Cultural Heritage Education in Ugandan Universities

An overview with a focus on intangible cultural heritage

2018

INSIDE

Uganda's Intangible Cultural Heritage and the 2003 UNESCO Convention

The ICH "domains"

According to UNESCO, intangible cultural heritage is manifested in the five following domains:

➢ Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of ICH
➢ The performing arts
➢ Social practices, rituals and festive events
➢ Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
➢ Traditional craftsmanship

The 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) defines ICH as *"the practices, representations, expression, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage"*. Uganda ratified the Convention in 2009 and is among the 176 states to have now done so.

UNESCO-inscribed ICH elements in Uganda

➢ The Ma'di bowl lyre music and dance
➢ The Koogere oral tradition of the Basongora, Banyabindi and Batooro
➢ The male-child cleansing ceremony in Lango
➢ The Empaako tradition of the Batooro, Banyoro, Batuku, Batagwenda and Banyabindi
➢ The Bigwala, gourd trumpet music and dance of the Busoga Kingdom
➢ Backcloth making

Uganda is indeed a country rich in ICH, which can be found in the diverse cultural practices, beliefs, values, history, ceremonies, and other aspects of the culture of the various ethnic communities that constitute Uganda as a nation. The Constitution recognises the existence of 65 ethnic groups, each with their distinct cultural foundation (as forest people, pastoralists, fishing communities, agricultural communities, kingdoms and chiefdoms). The Constitution also recognises the existence of diverse forms of expression, including more than 45 languages.

Uganda's tangible heritage includes the built environment (historic buildings, monuments), natural land forms (mountains, valleys, forests, caves, rocks, etc.) and other sites of cultural, natural and historic significance. These tangible aspects however have meaning which lends them significance, and therefore constitute an integral part to ICH. Five elements of ICH have specifically been inscribed on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, while bark cloth making has been inscribed on the Representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The intangible heritage of selected Ugandan communities, including the Ik, the Basongora and the Acholi, have also been inventoried within the framework of the 2003 Convention.

ICH evolves with time – changing, gaining or losing meaning and relevance to the communities where they feature. In Uganda, the survival of some of these elements of ICH (whether UNESCO-inscribed or not) is however threatened. Community consultations preceding the inscriptions of the 6 elements earlier mentioned has shown that elders are passing away without transmitting the knowledge and skills required for their

continued existence. According to reports to UNESCO in 2012 for example, only four elders conversant with the Koogere narrative were still alive and there was at the time no evident arrangement to transmit their knowledge. Some religious creeds also view cultural practices, such as the male-child cleansing ceremony in Lango, with disrespect and suspicion, while "modern" entertainment is swiftly replacing the Ma'di bowl lyre and the Kisoga Bigwala gourd trumpet music and dance. Further, and whereas the inscribed ICH elements have received international recognition (and therefore stand a chance of surviving if relevant measures are taken to avert their disappearance), there are also many other elements of ICH which have not been given adequate attention.

Uganda's laws and policies however provide a potential foundation to support the preservation and promotion of the country's cultural heritage. Besides the Constitution, these include the 2006 National Culture Policy (which provides for advocacy, capacity building, research and documentation, collaboration with stakeholders, and resource mobilisation as the general strategies for promoting culture); the 2015 National Museums and Monuments Policy (which highlights the role of the Ministry of Education to mainstream heritage education in curricula, and to design capacity-building programmes for cultural heritage conservation in collaboration with schools, universities and other tertiary institutions); and the 2014 National Strategy on Inventorying Intangible Cultural Heritage (which, besides laying out procedure for identifying and documenting ICH elements, stresses the necessity of involving local communities in the process).

Despite these legal provisions, the culture sector has nevertheless not been prioritised and continues to see very limited resource allocations in the national budget. This has far-reaching effects, including compromising the Government's Department of Culture's capacity to support initiatives to preserve and promote elements of ICH, such as through cultural heritage education in schools and tertiary institutions. It is in this context that the need for "ICH education" to raise the necessary awareness among young people, and policy makers and implementers assumes its full importance.

According to the 2003 Convention, safeguarding elements of ICH means *"measures aimed at ensuring the viability of ICH, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalisation of the various aspects of such heritage"*.

In Uganda, non-formal ICH transmission mechanisms have long been in existence, mostly within families and communities, and continue (as in many other parts of the world) to provide an important channel to pass on ICH in its various domains from one generation to the next. Oral traditions and expressions are for instance transmitted through social interactions, sometimes through stories and tales at the fireplace (or other socialising space) in the family setting. As one grows up, one is educated about the social practices of the family, clan, ethnic group and community. Social practices, rituals and festive events are integral to the life of communities and they mark important events such as childbirth, marriage, harvests, and the new moon. Community members also learn the do's and don'ts of these practices through informal interactions. Similarly, knowledge of craftsmanship and other traditional skills are often passed to youth through non-formal education, especially through apprenticeship.

In the pre-colonial era, it was the responsibility of cultural resource persons and institutions to identify valuable cultural elements and to establish structures and systems to transmit knowledge and skills, and to ensure their protection and sustained use. With the arrival of colonialism, such traditional knowledge systems and transmission mechanisms were however undermined. The creation of new spaces for learning and formal (often missionary-led) education led to the establishment of new identities. New religions, worldviews and values were introduced – some of which demonised indigenous belief systems. New political arrangements also changed the balance of power between cultural institutions, local communities and externally-imposed decision-making institutions, while profound social and economic changes affected everyone.

Nowadays, with the increasing dominance of formal education and its association with assured avenues to economic gain and a prosperous life, spaces for informal education continue to shrink. Uganda's youth spend much of their time in formal education establishments where there is limited cultural heritage education. Many primary and most secondary schools are boarding institutions and even day-schools leave little time for parents and other mentors to transmit aspects of ICH to young people. Further, modern technology, including televisions, mobile telephones and social media often take away the remaining time that children would have with their parents and other family members, thereby denying them the opportunity to learn about the wealth of their communities' ICH. Some religious faiths also continue to view culture with deep suspicion (if not outright antagonism) and deepen the gulf between young people and their cultural heritage.

While the national *"thematic curriculum"* provides for the use of local languages as a medium of instruction in the early years of primary schooling, this is only partially applied and is not supported by a more comprehensive approach to *"cultural education"*. In secondary schools, apart from schools that teach local languages and literature, the school programmes similarly leave little or no space for such education. Where cultural aspects, such as language, music, dance and drama are taught, little connection is made between culture and its potential to foster development.

Extra-curricular activities partly make up for this deficiency: some schools have arts clubs, cultural heritage clubs, and music and dance activities. Such initiatives – often focusing on the cultures of a specific or a diversity of ethnicities - can serve as spaces to transmit cultural heritage. Cultural heritage clubs

initiated by CCFU are now in existence in 130 secondary schools across Uganda. Other initiatives by individuals and institutions include the *Ekisaakaate kya Nabagereka,* an initiative by the Queen of Buganda to bring together young holiday makers to learn about their culture and cultural galas featuring traditional dishes, games, music, dance, drama and other activities are organised by different institutions across the country. Radio programmes on culture, often using local languages, are widespread. *Engule ya Radio Simba* for instance compels an adult who enters their Luganda language and culture competition to join along with *endukusa* (a "banana sucker") – a young girl or boy to ensure that knowledge transmission takes place. In the new curriculum for secondary schools, which is awaiting implementation, aspects of culture have been incorporated.

Nevertheless, the youth, who form a large percentage of our national population, have not had an opportunity to experience significant positive aspects of culture, but have found themselves in a context that is passive, dismissive or even intolerant towards cultural heritage and its relevance to their development.

Cultural heritage education in Ugandan universities

To examine the current status of cultural heritage education in Uganda's universities, various university websites were visited and meetings held with administrators and instructors of relevant courses. Public universities visited included Kyambogo University, Gulu University, Makerere University and Kabale University, while private universities included Kampala International University, Ndejje University, Uganda Christian University, the Islamic University in Uganda, Uganda Martyrs' University, and Mountains of the Moon University. Some course instructors provided relevant course outlines which were reviewed to identify culture- (and ICH-related) content and mode of delivery. Information on community outreach was particularly relevant to identify how universities are contributing to publicising and promoting ICH in their vicinity and in engaging the concerned communities. The survey points to the following:

1. **Offer of ICH-inclusive courses:** Aspects of culture in general and ICH in particular feature or are implied in courses offered by some universities (archaeology, customary law, family law, ethno-botany, literature, local languages, ethno-musicology, and sociology). Some of these are offered at Makerere University and at a few other universities. Makerere University now has an Institute of Heritage Conservation and Restoration, and offers an undergraduate degree in Archaeology and Heritage Studies where one of the courses taught is Cultural Heritage Studies.

   Across all surveyed universities, few courses however focus on transmitting and promoting practical ICH knowledge and skills. Among the ten institutions visited, for instance, only two offer courses that explicitly and purposefully link culture to development: the Islamic University in Uganda and Ndejje University both offer the course "Culture and Development" to their students of Development Studies, and of Social Work and Social Administration. In both universities, the course focuses on presenting culture as a discipline and

a science, with the purpose of analysing worldviews from a cultural perspective. The Uganda Christian University offers a course on "African Traditional Religion" including African traditional beliefs and practices. At the same university, a Uganda Studies Programme brings undergraduate students from the United States of America for a semester and takes them through a culture practicum that prepares them for field work and homestays by guiding them on interpersonal cultural expectations. At the African Rural University, all students are expected to take part in extensive community outreach activities, including being mentored by "traditional wisdom specialists".

As Makerere University professor Allan Birabi observes, however, despite the fact that *"basic heritage awareness/ education is a fundamental right for all humanity … an all-inclusive natural and cultural heritage education/awareness drive in such a way that all Ugandans feel part of the conservation process remains a big challenge to the country"*. This can largely be attributed to the very limited attention given by educational institutions to heritage education as an integral part of development.

2. **Values informing the education system:** A privatised education system treats its services as sellable merchandise. Uganda's private universities must internally generate almost all their finances through students' fees. In public institutions, education is subsidised for only a few students, mostly for those pursuing science courses. Such a "commercial approach" within tertiary institutions, which often also sees decision-making managers inclined to business considerations that override the pleas of academic-minded faculty, provides an unfavourable environment for the survival of valuable knowledge (Standing, 2011), some of which is constituted in ICH.

This orientation, according to several respondents, coupled with the limited appreciation of the value of culture and the limited understanding of the prospects it offers students, contributes to the low numbers of students who would take up ICH-related courses, should these be offered. This is in spite of the growth in cultural tourism (though still in its infancy in Uganda), and the existence of other avenues that could potentially see graduates usefully involved (the performing arts and their management; the growing number of museums; cultural research, etc.)

3. **Appreciation of culture – and ICH in particular – by university administrators and managers:** Some university representatives expressed their dilemma in striking a balance between the demands of their managerial and administrative leadership and the demands of the learners. Some felt that many influential administrators and managers have little or no appreciation of culture, reflecting the education system they went through, as well as the development contexts they work in, where culture is not a priority. As they determine the focus of curricula and the general university philosophy, cultural studies are given either a peripheral position or none at all.

4. **Capacity of instructors:** Some instructors of courses where ICH could potentially feature spoke of their limited capacity in going beyond the theoretical approaches they employ, for example, in the instruction of local languages and literature, anthropology, applied psychology, social work and social administration, history, and related subjects. These subjects have therefore not provided an opportunity for the concerned students to practically experience and appreciate ICH in its various forms.

5. **Embedding ICH in other courses:** Some ICH domains feature in various disciplines, such as music dance and drama, languages, history, and various science subjects, although there is some danger of "dilution" and trivialisation when an independent focus is not provided. For example, course instructors of Social Work and Social Administration and Development Studies normally incorporate discussions on culture when preparing their students for outreach programmes or internship. Many of those interviewed during this research however indicated that given the generally limited appreciation of the role of culture in development, these discussions are often dominated by dismissive attitudes towards culture, which the young graduates then carry with them to their field. This hampers the transmission of relevant knowledge and an appreciation of culture in general and of ICH in particular.

6. **Extra-curricular ICH-related activities:** There are vibrant co-curricular activities currently conducted by youth in tertiary institutions to promote culture, including ICH elements, through peer-to-peer as well as resource-person-guided informal education. Students' associations, such as the ethnically-rooted *Baganda Nkoba za Mbogo, Basoga Nseete,* and *Teso Students' Development Association* which are found in various academic institutions in the country also promote their respective cultures through cultural galas, outreach activities (such as communal cleaning of water sources, protecting indigenous species of crops and trees, and skills sharing, including making and marketing traditional crafts). Whereas the membership of these associations is often quite exclusive and focuses on promoting the culture of one's ethnicity, they often come together to compete in cultural activities when they showcase a diversity of cultural practices.

Information on ICH education in other countries was collected by reviewing their reports on the implementation of listed ICH elements submitted to UNESCO, surveying university websites, and consulting with relevant individuals.

Cultural heritage education efforts in Universities are evident in a few African countries, and these experiences provide some learning points for Uganda. The study points to the following enabling factors as being responsible for on-going heritage education in the different countries.

1. **An enabling context:** The extent to which cultural heritage education exists in an education system appears to largely depend on the country's historical context. Zimbabwe, whose leadership emphasises its "African identity", for instance focuses more on "African cultures" than countries where the leadership and history (for example of ethno-culturally-motivated civil strife) leads to more cautious discussions on ethnic and cultural diversity. Because cultural heritage education can most suitably thrive in an environment with free cultural expression (UNESCO, 2005), it is absent or highly filtered (and therefore compromised), when taught in culturally-sensitive education systems and in national contexts emerging from civil strife and other forms of internal conflicts.

2. **Political will:** The extent to which political leaders attach value to culture also influences the level of resources they allocate to its promotion. Zimbabwe for instance invests in cultural expression (for example the Dzimbabwe Arts Festival at the Great Zimbabwe University) as a mechanism to transmit ICH knowledge and skills, and in research and documentation, for instance at the African Language Research Institute, University of Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe, 2014). The National Trust of Zimbabwe has several heritage education projects and preserves historic sites (National Trust of Zimbabwe, 2017). Local

languages have been institutionalised as media of instruction in learning institutions and prioritised as national languages in formal and public spaces in several countries, including Kinyarwanda in Rwanda, Amharic in Ethiopia, and Kiswahili in Tanzania and Kenya.

3. **Individual university motivation:** Whereas external factors can influence academic and extra-curricular activities, a critical point lies in a university's internal motivation to promote ICH. In South Africa, for example, several universities set out to, and currently offer courses in culture and heritage management, which include ICH. The University of Witwatersrand offers undergraduate and graduate courses in Heritage Studies; Arts, Culture and Heritage Management; History; and Archaeology; while the University of Cape Town hosts a number of museums and cultural heritage information centres at which their students of cultural-heritage-related courses, such as traditional performing arts, history and archaeology, can be seconded. In Tanzania, the Department of Archaeology and Heritage at the University of Dar es Salaam offers undergraduate and graduate studies in Archaeology and in Heritage Management. The University for Development Studies in Ghana offers a PhD in Endogenous Development whose approach draws significantly on a community's indigenous knowledge, resources and opportunities to foster development.

Research into ICH can inform other disciplines (ethno-botany, ethno-biology, etc.), as well as other community-focused programmes. The Institute for African Renaissance Studies at the University of South Africa for instance offers as one of its two community engagement programmes an experience at the Mothong Heritage Trust which focuses on utilising indigenous knowledge to conserve endangered indigenous medicinal plant species in the outskirts of Mmamelodi township in the City of Tshwane.

A new initiative: "Promoting intangible cultural heritage education in institutions of higher learning in Uganda"

The Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU) has received support (mostly from UNESCO) for a 3-year project that aims at raising awareness of the management and academic staff in 4 universities in Uganda (Uganda Martyrs University, Kabale University, Kyambogo University and the Islamic University in Uganda) on the relevance of intangible cultural heritage in Uganda's current development context.

Working in partnership with the Uganda National Commission for UNESCO and these participating universities (through a project Steering Committee with representatives from relevant stakeholders, including academia, the National Council for Higher Education, representatives of student bodies, relevant ministries, and civil society organisations), the project proposes to produce training materials and a course outline on 'Intangible Cultural Heritage and Development' in Uganda and to train a cadre of academic staff in delivering such a course. The project conforms with the objectives of the National Culture Policy which stipulates the importance of intangible cultural heritage and the need to safeguard it.

The project is expected to have an impact within and beyond the four universities through a symposium and public lectures, in addition to widely available teaching materials. This is expected to result in a higher degree of appreciation of the importance of ICH in relation to development challenges by academic staff and in their increased competence in delivering course on ICH and Development. The project will be coordinated by CCFU, a local NGO with several years of experience in the field of ICH and in supporting course development in Ugandan universities.

Conclusions

Research findings point to a gap in Ugandan tertiary institutions, regarding both efforts and capacity to transmit knowledge and skills related to the various domains of ICH. To enhance such efforts, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. The enthusiasm to promote aspects of culture in several universities, especially by student bodies through co-curricular activities and through their cultural associations, could provide a foundation for more formal ICH-related courses. To make this transition, raising the appreciation of culture and ICH on the part of curriculum developers and course instructors would seem essential.

2. Some Universities are reflecting a slowly growing, but noticeable realisation of the importance of culture in development. Makerere University for instance now has an Institute of Heritage Conservation and Restoration, established in 2015, and offers a Bachelor's degree in Archaeology and Heritage Studies where one course called Cultural Heritage Studies.

3. Limited marketability of ICH-related courses is a major hindrance and efforts need to be made to position them as providing opportunities for future income and/or employment. A primary concern for university students, in a national context of very high youth unemployment - is to find employment or to benefit economically from their fields of study. Whereas ICH in itself carries intrinsic value, it needs to satisfy the economic aspirations of students and graduates.

4. The capacity of instructors to design and teach courses on culture - and ICH in particular - and to project such heritage as a pillar for sustainable development (rather than as a hindrance) is limited. Staff exposure and other forms of training will therefore be necessary to take ICH education forward in Uganda's universities.

And beyond Africa …

Uganda may also learn from experiences in more distant countries, but with similarities in their contexts. A recent survey of tertiary education institutions involved in heritage education in Asia and the Pacific conducted by UNESCO and the International Information and Networking Centre for ICH in the Asia-Pacific Region (ICHCAP) indicates that:

➢ Universities are essential to build a skilled workforce to implement ICH safeguarding activities.

➢ There has been an increase in post-graduate heritage education in the region in the past decade (but with limited focus on ICH).

➢ University departments now increasingly integrate ICH in the study of heritage and its management, as a significant component of their studies, underlying the importance of an integrated, cross-disciplinary approach to heritage studies.

➢ Out of 35 universities surveyed, 4 have degrees and post-graduate programmes that focus solely on ICH, 12 have degrees or post-graduate programmes that are closely related to ICH (such as anthropology, cultural studies or ethnography); 10 incorporate degrees or post-graduate programmes which incorporate ICH in approximately half the curriculum; 6 have such courses with less than ½ the curriculum devoted to ICH (with more emphasis on the tangible heritage); 3 only have courses on ICH in addition to (or instead of) degrees.

➢ 20 other universities are developing an ICH related degree or post-graduate programme.

➢ Most universities do not mention "ICH" but rather "cultural resources", cultural heritage documentation, etc.

➢ Most appear well equipped with skilled staff, and with strong engagement with local communities, and often organize field activities. Some (30) are well networked with other institutions, such as on collaborative degree programmes.

➢ Prevailing needs include training exposure for lecturers; exchange programmes; curriculum development assistance and materials, highlighting the potential for regional support and networking support, build regional synergies to develop materials, coordinated research, sharing pedagogical resources (there is limited use of UNESCO capacity building materials, used by only 1/3 of the respondents).

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