

International Partnership Programme for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage  
“**Training Course for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage**”  
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**Case Study Report: Papua New Guinea**  
The Safeguarding of the Yangit Female Initiation Ceremony  
East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea

*Papua New Guinea National Commission for UNESCO*

**Introduction to the targeted ICH:**

The Yangit female initiation ceremony (*Kraku Bandi*) involves the skin-cutting of young females who have experienced their first menstruation. This initiation ceremony is performed by the Yangit people of the Burui Kunai Local Level Government area of the East Sepik province. Young girls who undergo this ceremony are required to remain in seclusion for a period of three to four months. After the seclusion period is over, these young girls are then allowed to reunite with their families. An emergence ceremony is held to celebrate the young female initiates' achievements before they reunite with their families.

The targeted ICH in this project covers four domains; namely,

- a) Oral traditions and expressions
- b) Performing arts
- c) Social practices, rituals and festive events
- d) Traditional craftsmanship

**Objectives of the Project:**

The main objective of the project is to record and document this important female initiation ceremony for posterity and also to safeguard its existence and practice. In light of the rapid changes affecting our many cultures in Papua New Guinea, there is urgent need to safeguard this important female ceremony. The Yangit female initiation ceremony is highly threatened by increased Tourism activities within the province and country as a whole.

The preliminary research conducted in Yangit in October 2008 was aimed at creating awareness amongst the local people to safeguard and protect this special women's ceremony against all forms of outside exploitation.

**Methods of Project Implementation:**

The project was implemented through a field-trip undertaken in October 2008 by Music staff of the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies. Both video and audio recordings were

conducted on the emergence ceremony of nine young female initiates. Still photographs of the ceremony were also taken as part of documentation.

The recordings focused on the music and dance performances, oral history and traditional knowledge relating to the processes associated with the female initiation ceremony (*Kraku-Bandi*). Interviews were carried out with the local people concerned with these practices as well.

### **Outcomes of the Project:**

This project has attracted general public and media interest as well as academic interest from tertiary and research institutions. Information of the *Kraku-Bandi* ceremony was published in the daily newspaper, *The National* on Friday the 17<sup>th</sup> of October 2008 and as a result has stimulated interest amongst government and non-government organisations concerned with the preservation and safeguarding of such important ceremonies that are prevalent in many parts of Papua New Guinea.

A recent conference on ‘Community Transformation and Networking’ was held in Papua New Guinea this year from June 16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> which consisted of presentations that were aimed at developing Papua New Guinean communities through sustainable community projects. A paper entitled ‘The Developmental Role of Women in the Yangit Female Initiation Gender and Leadership Ceremony’ was presented during this conference. The presentation focused on the traditional role of women in Papua New Guinea using the *Kraku-Bandi* case. The Yangit women’s case was discussed in relation to the socio-economic role of women in this female initiation ceremony. This subject led to discussions concerning the importance of this female initiation ceremony and the need to safeguard women’s traditional roles and values.

### **Conclusion:**

Women everywhere have certain roles to play in the development and maintenance of their communities. In Papua New Guinea, women’s roles are reproduced and constructed out of performance contexts. These roles are as important as those played by men which further legitimise the gender-divide. The roles played by men and women are constantly reinforced by certain activities and institutions of the community.

There is a need to safeguard cultural practices relating to women’s traditional knowledge and values. Many communities depend on traditional institutions to provide the framework within which both men and women can develop and maintain their communities. *Kraku-Bandi* of the Yangit is one of these important partners that has much to contribute to discussions about development.

The Government of Papua New Guinea recognises culture as an important area for integral human development. It has established cultural institutions under the 1994 *National Cultural Commission Act* to develop, preserve and promote culture and heritage; namely,

- (a) The National Performing Arts Troupe
- (b) The Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies
- (c) The National Film Institute.

These institutions have different functions but share the ultimate goal of preserving, promoting and developing the diverse arts and cultures of Papua New Guinea.

The Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies was established in 1974 and has recently conducted research on the role of women in Papua New Guinea in the context of traditional ceremonies. Women's roles are studied as part of the Institute's function in carrying out research into, recording and interpreting all aspects of traditional societies. Results of the preliminary research conducted in Yangit are kept in the Institute's archive.

The *Kraku-Bandi* ceremony paves a fertile area in research that relates to the maintenance and continuation of women's cultural knowledge and value systems. These knowledge and value systems must be safeguarded against all forms of external forces and influence.