World Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region

Limited Distribution

WHITRAP-10/2.GB/INF.4B.2
Shanghai, June 4, 2010
Original: Chinese

World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and the Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO

Governing Board

Second Session

Shanghai, P.R. China
June 11, 2010


INF.4B.2 WHITRAP Mid-term Strategy (2008-2013)

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Adopted by 1GB

1. Introduction

On May 12, 2008, right at the time when this document was being prepared, an earthquake at Richter scale 8 shook a vast area of China. At the centre of the disaster, thousands upon thousands of people lost their lives, and millions upon millions were badly threatened in various ways. There are two important World Heritage properties in the earthquake area, namely Mount Qingcheng and the Dujiangyan Irrigation System, and Sichuan Giant Panda Sanctuaries, and both sites were severely damaged (see the box below).

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Damage to the World Heritage Properties in the Earthquake

Mount Qingcheng and the Dujiangyan Irrigation System

Most of the buildings were damaged. Er-wang, Fulongguan and other four major temples collapsed. The earthquake also broke most of the roads. The important irrigation component Yuzui (fish mouth) was cracked. One tourist died, and the total number of lost lives is still being counted.

Sichuan Giant Panda Sanctuaries

The damage to this World Heritage site was severe due to its close location to the centre of the earthquake and the following landslides and mudflows. To a certain extent, about one third of the total area was shattered. Within the site and in the buffer zone, 60% of the buildings collapsed, and 30 people died. Up to now, the communication system still has not been recovered in the A-ba District.

This is only one type of the threats that our World Heritage properties are facing. In the Asia and the Pacific region, the abundant and diverse cultural and natural World Heritage properties are under great pressures from such factors as environmental degradation, natural disasters, over exploration and increasing tourism. Up till now, there are six inscribed World Heritage properties listed as “in danger” in this region.

We have identified four key challenges ahead regarding the conservation, presentation and management of the World Heritage properties in the Asia and the Pacific region. First of all, there is a high disparity in distribution of the World Heritage properties, and the Asia and the Pacific region is under-represented on the World Heritage List. The second challenge is the low management effectiveness of the World Heritage properties. It is clear that the challenges mentioned above are directly linked to the third – a strong technical and policy support is badly needed to address the first two. Building up research and management capacity, therefore, becomes the crucial task for the Asia and the Pacific region in order to achieve better conservation and management of the World Heritage. But we cannot effectively address the three challenges without meeting our fourth challenge, which is to widen our network and form strong partnerships with stakeholders at all levels – from the field technicians, managers, government officials, and professionals to the international organizations.

The WHITRAP strategic document was evolved, following the general guidelines from the agreed terms of reference between the Government of the People’s Republic of China and UNESCO on the establishment of the Institute, through a series of consultations with key stakeholders. This strategy will show us how best we can work with our partners to effectively address the four challenges.
2. Vision and Goals

2.1 Our Vision

"The World Cultural and Natural Heritage properties of the Asia and the Pacific region are well represented on the World Heritage List, and all the World Heritage properties are effectively conserved, and managed with strong technical and policy support through joint efforts from all regional stakeholders, and ultimately conducive to a successful implementation of the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in the Asia and the Pacific region."

There are many different approaches to reach the envisioned scenario, and WHITRAP has set up a road map that focuses on strengthening the shareholders’ network and building up professional and managerial capacity through the implementation of extensive research and training programmes linking up all the stakeholders. Furthermore, WHITRAP seeks to achieve the successful conservation and effective management of all World Heritage properties backed up by strong technical and policy capacity from all the stakeholders, and ultimately reaches the envisioned scenario of successful implementation of the World Heritage Convention in the Asia and the Pacific Region.

2.2 Our Mission and Objectives

The Institute’s mission is to strengthen the implementation of the World Heritage Convention in the Asia and the Pacific region by building the capacity of all the professionals, administrators, practitioners and craftsmen involved with World Heritage site inscription, protection, conservation and management throughout the region via training, research, dissemination of information and network construction. The following specific objectives are set up to facilitate the achievement of our mission:
• Contribute to the achievement of a more balanced geographical distribution of training and research institutions and activities in World Heritage conservation in the Asia and the Pacific region;

• Enhance the balanced representation of Asia-Pacific properties on the World Heritage List;

• Promote better protection and management of the World Heritage properties in the region;

• Raise awareness of the World Heritage among the general public and promote the free flow of information so as to improve the visibility of the World Heritage;

• Foster international collaboration with UNESCO and other international and national bodies by implementing cooperative projects that would benefit the World Heritage in the Asia and the Pacific region.

According to the objectives, the Institute will have the following functions/activities:

• Execute short-term and long-term education and training activities for site managers, local government officials, educators and technicians;

• Undertake research on important regional World Heritage issues, and investigations on particular World Heritage resources in cooperation with relevant conservation training and research centres in the region;

• Organize scientific seminars, conferences and workshops (regional and international) in all areas pertaining to World Heritage;

• Collect available information in order to set up an accessible, secure and reliable database for World Heritage properties in the region;

• Collect and disseminate, via the Internet, the publication of books, articles and other media channels, relevant knowledge and information, and the outcomes of research activities in Asia-Pacific countries;

• Promote collaborative programmes in specific areas of World Heritage conservation, and the exchange of conservation practitioners at the regional level;
• Encourage the development of a World Heritage site managers' regional network to exchange information, experience and best practices;

• Facilitate the introduction of disciplines relating to World Heritage conservation and other academic activities in the universities and colleges in the Asia and the Pacific region.

2.3 Our Strategic Goals

WHITRAP's role in turning the vision into reality will be through networking and effective regional and international cooperation in innovative training and education, research and development, and technical services. We translate this task into four strategic goals for the coming six years. These goals define, in general terms, what WHITRAP aims to achieve:

• Training and Education: Systematic training and education programmes delivered in the domains of conservation techniques, management planning and implementation, and monitoring mechanisms and risk preparedness;

• Research and Development: A rich knowledge pool of better and innovative techniques and policies specialized in the conservation and management of the World Heritage properties in the Asia and the Pacific region;

• Information and Services: An integrated information warehouse of large collections of data, information and knowledge on the Asia and the Pacific region for a better knowledge support;

• Networking and Partnerships: An expanded, highly effective network of committed stakeholders.
3. Strategies

3.1 Goal 1—Training and Education

As an on-going process, WHITRAP will maintain consultations at various levels in order to improve the understanding of training and education needs and systematic training programmes will be developed to meet different capacity building needs of the region. These training and education programmes will be then tested, improved, and implemented. By the year 2013, WHITRAP should be able to deliver a wide range of training and education programmes best fit for the region.

WHITRAP will:

3.1.1 Develop professional education programmes in the World Heritage conservation and management

The World Heritage conservation and management is a multi-disciplinary subject, and formal education programmes have not yet been set up for this topic. With the advantages of its two university-based centres, namely Beijing Centre and Shanghai Centre, WHITRAP will develop the degree-oriented education programmes at Master and Ph.D. levels. The international Master programme in World Heritage management will be launched in 2010, and the Ph.D. programme by 2012. The courses will be elaborated, piloted and implemented in the two university-based centres, as well as in about five selected universities in the region through joint venture arrangement.

3.1.2 Develop a series of vocation courses to meet on - the - job training needs in World Heritage conservation and management

Many World Heritage conservation decision makers and management staffs need to upgrade their knowledge for better decisions and practices. WHITRAP will develop a series of vocation courses from 1 to 3 months in length to meet various training needs from the World Heritage conservation and management practitioners. WHITRAP,
working with its partners in this field, will elaborate effective training models and innovative methods for this purpose. Due to the large number of regional practitioners, WHITRAP will adopt a “training of trainers” approach for vocation training. WHITRAP aims, with close cooperation with regional and international partners, to provide training opportunities for about 300 trainers from the States Parties in the region, and it is estimated that the adoption of the “training of trainers” approach will benefit up to 3,000 people by 2013.

3. Raise all possible financial support opportunities for education and training

Most of the regional Member States are developing countries, and thus the lack of adequate financial resources is always a bottle neck for most World Heritage conservation practitioners in regard to their access to training and education opportunities. WHITRAP will, through its “World Heritage Conservation Funds for the Asia and the Pacific region” initiative, work closely with a wide range of partners, from national, regional to international, and from governmental and non-governmental organizations to raise more grant fellowships for the most qualified candidates from developing countries of the region. By 2013, WHITRAP intends to provide 20-30 fellowships every year.

3.2 Goal 2 – Research and Development

It is the endeavor of WHITRAP to keep up-to-date knowledge so as to support its training and education programmes; therefore, scientific research and technological development will always be the backbone of WHITRAP for all its programme works. Similar to the process for training programme development, WHITRAP will maintain a close contact with national, regional and international partners to enhance joint efforts on key research and technical issues in World Heritage conservation and management, and effective dissemination mechanisms will be set up for the research and development findings.
WHITRAP will:

3.2.1 Develop vanguard and practical research projects for quick response to the needs of the region

The research of WHITRAP will offer continuous technical and policy development to support its training and other services for the region. The region has wide diversity of cultural and natural sites that require different techniques for effective site protection and management. Therefore, the Institute’s research programmes will pay particular attention to the region’s specific demands in regard to protection techniques. The diverse cultural background and institutional setting of the region also call for more research on conservation policies and management methods for the World Heritage sites in the region. WHITRAP will set up research and development programme priorities as follows:

- Conservation and restoration techniques;
- Management planning and implementation policies;
- Risk management of World Heritage properties;
- Economics of Conservation and Sustainable Tourism.

3.2.2 Build up a knowledge management system for effective dissemination of research findings

Working closely around the third goal – information and services, WHITRAP will build up a knowledge management system to ensure the rapid dissemination of all research findings from relevant research programmes. In addition to the web-based dissemination tools, WHITRAP will continue to use traditional mechanisms for knowledge sharing, including workshops, seminars, and publications. WHITRAP aims to organize, once more in collaboration with national, regional and international partners, at least 2-3 workshops/seminars per year. With all different approaches, WHITRAP intends to expand its direct beneficiaries of knowledge dissemination up to 2000 by the year 2013.
3.3 Goal 3 – Information and Services

The Institute will build up a comprehensive data port on regional World Heritage resources as a key infrastructure supportive to research and training programmes, and make the data more accessible to different groups of users ranging from professionals, government officials, site managers to technicians. The data warehouse of the Institute, linked with its regional networks, will provide effective information sharing and ensure all stakeholders’ access to the datasets.

WHITRAP will:

3.3.1 Develop a comprehensive information warehouse of the World Heritage properties for the Asia and the Pacific region

WHITRAP intends to build up its information system to be one of the most important information port regarding World Heritage properties. State-of-the-art technologies will be employed throughout the development of such information system. And the development process will reflect joint efforts between WHITRAP and its partners. WHITRAP intends to build up the following major databases: 1) Detailed database for the World Heritage properties of the region; 2) High-resolution database for the selected World Heritage properties; 3) A knowledge pool on World Heritage conservation and management. By the year 2013, WHITRAP will be able to provide comprehensive information to meet the ever increasing information needs in research and training programmes.

3.3.2 Provide easy and efficient access to the information system

WHITRAP’s information system will be available on the Internet and through other approaches to all stakeholders. WHITRAP plans to achieve, by the year 2013, 2,000 regular internet users have access to our information system.
3.4 Goal 4 – Networking and Partnership

WHITRAP aspires to build itself as an open platform for joint efforts in World Heritage conservation. Networking and partnership will be the most vital mechanisms for WHITRAP to successfully execute its programmes.

WHITRAP will:

3.4.1 Build up a network of universities, research agencies in the region that are and will be engaged in World Heritage conservation

Both training and research programmes and other services of WHITRAP can only be effectively carried out with an extensive regional networking. WHITRAP will establish privileged access policies to the data, services, and other resources. We will demonstrate up-to-date knowledge and technologies in World Heritage conservation and their application in action, and make the membership more attractive by increasing our range of services, organizing public events etc. Therefore, WHITRAP will expand its network in the region for the purpose of improving the implementation of the development objectives, and seek to include 200 institutions and 1500 individuals in the affiliated programme/network by the year 2013.

3.4.2 Establish and maintain innovative partnerships with key stakeholders to strengthen and multiply the effectiveness and impact of our network

We will seek to increase the number of our project partners within the region and among the international organizations. We will make full utilization of the innovative information system and communication technologies for the purpose of knowledge sharing and make these information systems and other resources of WHITRAP accessible for more partners. By 2013, WHITRAP intends to build up strategic partnerships with 15-20 key organizations worldwide.
4. WHITRAP Strategy and UNESCO 5Cs Objectives

WHITRAP’s training and education, research and development, information and services, and networking and partnership development goals, or TRIN strategy will contribute to the 5Cs objectives of UNESCO for the protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

- Scientific evidence from research findings and better information services for strengthening the Credibility of the World Heritage List;
- Continuous research and training support for ensuring effective Conservation;
- Improved training and strengthened networking for promoting the development of effective Capacity - building in States Parties;
- Better information access and effective networking and partnerships for increasing public awareness, involvement and support for the World Heritage through Communication;
- Taking community participation as the core for all its programmes for enhancing the role of Communities in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

5. THE WAY AHEAD FOR WHITRAP

The first strategy was set up through internal brainstorms, local and international consultations. As a new organization, WHITRAP needs to adjust periodically its directions to meet the needs of the States Parties in the region. And thus it will be an on-going process for WHITRAP to make all necessary actions to respond to the changing environment in World Heritage conservation. In addition, it will be a good learning process for WHITRAP in its first decade. WHITRAP aims to work closely with all stakeholders for the common goals, and grow up with care and support from all.