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**COUNTRY REPORT: Kyrgyzstan**  
**The Role of Local communities in safeguarding of intangible heritage of the Kyrgyz**

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The Kyrgyz are one of the ancient nations of Central Asia. They have predominantly led a nomadic way of life and have a rich intangible cultural heritage. Many generations of the Kyrgyz-nomads created unique monuments of non-material culture. These are a heroic-epic trilogy “Manas”, small epics, legends, myths, fairytales, proverbs, and tongue-twisters. And last but not least in this respect are popular sagas, celebrations, religious beliefs, customs, and rituals, arts and crafts, and musical art in which peculiarities of life and culture of the Kyrgyz are reflected. This heritage was transmitted from generation to generation, and the nation itself was a bearer of cultural elements.

At present, an important role in safeguarding of intangible heritage is played by the local communities of various regions of the country. Ways of transmission and safeguarding of this heritage are different, starting from different rituals that are used in daily life (alastoo, koshok-koshuu, joktoo, etc.) up to organisation of festivals, narrators’ contests, and many others. Communities organise various cultural activities, for instance “”El ichi ounour kenchi”, “Yr kese”, and “Aitysh” with the help of local administrations. They have also assisted in the establishment of art and work-studios such as on production of national instruments in Issykkul region, on production of felt hand-made wares in Naryn and Batken regions, and of folk studios that work using individual methodologies such as “tutor-apprentice”.

In accordance with the Governmental decree #4 of January 11, 2005 on “Adoption of National Culture and Art development Programme in rural areas of the Kyrgyz Republic up to 2010” local administrations within their powers render help to the communities. In particular, they provide premises for work-studios on a free-of-charge basis and assist them to organise cultural events and activities. Local TV and radio broadcasting companies jointly with representatives of local communities produce cultural programmes, for instance, “Ak-Shookum” in Talas region and “Manas teachings” in Osh city for awareness rising of the population.

Local administrations and communities make significant efforts to the attract attention of the young generation to the importance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. They organise photo exhibitions, and contests of children’s drawings on cultural heritage, and carry out experimental classes on “Cultural heritage of peoples of Kyrgyzstan” jointly with local education departments (Talas region).

The public culture foundations also provide support and implement activities in safeguarding ICH. For instance, PA “Aitysh” has been working since 2000 and renders assistance to akyns-improvisers and had carried out many contests at international, national, and local levels. With its financial support many local communities conducted contests and training, where representatives of various communities demonstrate different genres of art performance that

are peculiar to specific communities. PA “Manas” was created in 2002 and has supported epic tellers. It has produced several TV programmes in various regions of the country. “Komuzchu” foundation promotes preservation and development of ancient melodies (kouu) that are performed on the national three-stringed flute-komuz and the stringed ouz-komuz. Fund representatives have also organised workshops on production of national instruments (in Issykkul and Jalalabat regions), school-studios on training of pupils to play on national instruments, and conduct the annual “Eldik kouulor” festival. Central Asian Crafts Association (CACSA) provides significant support for development and preservation of traditional handicrafts. It carries out the yearly exhibitions of traditional crafts and trainings, where local craftswomen are trained in new production technologies, at the same time preserving traditional cultural elements of each local community.

The National Academy of Sciences of the KR conducts scientific expeditions to the regions in order to make inventories of various elements of intangible cultural heritage on a periodical basis. Significant support is provided by the students of the Faculty of Anthropology of the American University in Kyrgyzstan. Unfortunately, due to insufficient financing and lack of technical support, these expeditions are not conducted regularly, but local communities provide help by documenting the elements of ICH. Starting from 2008 NAN of the KR had started work on development of methodological basics on inventory making (development of selection criteria and determination of significance of the element of ICH, creation of classifiers, standards of scientific description, etc.).

During the last years, due to migration processes, with urbanisation of villages and intensive development of “mass culture”, some elements of ICH are under threat. Understanding the importance of this heritage, the President of the KR signed the decree on “Development of Culture up to 2010” #523 of November 29, 2007. Within the framework of the decree international contests of akyns-improvisers for presidential prizes were organised in 2007 and 2008, special heritage reels for popularization of ICH were shown, the “Great Akyns” series was published, based on originals of Manuscripts Fund of the NAN of the KR, etc.

The State Programme on “Safeguarding, revival, and development of crafts in KR for 2007-2010 period” was approved by the Governmental Decree #230 on June 19, 2007. Within the framework of this programme an educational programme “Kyrgyz National Embroidery” is being implemented. Undoubtedly, these measures served as an incentive for development of ICH during the last years.

Along with positive tendencies on safeguarding and development of ICH in our country there are problems as well. First of all, although Kyrgyzstan does have an integrated normative and regulatory framework on ICH, there is a lack of specific programmes directed to development of education and training of specialists on management of ICH. At present, they are the main directions of work in the ICH field over which our experts have started to act.