

“Celebrating South Africa’s Living Human Treasures - The custodians of our Intangible Cultural Heritage”

As you are aware, September marks the annual Heritage Month in South Africa. An opportunity to signify the recognition of our culture that are both tangible and difficult to pin down such as creative expression such as music and performances, our historical inheritance, language, the type of food we eat as well as the popular memory. Essentially it is about celebrating our own uniqueness, but can also be defined as the sum total of what we inherited. This is a time to appreciate our rich and varied past for its complexity and diversity.

Do familiarize yourself with our events, programmes and projects, that will be focusing on the celebration of our heritage in most of the regions of the Western Cape, by visiting our website on www.capegateway.gov.za/dcas. As this is also a time to reflect on salient features that link us to the generations that came before, of themes and traditions that have shaped our lives, why don't you test your own knowledge with “What you never knew about our Heritage” on <http://www.sahra.org.za/what.htm>?

The national Department of Arts and Culture launched an excellent publication on the Excellence of African Heritage, South African Museums and Legacy Projects. For your convenience, it is available on the homepage of www.capegateway.gov.za/dcas under *Excellence of African Heritage*. It might take a while to download, but we can assure you that this comprehensive, informative and valuable piece of work will be worth the wait. Hanneljie du Preez, the Chief Director of Cultural Affairs, was in the fortunate position to be present at the launch of this publication when she attended a World Heritage Conference in Brazil.

This year, especially after the most successful 2010 FIFA Soccer Tournament, we can rejoice in the richness of our society and focus on the countless opportunities that abound for each of us. So, do not forget to foster your cultural pride and instill a shared identity when partaking in heritage activities during September. You are hereby invited to use your foundation to rebuild your society.



The proposed theme for the 2010 Heritage Month is **“Celebrating South Africa’s Living Human Treasures - The custodians of our Intangible Cultural Heritage”**.

The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) defines Intangible Cultural Heritage as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.

In South Africa the term Intangible Cultural Heritage is used interchangeably with the term Living Heritage.

The UNESCO Convention identifies five domains in which Intangible Cultural Heritage is manifested: (a) oral traditions and expressions including language as a vehicle of the Intangible Cultural Heritage; (b) performing arts; (c) social practices, rituals and festive events; (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; (e) traditional craftsmanship. Although the UNESCO Convention has set out the above mentioned domains, the list of the convention does not prescribe the categories of the ICH domains. Different communities may have different components of ICH not mentioned above.

In South Africa, like in most communities around world, Intangible Cultural Heritage provides communities, groups and individuals with a sense of identity and continuity and is mostly transmitted orally from one generation to another. In every community there are individuals who possess a high degree of knowledge and skills required to perform or recreate specific elements of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Individuals with a high degree of knowledge and skills in ICH are referred to as Living Human Treasures. Living Human Treasures contribute to the preservation and transmission of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Many expressions and components of Intangible Cultural Heritage are under constant threat of disappearing due to urbanization, cultural homogenization, lack of documentation etc. Living Human treasures have played a significant role in the preservation of ICH despite lack of support, appreciation and recognition.

South Africa is a peculiar case where indigenous knowledge was eroded by the separation of generations due to the migrant labour laws that created single sex hostels where working adults were separated from the rest of their families. Indigenous knowledge could also not be transmitted across cultural and language communities because of the Group Areas Act that created artificial countries called homelands for indigenous language communities.

During the 2010 Heritage Month, the government will celebrate and recognize the role of those special gogos and makhulus that we call Living Human Treasures who help us in safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage by transmitting and promoting ICH in various communities.

In most communities, Intangible Cultural Heritage is not limited to a single domain but include multiple domains. For example a wedding ceremony does not only consist of music, dance, but also consists of lobola negotiations between families, the rites of passage, exchange of gifts and numerous other rituals and events. Similarly, a go phasa may include songs, dance, ritual or rites and offering of drinks and animal to the ancestors. The transmission of various forms of ICH by Living Human Treasures who are mostly senior citizens enable the transmission of skills and knowledge from one generation to the next.

Living Human Treasures are important role players in fostering social cohesion, cultural diversity and the spirit of botho in South Africa’s diverse society. One way of supporting and ensuring the transmission of their knowledge and skills to the next generation is for the Department of Arts and Culture to give Living Human Treasures in South Africa, an official recognition for their role in ensuring the survival of South Africa’s societies. A Draft National Policy on South African Living Heritage proposes the establishment of a national Living Human Treasure Program that will include the development of criteria for the identification of living treasures, legal or regulatory provisions including the establishment of a committee that will develop the criteria for the identification of Living Human Treasures.

In addition, the above mentioned draft policy proposes the following as the basis on which living human treasures should be selected: (a) the value of their skill as a testimony of human creative genius (b) the character and reputation of such individuals in their community; (c) the risk of their knowledge disappearing; (d) the ability to transmit living heritage; and (e) recommendation by the community. Most importantly, the draft policy recommends that Living Human Treasures shall be appointed for life and selected with consideration only for their talents, prowess, and skill in a particular field of art and culture, irrespective of race, creed, skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, or political affiliations. It is a fact that the potential of Intangible Cultural Heritage has not been utilized for economic community development and to address some of the social ills facing South Africa. Recognition of Living Treasures who are custodians of Intangible Cultural Heritage is a tool of safeguarding their knowledge. As a result, aspects of ICH remains alien to some members of South African communities, in particular the youth. By dedicating the 2010 Heritage Month to Living Human Treasures, the Department of Arts and Culture intends to recognize and initiate mechanisms that support the transmission of Intangible Cultural Heritage by Living Human Treasures.

This continuous loss and neglect of African practices and belief is perpetuated by among other things the adoption of foreign traditions due to urbanization, industrialization and a lack of suitable spaces to enable practices of some aspect of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The media has also contributed to the loss of oral traditions and expressions. Story telling has been replaced by television that is dominated by Western movies, play stations and computers. The traditional practices of singing and dancing during traditional weddings have been replaced by CD's and Disc Jockeys. Similarly, print media coverage does not include coverage of information on various aspects of Intangible Cultural Heritage nor the Living Human Treasures.

Although South Africa has rich and diverse intangible cultural heritage, there is no statistical data or inventory of intangible cultural heritage and Living Human Treasures in South Africa. In addition, there are no uniform or co-ordinated strategies on the management and use of intangible cultural heritage in South Africa. Existing strategies on the use and management of Intangible Cultural Heritage by different institutions and government departments do not include the expertise or knowledge of living human treasures, practitioners and the communities.

This continuous loss and neglect of African practices and belief is perpetuated by among other things the adoption of foreign traditions due to urbanization, industrialization and a lack of suitable spaces to enable practices of some aspect of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The media has also contributed to the loss oral traditions and expressions. Story telling has been replaced by television that is dominated by Western movies, play station and computers. The traditional practices of singing and dancing during traditional weddings have been replaced CD's and Disc Jockeys. Similarly, print media coverage does not include coverage of information on various aspects of Intangible Cultural Heritage nor the Living Human Treasures.

The Government is about to embark on an audit of ICH in South Africa to ensure effective management of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The national audit on ICH will among other things provide the DAC with an indication of the scope and status of ICH in South Africa, a register of the different categories of ICH, as well as measures to preserve and protect ICH and to provide guidance in the development of a management plan for ICH including co-ordination of programs to protect, preserve and promote intangible cultural heritage in South Africa.

The Minister of Arts and Culture will launch the Heritage Month on 6 September 2010. The Government intends to promote the theme in partnership with institutions that are located in various communities. The 2010 Heritage Month Celebrations will consist of active participation of archives, museum, galleries, libraries, community art centers, archives to highlight the importance of intangible cultural heritage and Living Human Treasures associated with them. In addition, the above mentioned venues will be used as a platform for debates and discussion on the theme.

The National Heritage Day Celebrations will be held on 26, September 2010 in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal Province. The President of the Republic of South Africa will be doing the keynote address during the official program.

In order for the national Heritage Day Celebration to have a meaningful impact on South Africans, government departments and service delivery agencies will be offering their services or mandates such as application and tracking of Identity Documents, application of social grants, mobile health clinics and career guidance for learners and other government services at the celebrations.