

**Expert Report for: UNESCO- ACCU Expert meeting on Community Involvement  
in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: Towards the Implementation of  
UNESCO's 2003 Convention in Tokyo March 13-15, 2006**

**Notes towards**  
***The involvement of communities in defining inventorying and***  
***safeguarding their ICH***

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Through the five domains of ICH, many are shared broadly, across ethnic groups, nations and communities. Others are specialized areas of knowledge and practices, known only to a smaller group of people, who share responsibility for the care of knowledge and practices, as well as share the knowledge itself. These groups may be seen as parallel to Western professionals, such as doctors or biologists.

The Convention makes specific mention of Indigenous communities: there are substantive differences between indigenous knowledge systems and other knowledge systems. Some differences include the importance of spirituality and the wholistic and interconnected nature of indigenous knowledge. Individuals within indigenous knowledge systems are culture bearers, practioners as well as cultural custodians. There are differing levels of responsibility that ones with differing levels of understanding. These groups of people with specialized knowledge may belong to a family group, which could be a closely related group or a clan relationship. Sometimes, the group may be gender specific. Often, one type of ICH will have knowledge and practices specific to men and another set of knowledge and practices specific to women. The sacredness of the ICH is a critical aspect of practice, transmission and safeguarding ICH and transmission of culture. There are many protocols, including prohibitions on sharing knowledge and on who are the cultural practioners and when specific ICH can be practiced. Breaking these protocols can endanger the practioners, the culture bearers, communities, and the environment.

In addition to formal (although interpersonal) methods of training within these specialized areas of ICH, there are also complex protocols which are strictly followed which protect and sustain the community, the cultural practioners, but also the integrity of the knowledge itself.

The relationship between indigenous communities and nation states is complex, characterized by mistrust and conflict. This history will affect the implementation of the convention. The involvement of the permanent forum of indigenous people at the UN would be productive. There are several protocol statements, such as the Mataatua Declaration and Australian Library and Archives Protocols which can guide this work.

Cultural practioners, especially cultural custodians, must be involved in all stages of inventory, research and safeguarding.