

Chapter 1

Supporting and Sustaining the Indigenous Intangible Cultural Heritage (IICH) of Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Africa is one of the continents gifted with a diverse and rich cultural, natural, tangible, and intangible heritage. The manifestations of these diverse gifts are often interweaved through the indigenous people's ways of living, their beliefs, perceptions, and many more. Most importantly, the heritage of Africa, particularly in Zimbabwe, is also brought to life through the partnership of nature and culture, where the intangible gives meaning to the tangible and both provide indigenous communities with their recurrent cycles of life. There is a growing consensus that indigenous intangible cultural heritage is crucial to the social and economic development of Zimbabwe. However, this cultural heritage is in danger of disappearing if no proper steps are taken to sustain it and make it available for present and future generations. To be kept alive, indigenous intangible cultural heritage (IICH) should be relevant to the indigenous communities and continuously be recreated and transmitted from one generation to the other. Despite the risk that certain elements of indigenous intangible cultural heritage could die, or disappear without help, safeguarding measures should be put in place to ensure the IICH is always available and sustainable. Safeguarding indigenous intangible cultural heritage should involve the transferring of knowledge, skills, and meaning to future generations. The transmission of indigenous intangible cultural heritage was emphasized in the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention OF 2003 rather than the production of tangible expressions such as songs, dances, musical instruments, or crafts. This indigenous intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation and is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history. The IICH provides the indigenous communities with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. A lot has been written on the preservation of IICH but very few writers have gone a step further into discussing the factors affecting the utilisation and dissemination of IICH in Zimbabwe. This chapter seeks to assess the role being played by cultural and heritage organisations in ensuring that the indigenous intangible cultural heritage is being utilised, supported, and sustained for long-term access. Although the role of

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-8827-0.ch001

these cultural and heritage organisations is to collect, preserve, and disseminate information in any medium and format, it is unfortunate that the indigenous intangible cultural heritage (IICH) is slowly becoming invisible and irrelevant in some communities in Zimbabwe, thus compromising its existence and use by future generations. This chapter discusses some of the threats to the sustainability of IICH and the possible strategies of making IICH available for long time access. The chapter also explores the importance of documentation, preservation, advocacy, and transmission of IICH for its sustainability and accessibility to succeeding generations. The chapter concludes by calling for more research into the effective utilization of the IICH for sustainable development in Zimbabwe.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings and culture are inseparable and considered to be the two sides of the same coin. One does not exist without the other. The human being is a social being possessing culture, which determines the way of life including the general behavior of an individual. Cultural innovation was the most remarkable mechanism that led humanity to more and more complex settings to adapt to the new environment. Manetsi (2011) posits that culture maintains order, and balance with nature and natural as well as supernatural forces through their temperament, feelings, perceptions, attitudes, and morals as well as in substantial value, which they give to material and non-material objects. Indigenous intangible cultural heritage simply refers to the array of cultural assets that man has created and maintained in the forms of beliefs, norms, cultural tradition, values, knowledge, and a range of activities that frequently provide meaning and substance to human life. According to Katsamudanga (2003), IICH represents extreme variations of attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes, the indigenous intangible cultural asset produces a spectacular identity of a community or nation. The identity of a nation or community with its IICH makes an astounding spectacle of the overall psyche and sentiments of the entire communities and residents of a nation. In fact, indigenous intangible culture is the soul of all that we see in the tangible form of the culture. It can be very easy to safeguard a temple or a palace but to conserve the real meaning of the temple or palace requires the conservation of all the activities, festivals, processions, music dance, and other rituals associated with it. Zimbabwe has a wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted from one generation to the other through oral traditions, social practices, rituals, festive events, and performing arts, (Nhambura, 2022). The IICH also includes, living expressions inherited from ancestors and passed on to the descendants.

THE VALUE OF IICH TO THE COMMUNITY

The importance of IICH is not in its cultural manifestation, but in the wealth of knowledge that is transmitted from one generation to the other. The value of the transmission of this knowledge is relevant for sustainable development of every community. IICH does not only represent inherited traditions from the past but also contemporary rural and urban practices in which diverse cultural groups take part. IICH gives indigenous people a sense of identity and continuity, and providing a link from their past through the present and into the future. IICH has evolved in response to the indigenous people's environments.

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