

Technology preserves, documents, safeguards Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Ms. Marlene Phillip, Research and Documentation Specialist and focal point for the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

BASSETERRE, St. Kitts – “Culture is who we are, it’s a part of our identity and we need to be able to transfer this knowledge to the next generation,” Ms. Marlene Phillip, Research and Documentation Specialist and focal point for the Intangible Cultural Heritage, told attendees at the UNESCO Awareness Campaign for Policy Makers and Capacity Building Project For Intangible Cultural Heritage opening ceremony, held at the Shadwell Great House on February 24.

St. Kitts and Nevis signed on to the UNESCO/ICH Convention five years ago, to receive assistance to preserve the local traditions and the living expressions of our culture. St. Kitts and Nevis was the first Eastern Caribbean Island to receive funding from UNESCO/ICH to aid in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage treasures, according to Ms. Phillip.

“Over the past five years, we have gone from signing the Convention to understanding what Intangible Cultural Heritage and the convention mean, received access to US \$99,000, for a two-year project on safeguarding ICH,” said Ms. Phillip.

She noted that as a society we have been doing quite well in preserving the intangible aspects of our culture.

“At culture, we recognize that we have been safeguarding our culture for years...as a Caribbean people, we have been keeping our traditions alive through oral history, through performance, through the art forms, through the food we eat. All these things are our Intangible Cultural Heritage,” she said.

She said that assistance from UNESCO’s ICH project has provided well-needed support in the documentation of the intangible aspects of our culture, using voice recorders, as well as digital and video cameras.

Documentation becomes important because many of the individuals who know our traditions make up the older part of the population and may pass away before being able to transmit such relevant information.

“It is critical to meet these individuals that are keeping the culture alive, to document it...if we don’t recognize this sometimes we miss the opportunity to meet, talk to them and learn about our history and culture before they pass away,” she said. The information collected from the interviews with the elderly about our traditions will help in cultural preservation and transmission “to help the young to be aware of our culture by leaving something behind through the use of a website.”