KAMANI SAMARASINGHE[1]

Department of Information Technology
Faculty of Dance and Drama
University of the Visual & Performing Arts, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

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UNESCO-Inscribed Musical Traditions as Intangible Cultural Heritage: Contributions to Sustainable Development

Abstract

Traditional music plays a significant role in preserving cultural identity, transmitting knowledge, and strengthening community cohesion. As a key domain of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), many musical traditions have been recognized through UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists. This study examines the contributions of UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and explores the safeguarding practices associated with their sustainability. A qualitative documentary research design was adopted, drawing on UNESCO documentation and information related to eleven musical heritage elements inscribed between 2021 and 2024. The elements were selected to represent diverse geographical regions and forms of musical heritage, including singing, dance, rituals, and traditional craftsmanship. The analysis was guided by a conceptual framework connecting intangible cultural heritage safeguarding, cultural sustainability, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UNESCO documentation was examined through thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes related to knowledge transmission, community participation, gender inclusion, economic opportunities, and safeguarding practices. These themes were subsequently examined in relation to relevant SDGs and their targets. The findings indicate that UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions contribute to multiple dimensions of sustainable development. Strong associations were identified with SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Among these, SDG 16 emerged as the most frequently identified goal, highlighting the role of traditional music in promoting social cohesion, cultural dialogue, and community participation. The analysis of UNESCO documentation on traditions such as Mek Mulung, Hiragasy, and Dutar making identified recurring connections between musical performance, traditional craftsmanship, community participation, and intergenerational knowledge transmission, highlighting the importance of holistic and community-based safeguarding approaches. The study further identifies lessons from international safeguarding experiences that may inform the preservation and sustainable management of

[1] ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9101-9852

traditional music heritage in Sri Lanka. Overall, the findings suggest that musical Intangible Cultural Heritage contributes not only to cultural continuity but also to broader social, educational, and economic dimensions of sustainable development.

Keywords: Cultural Sustainability, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Sustainable Development Goals, Traditional Music, UNESCO

Introduction

Music reflects human creativity and cultural diversity as an integral element of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). Traditional music serves as a medium for storytelling, historical preservation and community bonding worldwide. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) 2003 Convention, ICH refers to "the oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe" that are transmitted across generations (UNESCO, 2023b, p. 6). The list of UNESCO's ICH has grown to include new inscriptions since 2008. The UNESCO ICH inscribed element list includes 788 elements representing 150 countries across five regions (UNESCO, 2023b). The terms music and song appear in 304 of the 584 entries on the list (52%), referring to music alone or in combination with other qualities such as dance and poetry (De-Miguel-Molina et al., 2021). This indicates the significant presence of musical traditions within UNESCO-inscribed Intangible Cultural Heritage and highlights their close connections with other cultural practices. Given this representation, examining how musical traditions contribute to sustainable development and how their safeguarding practices support cultural continuity is important for understanding the broader role of Intangible Cultural Heritage in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Traditional music serves as a primary vehicle for the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, acting as a cultural narrative that preserves ethnic memory (Jing et al., 2025). While other forms of ICH may rely on physical artifacts, musical traditions are sustained through oral transmission, which provides them with a distinct convincing power that allows them to persist across centuries (Mandula et al., 2025). Traditional musical heritage is a unique form of ICH because it is a living, performance dependent practice that simultaneously embodies identity, social cohesion, and economic value, making it uniquely positioned to advance multiple sustainable development goals (Liang & Gingging, 2026; Tang & Wu, 2025). Cultural sustainability works as a link between material heritage, intangible heritage, tradition, and identity (Auclair & Fairclough, 2015; Scovazzi, 2023). Protecting this heritage supports cultural resilience, enriches global cultural landscapes, and promotes intercultural dialogue, which is vital in a rapidly globalizing world where intangible cultural elements face threats from modernization, loss of practitioners, and diminishing community engagement.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the 2030 Agenda, are a collection of 17 interlinked global goals adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 (United Nations, 2016). While the SDG framework was initially conceptualized through a tripartite matrix of economic, social, and environmental dimensions, the discourse surrounding global development

has undergone a significant ontological evolution. Critics have historically argued that a strictly techno-economic approach fails to capture the human systems that dictate how societies interact with their environments, leading to a paradigm shift that recognizes culture as an indispensable pillar of sustainable development (Astara, 2014; Hawkes, 2001). Although the 2030 Agenda does not feature a discrete, standalone goal dedicated exclusively to culture, the final text explicitly acknowledges that "all cultures and civilizations can contribute to, and are crucial enablers of, sustainable development" (UCLG, 2018, p. 4). The preservation of cultural heritage through targeted educational and training initiatives is vital for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those concerning inclusive education, localized economic growth, and sustainable urban communities (Achille & Fiorillo, 2022). Previous studies have highlighted the importance of culture in sustainable development (Hawkes, 2001; Astara, 2014), examined music as Intangible Cultural Heritage (De-Miguel-Molina et al., 2021), and explored the role of cultural heritage in education and training (Achille & Fiorillo, 2022). However, these studies do not specifically provide a comparative analysis of how UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions relate to individual Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and how their safeguarding practices support cultural sustainability. This study addresses this specific area by examining selected UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions from 2021 to 2024 through qualitative documentary analysis. By identifying relationships between musical heritage, safeguarding practices, and relevant SDGs, the study aims to provide a clearer understanding of the potential contributions of traditional music to sustainable development and to identify lessons that may inform safeguarding strategies in Sri Lanka.

This paper aims to examine UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions as forms of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and to analyse their contributions to sustainable development, with particular attention to the safeguarding practices that support their continuity and transmission across generations. The main research question associated with this research is “What are the contributions of UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions, as intangible cultural heritage, to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals?

Sub questions associated with this research are

1. How do UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions contribute to specific Sustainable Development Goals and targets?
2. What are the prevalent safeguarding and management practices for UNESCO-listed musical traditions, and how do they align with sustainable development principles?
3. What best practices and lessons from international UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions can inform effective safeguarding strategies for traditional music heritage in Sri Lanka?

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative documentary research design to examine selected UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions in relation to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs). Documentary analysis was appropriate because the study focused on information contained in official heritage documentation, including descriptions of cultural elements, safeguarding measures, community participation, and knowledge transmission. The study did not seek to measure the direct impact of musical traditions on SDG achievement. Instead, it examined documented relationships between musical heritage, safeguarding practices, and sustainable development. The analysis was guided by a conceptual framework connecting ICH, cultural sustainability, safeguarding practices, and the SDGs. Cultural sustainability provided the broader perspective for examining the continuity of cultural practices and the transmission of knowledge across generations. The SDG framework was used as an analytical reference for identifying potential relationships between the documented characteristics of musical traditions and relevant development goals and targets. The study employed purposive sampling to examine UNESCO-inscribed cultural elements containing significant musical or song-related components. The selection was restricted to inscriptions made between 2021 and 2024. This period was chosen to establish a defined and manageable group of relatively recent inscriptions for comparative documentary analysis. The selected cases included traditions involving singing, dance, ritual performance, poetic expression, and traditional musical instrument craftsmanship. The selection also included examples from different geographical regions and cultural contexts, allowing comparison of the varied forms in which musical heritage is practised and safeguarded. The inclusion criteria were:

(1) the cultural element was inscribed on a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list during the selected period;

(2) music, singing, or a closely associated musical performance was a significant component of the element; and

(3) relevant UNESCO documentation was available for examining its cultural characteristics and safeguarding practices. Elements that did not meet these criteria were excluded.

The primary documentary sources consisted of official UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage webpages and associated documentation for the selected elements. Depending on availability, these sources included descriptions of the cultural elements, nomination files, information on community participation, safeguarding plans, and decisions of the Intergovernmental Committee. Relevant academic publications were consulted to support contextual interpretation and discussion. Information was extracted from the available documents according to the following categories: characteristics of the musical tradition; associated cultural practices and knowledge; community participation; intergenerational transmission; education and training; gender-related information; livelihood and economic activities; environmental or material-resource considerations; partnerships; and documented safeguarding measures. The extracted information was organised by cultural element to facilitate comparison across cases. The analysis focused on documented evidence rather than assuming that the presence of a musical tradition necessarily resulted in measurable sustainable development outcomes.

The documentary material was analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns across the selected cases. The analysis involved four stages. First, the relevant UNESCO documents were reviewed to identify information related to the cultural characteristics, transmission, community involvement, and safeguarding of each element. Second, relevant passages were assigned descriptive codes representing the issues identified in the documents. Third, related codes were compared and grouped into broader themes, such as cultural knowledge transmission, community participation, education, gender inclusion, livelihoods, traditional craftsmanship, and intercultural cooperation. Fourth, the themes were compared across cases to identify similarities, differences, and their potential relationships with sustainable development. SDG mapping was conducted by comparing the documented evidence associated with each theme against the aims and relevant targets of the 17 SDGs. A relationship was recorded when the documentary evidence provided a reasonable basis for connecting a cultural practice or safeguarding measure with a particular goal or target. For example, documented educational and intergenerational learning activities were examined in relation to SDG 4, while evidence concerning livelihoods and employment was considered in relation to SDG 8. Community participation and cultural dialogue were examined in relation to relevant aspects of SDG 16. These relationships were interpreted cautiously, distinguishing documented practices and potential contributions from demonstrated development outcomes. A comparative matrix was used to organise the findings by cultural element, analytical theme, supporting documentary evidence, and associated SDG. The matrix enabled the identification of recurring themes and facilitated comparison of the different ways in which musical traditions and their safeguarding practices may relate to sustainable development.

The study relies on documentary sources, which may emphasise intended safeguarding benefits rather than independently verified outcomes. In addition, the availability and detail of information may vary across UNESCO files. The findings should therefore be understood as a comparative interpretation of documented relationships between musical heritage and sustainable development, rather than a direct evaluation of the effectiveness of safeguarding interventions or the achievement of individual SDGs.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the documentary analysis and discusses how the selected Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) musical items contribute to sustainable development. By evaluating the data collected from UNESCO dossiers, clear patterns emerge showing how traditional music, songs, and related performing arts act as important tools to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As shown in table 1, ten distinct musical elements inscribed between 2021 and 2024 were analyzed. These items represent diverse regions, including Africa, Europe, Asia, Latin America, and the Arctic.

Table 1: Examples of Musical Heritage on the UNESCO List and SDG alignment

ICH Item	Category	Inscribed Year in the List	Country	Related Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)	Rationale for SDG alignment
1. Wosana ritual and associated practices	Rainmaking Ritual	2024	Botswana	2, 3, 5, 16	Rainmaking rituals connect cultural practices with agricultural concerns (SDG 2). Community participation may relate to well-being (SDG 3), gender inclusion (SDG 5), and social cohesion (SDG 16), where supported by documentary evidence.
2. Mangweng we traditional dance	The performance involves a lead singer or dancer, supporting singers and dancers, hand clappers, and musicians.	2024	Zambia	4, 5, 8, 16	Collective singing, dancing and musical performance may facilitate knowledge transmission (SDG 4), gender participation (SDG 5), cultural livelihoods (SDG 8), and community

					cohesion (SDG 16).
3. Sevdalinka, a traditional urban folk song	Form of traditional urban singing	2024	Bosnia and Herzegovina	3, 4, 5, 8, 16	Traditional urban singing may support emotional well-being (SDG 3), musical knowledge transmission (SDG 4), inclusive participation (SDG 5), cultural livelihoods (SDG 8), and social cohesion (SDG 16).
4. Mek Mulung	Traditional Malaysian performance involving acting, dialogue, singing, and dancing	2023	Malaysia	4, 16	The integration of acting, dialogue, singing and dance provides opportunities for cultural knowledge transmission (SDG 4) and community participation (potentially related to SDG 16).
5. Bolero: identity, emotion, and poetry turned into song	Latin American sentimental song	2023	Cuba and Mexico	4, 5, 16, 17	The intergenerational transmission of Bolero singing, poetry, and musical

					knowledge supports cultural learning (SDG 4). Its performance traditions may provide opportunities for women's artistic expression (SDG 5) and promote cultural identity and social connections (SDG 16). Its joint inscription by Cuba and Mexico reflects in
6. Hiragasy	The performing arts comprise of songs, dances, and speeches.	2023	Madagascar	4, 5, 16	Hiragasy combines songs, dances, and public speeches that facilitate the transmission of cultural knowledge and social values (SDG 4). Participation in performing arts may provide opportunities for gender inclusion (SDG 5), while

					collective performances and public communication may encourage community participation and social dialogue (SDG 16).
7. Malhun	A popular form of poetic expression	2023	Morocco	4, 5, 16	The transmission of Malhun poetry, singing, and associated cultural knowledge across generations supports cultural education and learning (SDG 4). Participation in the tradition may provide opportunities for women's cultural expression (SDG 5), while shared performances and poetic traditions may strengthen cultural identity, community relationships, and social

					cohesion (SDG 16).
8. Sadeh/Sada celebration	Seasonal festival involves singing, dancing, and praying around a fire and offering blessings	2023	Iran and Tajikistan	2, 16, 17	The celebration reflects traditional knowledge associated with seasonal cycles and agricultural practices, suggesting a relationship with food security and agricultural sustainability (SDG 2). Collective celebrations may strengthen community relationships and social cohesion (SDG 16), while the shared cultural heritage of Iran and Tajikistan provides opportunities for cross-border cultural cooperation (SDG 17)

9. Raï	Popular folk song	2022	Algeria	5, 8, 10, 16	Raï provides opportunities for cultural expression and participation, including women's voices (SDG 5), and contributes to cultural industries and musicians' livelihoods (SDG 8). Its expression of diverse social experiences may support social inclusion (SDG 10), while its role in cultural dialogue and shared identity may contribute to social cohesion (SDG 16).
10. Dutar making craftsmanship and traditional music performing arts combined with singing	Turkmen music and singing	2021	Turkmenistan	4, 5, 12, 16	The transmission of instrument-making and performance skills relates to education (SDG 4). Other proposed links require evidence of

					gender inclusion (SDG 5), responsible resource use (SDG 12), and relevant community or institutional outcomes (SDG 16).
11. Inuit drum dancing and singing	Dancing and singing	2021	Greenland	4, 16, 17	The intergenerational transmission of drum dancing, singing, and associated cultural knowledge may support informal education and the continuity of Inuit cultural heritage (SDG 4). Collective performances and community participation may strengthen cultural identity, social cohesion, and community relationships. However, these activities

					alone do not demonstrate progress towards a specific SDG 16 target. The tradition is shared across Inuit communities in Greenland and Canada. Its multinational inscription provides an example of cross-border cooperation in recognizing and safeguarding shared cultural heritage.

Source: https://ich.unesco.org/en/lists

Two major observations have been identified by considering the nature of these musical traditions in the table 1.

1. **Multidisciplinary Nature of Musical ICH**: The findings presented in Table 1 indicate that musical Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is often multidisciplinary in nature and rarely exists as an independent cultural practice. Many UNESCO-inscribed elements combine music and singing with other forms of cultural expression, including dance, drama, storytelling, craftsmanship, rituals, and social practices. For example, Mek Mulung of Malaysia integrates acting, dialogue, singing, and dancing within a single performance tradition (Jamalludin, 2019). Similarly, Hiragasy of Madagascar combines songs, dances, and public speeches as part of a community based performing art (UNESCO, 2023a). The Dutar making craftsmanship and traditional performing art of Turkmenistan demonstrates the close relationship between instrument-making skills and musical performance (UNESCO, 2021). These examples show that traditional music functions within a broader cultural system rather than as a separate artistic activity. As a result, safeguarding musical heritage also supports the preservation of related knowledge, skills, and cultural practices. This interconnected nature highlights the importance of adopting holistic safeguarding approaches that recognize the relationships between music, performance, craftsmanship, and community life. This finding suggests that safeguarding policies

should move beyond preserving musical performances alone and should also support the wider cultural contexts in which these traditions are created, transmitted, and practiced. This approach is consistent with UNESCO's understanding of Intangible Cultural Heritage as a living and interconnected system of cultural expressions.

2. Cross-Border Nature of Musical Intangible Cultural Heritage: The findings presented in table 1 reveal that some musical heritage elements transcend national boundaries and are shared by multiple countries. For example, Bolero was jointly inscribed by Cuba and Mexico, while the Sadeh/Sada celebration is shared by Iran and Tajikistan. These examples illustrate how cultural traditions can develop and be maintained across different geographical and political contexts while retaining common historical and cultural roots. The presence of multinational inscriptions highlights the role of Intangible Cultural Heritage in promoting cultural exchange, mutual understanding, and international cooperation. Rather than belonging exclusively to a single nation, many musical traditions represent shared cultural expressions that connect communities across borders. This finding suggests that safeguarding musical heritage can contribute not only to cultural preservation but also to intercultural dialogue and cultural diplomacy. Such collaborative safeguarding efforts are consistent with UNESCO's objective of fostering respect for cultural diversity and strengthening cooperation among communities and nations.

Traditional Music and Sustainable Development Goals

The findings presented in Table 1 indicate that traditional music contributes to a wide range of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The analysis demonstrates that musical heritage extends beyond artistic expression and plays an important role in supporting social, cultural, educational, and economic development. Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16) emerged as the most common goal associated with the selected musical heritage elements. This goal was identified across all the examples included in the study, ranging from Botswana's Wosana ritual to Inuit drum dancing and singing. Many of these traditions depend on collective participation through singing, dancing, storytelling, and community gatherings. For example, the Mangwengwe traditional dance of Zambia involves collective performance practices that strengthen social cohesion and encourage community engagement (UNESCO, 2024). These activities contribute to social harmony, cultural continuity, and the strengthening of community-based institutions.

Quality Education (SDG 4) was another prominent theme, appearing in most of the selected heritage elements. Traditions such as Sevdalinka, Mek Mulung, Bolero, Hiragasy, Malhun, Dutar making craftsmanship, and Inuit drum dancing and singing serve as important mechanisms for transmitting cultural knowledge. Through oral traditions and practical learning, younger generations acquire musical skills, language, history, values, and cultural identity. These forms of intergenerational knowledge transmission complement formal education and support lifelong learning. The analysis also revealed a significant connection between traditional music and Gender Equality (SDG 5). Several elements, including Wosana, Mangwengwe, Bolero, Hiragasy, Malhun,

Rai, and Dutar making craftsmanship, provide opportunities for the participation of both men and women in cultural activities. In many communities, musical traditions create spaces for artistic expression, leadership, and cultural representation, thereby supporting greater social inclusion and gender equity.

Traditional music also contributes to Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8). Heritage elements such as Mangwengwe traditional dance, Sevdalinka, and Rai support cultural industries, festivals, tourism activities, and local creative economies. These traditions generate employment opportunities for performers, instrument makers, cultural practitioners, and event organizers, while also enhancing the economic value of cultural heritage. Furthermore, some musical traditions demonstrate links to Zero Hunger (SDG 2) and Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3). The Wosana ritual and the Sadeh/Sada celebration are closely connected to agricultural cycles, environmental knowledge, and community well-being. Such traditions reflect the relationship between cultural practices and local livelihoods. In addition, music is often associated with emotional well-being, healing practices, and social support, highlighting its contribution to both individual and community health. Finally, the analysis identified links to Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12) and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17). The Dutar making craftsmanship and traditional performing art demonstrates the sustainable use of locally available materials and the transmission of traditional craftsmanship skills. Similarly, multinational heritage elements such as Bolero, Sadeh/Sada celebration, and Inuit drum dancing and singing illustrate the importance of collaboration among communities, institutions, and countries in safeguarding cultural heritage. These partnerships contribute to the long-term sustainability of traditional music and strengthen international cooperation in heritage preservation. Overall, the findings suggest that traditional music should not be viewed solely as a form of artistic expression. Rather, it represents a valuable cultural resource that contributes to multiple dimensions of sustainable development and supports the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals.

Implications for the Safeguarding of Traditional Music in Sri Lanka

The findings of this study provide several insights that may support the safeguarding and sustainable management of traditional music heritage in Sri Lanka. The analysis of UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions demonstrates that effective safeguarding extends beyond the preservation of musical performances and involves broader cultural, social, educational, and economic dimensions. The findings also highlight the importance of heritage governance in safeguarding traditional music in Sri Lanka. Effective safeguarding requires more than documenting and preserving musical recordings; it also involves decisions about who participates in safeguarding activities, how responsibilities are shared, and how cultural knowledge is transmitted across generations. The practices documented in the selected UNESCO-inscribed elements suggest the value of strengthening collaboration among tradition bearers, cultural institutions, educational organisations, archives, and relevant government bodies. In the Sri Lankan context, such collaboration could support community participation in safeguarding decisions, the integration of traditional musical knowledge into educational activities, and the

responsible use of digital technologies for documentation and access. These implications should be considered in developing inclusive and sustainable approaches to heritage governance that recognise the knowledge and priorities of the communities concerned.

Integrating Traditional Music into Sustainable Development Policies

The reviewed heritage elements illustrate that traditional music can contribute to multiple Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in the areas of education, social cohesion, and economic development. This suggests that Sri Lankan traditional music traditions, may be considered not only as cultural expressions but also as resources that support sustainable development. Integrating traditional music into national cultural, educational, and tourism policies could strengthen its visibility and support safeguarding initiatives. In Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs and the Department of Cultural Affairs could support the documentation, promotion, and safeguarding of traditional music heritage. The Ministry of Education could facilitate the inclusion of traditional music in school curricula and educational activities, while the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority could promote responsible cultural tourism that recognises and respects traditional musical practices and their communities. Coordination among these institutions, heritage professionals, educational institutions, and tradition-bearing communities would help strengthen heritage governance and ensure the sustainable transmission of traditional music to future generations. Integrating traditional music into national cultural, educational, and tourism policies could strengthen its visibility and justify increased support for safeguarding initiatives.

Safeguarding the Entire Cultural Ecosystem

The study also highlights the importance of adopting a holistic approach to safeguarding. Examples such as Mek Mulung, Hiragasy, and Dutar making craftsmanship and traditional performing art demonstrate that musical heritage often exists within a wider cultural system involving performers, instrument makers, educators, and local communities. Therefore, safeguarding strategies in Sri Lanka should focus not only on musical performances but also on the associated knowledge, craftsmanship, performance contexts, and community practices that sustain these traditions. Such an approach would contribute to the long-term viability of traditional music heritage.

Promoting Social Cohesion and Intercultural Understanding

The strong association between musical heritage and SDG 16 in the reviewed examples suggests that traditional music can play an important role in strengthening social cohesion and cultural understanding. Sri Lanka's diverse musical traditions, practiced by different ethnic, religious, and regional communities, provide opportunities for cultural exchange and dialogue. Community-

based music programmes, cultural festivals, and educational initiatives may therefore contribute to fostering mutual respect and strengthening social harmony.

Strengthening Documentation and Transmission

The findings further emphasize the importance of documentation and intergenerational transmission in safeguarding musical heritage. UNESCO-listed traditions commonly employ community participation, educational programmes, and documentation activities to ensure continuity. Similar approaches could be expanded in Sri Lanka through systematic documentation, digital archiving, community-based learning, and the incorporation of traditional music into formal and informal education programmes. Overall, the international examples reviewed in this study demonstrate that safeguarding traditional music requires integrated strategies that support cultural continuity, community participation, knowledge transmission, and sustainable development. These lessons provide valuable guidance for future efforts to preserve and promote Sri Lanka's rich musical heritage.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions contribute to multiple dimensions of sustainable development. The analysis revealed strong connections between musical heritage and several SDGs, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Among these, SDG 16 emerged as the most frequently identified goal across the selected heritage elements, highlighting the important role of traditional music in promoting social cohesion, community participation, cultural dialogue, and the transmission of shared values. The findings further suggest that traditional music functions as a living repository of knowledge through which communities transmit languages, histories, artistic skills, cultural values, and collective memories from one generation to the next. The study also found that the safeguarding of musical heritage is closely aligned with sustainable development principles. The reviewed examples demonstrate that traditional music rarely exists as an isolated artistic practice. Rather, it is interconnected with dance, storytelling, rituals, craftsmanship, social practices, and community life. Heritage elements such as Mek Mulung, Hiragasy, and Dutar making craftsmanship and traditional performing art illustrate the importance of adopting holistic safeguarding approaches that support not only musical performance but also the wider cultural ecosystems in which these traditions are created, practiced, and transmitted. Community participation, intergenerational knowledge transmission, support for traditional craftsmanship, and collaborative safeguarding initiatives emerged as common features of successful heritage management. The analysis further identified several lessons that may inform future safeguarding strategies for traditional music in Sri Lanka. International examples highlight the importance of integrating traditional music into broader cultural, educational, and development frameworks

rather than viewing it solely as a form of artistic expression or historical heritage. Strengthening documentation programmes, supporting community-based transmission, recognizing the role of instrument makers and other cultural practitioners, and promoting traditional music within educational and cultural policies may contribute to the long-term sustainability of Sri Lanka's rich musical heritage. Furthermore, the strong association between musical heritage and social cohesion suggests that traditional music can serve as a valuable resource for fostering intercultural understanding and strengthening community resilience. Overall, the study demonstrates that UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions represent more than cultural performances; they are dynamic cultural resources that contribute to education, social inclusion, economic opportunities, cultural continuity, and community well-being. Consequently, the safeguarding of musical Intangible Cultural Heritage should be regarded not only as a cultural responsibility but also as a meaningful contribution to sustainable development. By recognizing and supporting the diverse functions of traditional music within society, policymakers, cultural institutions, and local communities can strengthen both heritage preservation and sustainable development outcomes. Future research could employ field-based investigations to examine the social, cultural, educational, and economic impacts of traditional music within specific communities. In the Sri Lankan context, empirical studies involving musicians, cultural practitioners, educators, and community members would provide valuable evidence for developing effective and sustainable safeguarding strategies for traditional music heritage.

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Dr. Kamani Samarasinghe is a senior lecturer at the Department of Information Technology, Faculty of Dance and Drama, University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Sri Lanka. Her research interests include traditional music archiving, digital preservation, and the safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).