendations for Safeguarding ICH in Disasters and Mobilising ICH for Disaster Risk Reduction
(December 2018)



PRELIMINARY RESEARCH ON ICH SAFEGUARDING AND DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION
PROJECT REPORT FOR FY 2016-2017

International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI)

Preliminary Research on ICH Safeguarding and Disaster Risk Management in the Asia-Pacific Region: Project Report for FY 2016-2017
(March 2018)



Research on ICH Affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic

ICH Resilience amid COVID-19 Pandemic
(booklet) (March 2023)

International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI)

ICH Resilience amid COVID-19 Pandemic (booklet)
(March 2023)



Research on ICH Affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic
(Preliminary Report) (August 2022)

International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI)

Research on ICH Affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic: 'A Preliminary Report of the Questionnaire-Based Survey Conducted in FY 2021'
(August 2022)



IRCI Brochure 2024-2025

IRCI 2024-2025



IRCI Leaflet

IRCI



Other Project Publications

Research on ICH's Contribution to SDGs: Education and Community Development Project Report FY 2020-2021
(March 2022)

Research on ICH's Contribution to SDGs: Education and Community Development Project Report FY 2020-2021
(March 2022)



Sustainable Research Data Collection for ICH Safeguarding in the Asia-Pacific Region
PROJECT REPORT
FY 2019-2021

Sustainable Research Data Collection for ICH Safeguarding in the Asia-Pacific Region: Project Report FY 2019-2021
(March 2022)



Progress and Challenges in the Research for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage - Towards a Sustainable Future -
(March 2022)

Progress and Challenges in the Research for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage - Towards a Sustainable Future -
(March 2022)



Asia-Pacific Research Forum for ICH Safeguarding is a Facebook Group to share information on research projects, events and publications. It invites everyone interested in research for safeguarding ICH in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

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National Institutes for Cultural Heritage, Japan
International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI)

Address: 2-cho, Mozusekiun-cho, Sakai-ku, Sakai City, Osaka 590-0802, Japan
Tel: +81-72-275-8050
Fax: +81-72-275-8151
E-mail: irci@nich.go.jp

Website: <https://www.irci.jp>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IRCI.Official>
Youtube (IRCI.Official): <https://www.youtube.com/@IRCI.Official>

