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Bridging the Divide: Western and Indigenous Systems of Heritage Management in the African Context

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Abstract

Western heritage management systems were introduced as part of a colonial package throughout Africa to preserve monuments and sites that bore witness to the development of indigenous peoples. Before colonialism, indigenous management systems were in place to maintain respect and the survival of cultural heritage sites. These included taboos, restrictions, legends, myths, and ritual ceremonies, and these measures were effective in ensuring the survival of heritage places. This was mainly because traditional communities shared common values and respect for these places, which represented points of communication with the ancestral world. The new Western system of heritage management, however, sought to protect only tangible heritage and considered Western-centric techniques as the only relevant ways of conservation. This scenario prevailed throughout the colonial period, and heritage institutions even inherited the rigid policies towards conservation after independence. Coupled with aspects like the introduction of Christianity, science and technology, and legislation about land ownership, the environment led to the 'suffocation' of indigenous management systems in many parts of Africa. The two systems have different aspects that they cater for and present a conflict, though in a few cases, there have been integrations. This paper adopts a qualitative research approach, which includes interviews with archaeologists, cultural heritage practitioners, and community members in an attempt to get more insights on the possibilities of integrating Western and Indigenous management systems for heritage in the African context. Engaging communities enables the discovery of significant narratives that can provide deeper and more valuable information.

Keywords: heritage management, Western systems, Indigenous systems, bridging the divide, African context, cultural integration.

1. Introduction

Conservation of heritage is often inseparable from local communities, as it fosters identity for a certain society/nation, and the state turns to legitimise it (Maradze, 2003). Hence, communities should be central in the management of heritage. Heritage represents people's beliefs, opinions, and ideologies; thus, cultural resources belong to the people, and there is a need to include them in the conservation, rather than adopting laws and conservation practices that alienate them. Community involvement in the management of heritage seems to be taking centre stage worldwide over though some African countries tend to reflect the alienation of local communities in heritage resource management. This

is because some heritage legislation in Africa remains a legacy from the former “colonial masters” (Chirikure et al., 2008).

A new philosophy for cultural heritage management in the African context has shifted towards integrating indigenous systems of heritage management (Report of the Director General of UNESCO to the Secretary General of the United Nations, 2013, p. 3). This has seen a lot of research and publications over the years on issues related to community engagement in its management. In a bid to investigate and solve the alienation of local communities and bridge the gap with regard to Western and indigenous management systems of heritage in Africa, new philosophies of the same have been adopted.

Over the last decades, indigenous populations worldwide have been engaged in theoretical aspects as well as practices of heritage and archaeology, increasingly becoming vocal about issues of cultural heritage (Pikirayi, 2011). Conclusions have been that the parameters of community engagement should be redefined, as local communities have been alienated from cultural heritage resources because of colonial legislation (Pikirayi, 2011). Chirikure (2008) states that community engagement in heritage management has progressively gained importance as archaeologists strive to increase the discipline’s social relevance by actively engaging local communities in the running of heritage places.

In Zimbabwe, the democratisation of the political process from white minority rule did not witness the immediate engagement of local communities in issues related to the management of heritage resources. This has culminated in ownership and management wrangles as the alienated local communities have become activists, demanding a stake in the conservation of their heritage (Chirikure, 2008). According to UNESCO (2003), the Convention on Intangible Heritage (Article 11b), a partnership approach amongst communities and other stakeholders in the management of heritage proves to be a more viable approach to this challenge.

According to Ndoro (2003), in recent times, the theory and practice of heritage management have been changing in significant ways. One of the most significant changes that can be noted is that local communities have increasingly engaged with issues related to the management of cultural heritage sites through the development of varied models of heritage resource management, such as co-management and participatory management. In Africa, archaeological research has traditionally been carried out by foreign scholars, often using Western scientific methods that hold little relevance for local communities. Rooted in colonial practices, archaeology has historically marginalised indigenous perspectives. However, recent approaches to heritage

management increasingly emphasise the importance of engaging local communities in the conservation of archaeological sites (Pikirayi, 2011). Jopela (2011) states that most heritage agencies have operated based on Western heritage management approaches. Both local communities and various academics have criticised these management approaches as inadequate (Mawere et al., 2012). Scholars and heritage practitioners argue that the Western heritage management systems are unable to ensure holistic management of heritage and are of no cultural significance. Motivated by these developments, this study, through a qualitative approach, sought to investigate if the integration of indigenous and Western systems of community-based heritage management is a realistic and effective option for the African context.

2. Literature review

2.1 Legislation for Heritage management in the context of Africa

The purpose of legislation is to foster the good management of the national estate as well as to encourage the local communities to conserve their legacy, unlike in other countries. The world over, most African countries' legal instruments are like 'new wine put into old skins' as they date back to colonial times, except South Africa (Munjeri, 2005). Legal protection of heritage without community involvement can negate the purpose of listing a place or heritage resource on national or international heritage registers (Deacon et al., 2003). Most sub-Saharan countries are victims of European colonisation, and as a result, several of their post-colonial legislations are a cast of colonial frameworks. One of the most distressing legacies of colonial and minority rule was the alienation of local communities from their heritage resources (Mitchel, 2003). This has perpetuated a system of alienation and exclusion of local communities in the conservation of their heritage legally in some of the post-colonial legislations in Africa, with exclusion of a few countries that have addressed these anomalies.

According to Deacon et al. (2003), in 2001, UNESCO emphasised that the core principle of the proposed Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage is that such heritage should be preserved primarily through the creativity and active participation of the communities that create and sustain it. This underscores the importance of a bottom-up approach to conservation, ensuring that communities remain central to the process. International frameworks, such as Australia's Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act, have demonstrated effective models by establishing mechanisms that allow communities to retain control over the management of their intangible heritage and benefit directly from it (Beazley, 2002; Blake, 2001), which is what most sub-Saharan African countries should adopt. According to Deacon et al. (2003), a few national

legislations in Africa, namely Botswana's (2001), South Africa's NHRA (1999) and others, refer directly to intangible heritage. The NHRA includes in the national heritage register all places and objects associated with oral traditions and living heritage (1999, section 3(2)). In section 5(7), it makes specific provision for protecting the living heritage components associated with objects and places.

Against the background of earlier exclusion of local communities in apartheid South Africa from participation in the conservation of cultural heritage, the South African National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999 was born. This act empowers previously marginalised local communities to take a central role in the conservation of their heritage resources (Delmont, 2004). The act has seen the introduction of an integrated and interactive system for the management of national heritage resources. Chapter 1, section 8 of the National Heritage Resources Act (NAHRA) 25 of 1999 provides for the establishment "three-tier system" to ensure effective management of heritage resources. These are the national level under the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), provincial level heritage resources agency responsible for provincial heritage resources, and the local level, which is constituted with members of the local community who are responsible for class three heritage resources. This can be viewed as a great achievement in Africa, as some legislations have seen the need for inclusion of local communities, as local societies have taken centre stage in the conservation of heritage through legal appointments as custodians of class three heritage resources in South Africa.

More so, the new Monuments Relics Act 2002 of Botswana has addressed issues on community involvement in the management of monuments to enhance protection and conservation of heritage (AFRICA2009, 2002). Communities have taken centre stage in conservatory activities at heritage sites to enhance heritage conservation for posterity. Tsodilo Hills is one example where local communities are undertaking most conservation activities.

Additionally, a classic case of local community success in playing an important role in the conservation of tangible heritage in South Africa can be evidenced at a site called Thulamela in Kruger National Park. In the 1990s, after a consensus was reached to rebuild the walls at the Zimbabwe-culture site, locals were taken on board from the genesis of the project and had important decision-making powers in the conservation project (Chirikure et al., 2008). To date, Thulamela has been celebrated in the local and international media as a success story of local community involvement in the conservation of heritage resources before the amendment of the South African post-colonial legislation.

Henceforth, the notion that locals are central to the conservation of tangible heritage in sub-Saharan Africa can be reinforced by this case study.

However, in Zimbabwe, the transition of the political process from White minority rule did not immediately see the involvement of local communities in conserving their heritage. The National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe Act 25:11 (NMMZ) was adopted from the colonial heritage legislation, which did not provide for community involvement in the conservation of either tangible or intangible heritage, as it is silent on this aspect (Pwiti & Mvenge, 1996). This saw the local communities getting agitated and hostile by committing several acts of vandalism in defiance of their alienation. For example, they defaced the Domboshava Rock art site with oil paint as an act of sabotage. These occasions triggered policy change within NMMZ, and it then adopted a community involvement policy (Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008). This has seen NNMZ recruiting members of the local communities to work within the organisation, partaking in conservation activities. At the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage site, the bulk of the stone masons who carry out conservation activities of the dry stone walls are from the local community, namely the Mugabe clan who are descendants of the coterie that occupied the site in the nineteenth century, who use their traditional knowledge of stonemasonry to restore collapsed walls (Fontein, 2006).

Though in this instance the locals have taken centre stage in conservation activities, it is not enshrined in the NMMZ Act 25:11 that locals are central in the conservation of heritage resources, hence it is not legally binding. NMMZ is the board set up and mandated by the law to be the custodian of Zimbabwe's tangible heritage, thereby carrying out conservation activities of heritage resources, and is silent on local communities being central in conservation. Ironically, the NMMZ Act 25:11 is in clear contrast to the UNESCO 1972 Convention concerning the protection of the World cultural and natural heritage, which Zimbabwe ratified in August 1982. The Convention advocates for the participation of local communities and other stakeholders in the protection of World Heritage (UNESCO 1972 Convention, Article 5). The act provides for a partnership approach to the management of heritage, a significant contribution to the protection of World Heritage properties. UNESCO is, without a doubt, making a bold move by advocating legally for the central participation of local communities worldwide in the conservation of heritage resources. Thus, it is pertinent for Zimbabwe to include local communities in the national legislation and not just make it a policy but legally binding, as local community involvement in the conservation of heritage is gaining prominence not only regionally but worldwide.

Based on the above section, heritage agencies worldwide have realised that adopting a solo approach that excludes local communities as well as traditional conservation and management strategies in heritage conservation and management is counterproductive, as it leads to unsustainable use of heritage sites. Involving informal management systems has been thought to be the best solution to manage and conserve heritage sites in Africa; yet, the problem has been how the community can be involved (Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008). Community participation has recently become popular in the global heritage management discourse. Formal heritage management systems have failed to protect archaeological sites in many parts of Africa. Since historical times, local communities living near heritage places have often played a large role in ensuring the survival of places of cultural significance through their traditional custodianship systems. Yet often these systems are ignored or not fully recognised by the state heritage management organisations.

However, in ensuring the conservation and management of archaeological sites, most governments have fallen short in ensuring the participation of other management systems, because heritage management falls within two different frameworks: the 'modern', Western or state-based management system designated as formal and the traditional custodianship system or traditional management systems (Ndoro & Pwiti 1999; Mumma 2002; Jopela, 2006). The management of heritage sites imbued with sacred values has led to a conflict between local communities and heritage management institutions across the region (Pwiti & Mvenge 1996; Taruvinga & Ndoro 2003). The dilemma associated with managing such archaeological sites is that often formal heritage managers criticise the damage done to sites as a result of the traditional use of such spaces (Pwiti et al., 2007). On the other hand, the limited resources and capacities of state-based heritage organizations and the way they currently operate (based on formal heritage management approaches), has led scholars and heritage practitioners to recognise that formal heritage management systems on their own, are incapable of ensuring the effective and sustainable management of immovable heritage, or any other place of cultural significance (Mumma 2005). There is a need for heritage authorities to bridge the gap, that is, to involve both formal and informal systems at all stages of planning and management of heritage places. All conservation procedures implemented by heritage managers should be sensitive to the needs of the local community.

The weakness in legislation was largely addressed by making recourse to international legislation, such as the Venice Charter, Burra Charter, and the World Heritage Convention. Emphasis is on Western values in these charters and legislations in most of Africa; local values were not taken on board (Ndoro, 1997). This has led to the growth of approaches mooted to engage and co-opt local values and informal systems into the

mainstream. Community participation is now viewed as an integral component of the practice of heritage management systems sensitive to local needs, though its success has been lukewarm (Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008). Indigenous systems of heritage management remain largely unnoticed. Perhaps this is caused by the difficulty in reconciling opposed systems. The Western system is based on restricted access; striking a balance between the two is a goal yet to be pursued and has not become standard practice (Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008). Formal community-based systems are seen as a tool of oppression and not protection (Munjeri, 2005).

2.2 State of Heritage Management in Africa

The establishment of programmes like AFRICA2009 can be seen as another step towards putting local communities at the centre stage in the management of heritage in Africa. The AFRICA2009 programme is a partnership of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, ICCROM, CRATerre-EAG, and African Cultural Heritage Organisations (Joffroy, 2005). This programme was launched in 1998 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, to improve the conservation conditions of immovable cultural heritage in sub-Saharan Africa through sustainable conservation of heritage places. Through courses, seminars, and research, professionals come together to devise ideas and develop collective frameworks that can be adapted to suit local needs regionally. According to Joffroy (2005), the AFRICA2009 research project is devoted to 'Traditional Conservation of Immovable Cultural Heritage in Africa'.

The research done under this programme emphasised the role of the traditional owners and local communities in the conservation of these immovable heritage sites after a pilot project at the Royal Palaces of Abomey in Benin and Timbuktu in Mali. It made it clear that conservation of heritage places without local communities' inclusion was 'fruitless' or retrogressive, because it would create social or political problems (Joffroy, 2005). On the other hand, the involvement of traditional owners and local communities has yielded numerous benefits in the conservation of heritage resources, including enhanced sustainability, strengthened cultural identity, and increased community ownership of heritage management processes. These rewards include an in-depth understanding of a site about its social context and use, as well as how it is valued by the locals. In situations where physical intervention is necessary, the heritage agencies have traditional experience and knowledge to warrant correct conservation practices, thus fostering the preservation of the authenticity of the site (Joffroy, 2005). Hence, this project brought about the adoption of what is termed a traditional approach to conservation which puts local communities central to the conservation of tangible and intangible heritage, as

reinforced by Munjeri (2004) who suggests that societies or local communities are part of the three pillars of an equilateral triangle relationship (the Magna Triangle) that form a 'smart partnership' that sustains cultural heritage. This is illustrated below from various cases in this discussion, taken from sub-Saharan Africa, some pioneered by the AFRICA2009 initiative.

In Kenya, the Mijikenda Kaya Forests are a model case that illustrates the local community being central to the conservation of tangible heritage. Kayas are the sacred forests of the Mijikenda people who live close to the Kenyan coastal plains (Githitho, 2000; Mutoro, 1994), characterised by residual patches which are on average 10-400 hectares. These Kayas were conserved as patches of forests of varying sizes that were used as burial grounds and meeting places (Chauke, 2003). Through a series of traditional conservation practices, the Kayas are managed by the local community. Various regulations were put in place to prevent the desecration of the site. In case of infringement, fines were imposed and cleansing ceremonies were performed. To conserve the Kayas, for instance, cutting down trees is prohibited because it is said the Kayas house the Fingo or protective magic to the community (Githitho, 2000). More so, sorcery or witchcraft was seen as destructive as well as antisocial and harmful to the community, and was strictly forbidden in the Kaya. The shedding of blood was prohibited in the Kayas, and women are prohibited from coming to the Kayas when experiencing their menstrual cycle. If any shedding of blood were to happen, whether by accident or intentionally, a cleansing ceremony would be done (Joffroy, 2005).

The Kenyan government has seen to it that the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) has declared most Kayas as national monuments as a technique of safeguarding them from human settlement as a result of the growing population (Githitho, 2000). These Kayas are managed jointly by the NMK and the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), as well as the Mijikenda community. The community is the one that carries out all conservatory work, and the NMK only comes in on a consultative basis and provides support through monitoring and legal prosecution where required, and WWF provides the technical expertise and financial support (Chauke, 2003). The communities are involved in all aspects of management and conservation of heritage in most parts of Kenya, as alluded to by NMK’s former Director-General, Dr George Abungu, in Mombasa in 2001 in a speech to delegates at an AFRICA2009 workshop that NMK has since adopted local community involvement in the management of cultural heritage (Chauke, 2003). Hence, local communities are central to the conservation of heritage in most sub-Saharan countries.

The concept of involving informal management systems has dominated current heritage management (Munjeri, 2002). This has seen places like the Kasubi tombs in Uganda adopting community-based management systems. The majestic Kasubi tombs are housed in Kampala, the capital of Uganda. According to Munjeri (2002), the site covers almost 30 hectares, situated on a hilltop, and is evidence of the history of the 6 million Baganda. The tombs were inscribed on the prestigious World Heritage list in 2001, and worth noting is the fact that the management system of the tombs is deep-rooted in this 'age-old tradition' where custodians are stationed at the site and tasked at different levels technically, spiritually, and even administratively (Munjeri, 2002).

The conservation of the site is the sole responsibility of the locals, as various conservatory activities are placed under a certain clan amongst the local community. Management of the site is steeped in traditions; overall authority is vested in the Kabaka (king), who has a clearly defined hierarchy below him with clearly stipulated roles for each individual engaged in site management, decision-making, or technical activities (Munjeri, 2004). At the helm of the throne is the Nalinga, who is more of the 'Spiritual Father' of the site, while the Lubunga is the land-use coordinator. Thatching is done by the Ngeye clan, while the Ngo clan is tasked with the production and maintenance of the bark cloth. According to Munjeri (2002), the Kasubi tombs is a classic case of local community involvement or local communities playing a critical role in the conservation of heritage, as the safeguarding of the site is firmly backed by the country's Historical Monuments act which is the overall instrument for the protection of the site at national level, thereby rallying behind the wisdom and ability of the local communities to undertake conservatory activities of the sites. The title deeds on which the tombs are situated are in trust of the Kabaka on behalf of the kingdom, and the protection of the tombs is further supported by varying tourism policies. Based on these varying cases, it can therefore be established that most African countries have adopted the local community centrality approach to conservation of heritage.

Elsewhere in Africa, Botswana to be precise, Tsodilo Hills provides yet another case of community participation in the management of cultural heritage (Tsheboeng, 2001). Tsodilo World Heritage Site (WHS) is situated in the Ngamiland district in the northwestern part of Botswana. The site is about 400 kilometres west of the town of Maun and 50 kilometres south of the Okavango Delta. The Tsodilo hills are impressive natural quartzite landmarks that rise high within ancient dunes to the east and a dry fossil lake bed to the west (Wendorff & Lasarwe, 2005). The local Hambukushu and Basarwa communities have strong traditional beliefs that involve respect for Tsodilo as a place of worship and ancestral spirits.

The local communities living at Tsodilo WHS have been involved in the management of Tsodilo as the core stakeholders. Locals have been employed permanently at the Tsodilo site museum for certain positions, and some are engaged as local tour guides who play the role of community representatives in the active conservation and management of Tsodilo; thus, they also benefit economically from the site. These local community representatives and other members at large are also allowed to sell their locally produced curios at the site to the visitors for economic benefits. Some locals have significantly benefited from the site, so they guard against site intrusion. Consequently, it can be safely said that Africa has seen local community centrality in the conservation of heritage, as pertinently witnessed by these varying cases.

In Burkina Faso, there is a living heritage site named Na-yiri Kokolog that is inhabited by the chief of eight villages. The chief, in cooperation with international organisations, started a project in an attempt to strengthen and promote the traditional practices for the conservation of Na-yiri Kokolog cultural and architectural significance (Ndoro, 2008). However, the growing need for water to facilitate the project required a borehole to be drilled, and a solar lighting system had to be connected to enhance the implementation of the project. The project brought together villagers in decision-making about the heritage place in terms of traditional conservation techniques. The locals also benefited in terms of the development of their area, which became an opportunity; the borehole and lighting became useful not only for the conservation of the cultural and historical environment but for the benefit of the whole community (Ndoro, 2008). Therefore, the locals began to make decisions themselves in terms of conservatory activities of the cultural landscape. Hence, in most communities in Africa, customary rights and traditional management systems have played an important role in the way people perceive, utilise, and respect their heritage (Ndoro, 2008).

The centrality of the local community in the conservation of heritage in Africa can be further strengthened by the case of Kasama rock art in Zambia. Declared a National Monument in 1964, the protection of this site has been under the Forest Act partly because it was classified as a Forest Reserve (National Heritage Conservation Commission, Zambia, 2008). In Africa, Kasama is notably one of the sites with the heaviest concentrations of rock art sites. All the paintings are iron oxide red; an estimated number exceeding 500 panels was registered during the 1990s. These paintings are characterised by mainly paintings or drawings on a rock surface of either animals or geometric figures. These masterpieces are considered the work of the Twa people, who can be traced as far back as 2000 BC (National Heritage Conservation Commission, Zambia, 2008). The site has various values associated with it, including spiritual,

historical, educational, research/scientific, artistic/aesthetic, and economic values. These are preserved by a few villagers located in close vicinity to the site, who are the traditional users and custodians of the place. The Heritage Agency, the National Heritage Conservation Commission of Zambia, has agreed with the traditional leadership, comprising headmen and their close allies, to ensure that the local community plays an active role in conservation at the site. These locals have attached various traditional beliefs, for instance, the belief that the ancestral spirits that provide rain and heal, live in the caves (National Heritage Conservation Commission, Zambia, 2008). Hence, the locals have assumed an active role in facilitating the conservation of this site with the support of the National Heritage Conservation Commission of Zambia.

According to Mawere et al. (2012), in Zimbabwe, just like in other African countries, the advent of post-colonial Zimbabwe has ushered in a scientific approach to the conservation and management of heritage inherited from the colonial heritage management agency. Nonetheless, the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) has since observed that the solo-approach to managing heritage that eliminates the use of traditional conservation and excludes local communities is counter-productive as it is a recipe for disaster (Mawere et al., 2012), hence, the adoption of community-based approaches to heritage management of some sites, like Chibvumani National Monument, though with some limitations. Chibvumani is a dry stone-walled national monument in the NMMZ's Southern Region in Bikita district of Masvingo Province. In a bid to embrace the concept of community participation in heritage management that is gaining prominence, the site was placed under the Adopt-a-Site programme (Mawere et al., 2012). This notion reinforces the fact that the concept of community participation is central to heritage conservation in Zimbabwe, as in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

However, it can be argued that though the programme appears to be noble theoretically, it requires reworking for it to be effective. The NMMZ pushed away the local community as it placed the site under Mamutse Primary School. The school was to carry out general conservation activities at the site and report any matters of extensive vandalism or deterioration to the NMMZ directly, thereby excluding local communities. In exchange, the NMMZ let the school use the site for educational tours and also ferry pupils to Great Zimbabwe for trips at least once a month (Mawere et al., 2012). The NMMZ failed to fulfil their end of the deal, which has brought the programme to a standstill. More so, this did not go down well with the local community, as witnessed by various acts of vandalism at the sites. The most recent act of vandalism was in 2009 by Donald Chirochangu, an allegedly mentally challenged male who reconstructed some walls at the site (Mawere et al., 2012). In addition, as a strong sign of anger in 1998, the then NMMZ Regional Director

was chased away from the site as he was passing by on his way to Mutare. He was blamed and accused of economically empowering little children, whilst the real owners of the monument were and still get nothing (Mawere et al., 2012). The programme, noble as it is theoretically, can be regarded as a typical case of the failure of the idea of the centrality of the local community in the conservation of tangible and intangible heritage in Zimbabwe, as witnessed by this scenario.

The above-discussed scenario is echoed by Ndoro (2008), who notes that since independence, scientific heritage management methods in Africa have unconsciously been the cause for the continued exclusion of local communities from their heritage. Heritage management takes into account the whole landscape in which cultural property, tangible and intangible, exists and involves a commitment to uphold every value ascribed to the heritage by all parties involved (Grundberg, 2000). The challenge in preserving and presenting Africa's monuments lies in learning how to take off academic filters to view the social matrix and cultural perceptions of the past in full and finding ways to integrate traditional indigenous knowledge with scientific methods of proceeding (Ndoro, 2001). The formal management system does not engage the local community. The local community is absent and alienated from its cultural heritage. An integrated preservation and presentation strategy should ensure that the significance of the archaeological remains is presented effectively (Ndoro, 1994). Archaeological heritage management was introduced in southern Africa during the colonial period and has continued to be linked with European ideas even after independence. Western ideas and demands, rather than local values, have driven the course of heritage management (Ndoro, 2001). Indigenous views and feelings about the past held by the wider community are still disregarded. This has made formal and informal management systems equal and has led to conflicts at heritage sites.

The most potent challenge facing heritage management in Africa is the need to transform it from a rarefied discipline into a practice that broadly appeals to the local cultural ethos. In most African countries, colonial instruments are still being put into practice, but some countries like South Africa have created new heritage management systems which consider previously marginalised values (Ndoro & Pwiti 2005). Thus, in South Africa, formal and informal systems are integrated in the management of heritage, and the bottom-up approach is used for effective management.

At the international level, there are also calls to incorporate a traditional heritage protection system. UNESCO, through the World Heritage Convention definition of heritage, provided an innovative opportunity for the conservation of sites with both

tangible and intangible heritage and for cultural landscapes as combined works of nature and man. The convention not only embodies tangible and intangible values of cultural heritage but also acknowledges in its implementation the recognition of traditional management systems, customary law, and long-established customary techniques to protect it (Rossler, 2003). It must also be emphasised that not all heritage typologies can be protected using both the Western and indigenous systems. Certain sites can be managed purely on a Western basis, others on the traditional (Chauke, 2003). The inherent traditional values found in a certain type of cultural heritage make it very possible to recognise the traditional heritage protection systems in formal legislation. The Western heritage systems are not fixed, hence the need to capture the equality among the three principles of value, society, and the legislation that govern the management of cultural heritage (Munjeri, 2005).

3. Methodology

The research used a qualitative approach in examining the intersection of formal and informal systems of heritage management in the African situation. The qualitative approach was used due to its capacity to provide a deep understanding of the perceptions, beliefs, and values of communities on heritage preservation. Data collection involved interviews with archaeologists, cultural heritage practitioners, and local communities, as well as archival studies and policy document analyses. Qualitative methodology enabled narrative reporting of findings, consolidating the lived experience and perceptions of individuals presently engaged in heritage management (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Macmillan & Schumacher, 1993).

Field research was conducted in villages surrounding Great Zimbabwe, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to solicit firsthand data on customary conservation practice and conflict with formal systems. In addition, desktop research was carried out, analysing case studies of various African countries, including Kenya (Mijikenda Kaya Forests), Uganda (Kasubi Tombs), Botswana (Tsodilo Hills), and Zambia (Kasama Rock Art). This comparative analysis enabled the determination of successful models of community-based heritage management and the challenges faced in integrating Western and indigenous systems (Joffroy, 2005; Ndoro, 2008). The research employed focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews to understand stakeholders' perceptions of heritage management, traditional custodianship, and the feasibility of merging these two models of management. The responses were analysed using thematic analysis, bringing to the fore overarching themes that included disconnection from heritage resources, economic gains, and the place of traditional leadership (Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008; Katsamudanga, 2003). By

prioritising the stories of the people, the research aimed to create a model that respects indigenous knowledge while meeting international conservation standards (UNESCO, 2003).

Ethical issues were dealt with by obtaining informed consent from the participants and by assuring anonymity when desired. The findings were validated with current literature to support the proposed management initiatives. Limitations identified in the study involve possible biases in self-reported community opinions and generalizability challenges of results in heterogeneous African settings. Notwithstanding, the study adds to the body of literature on the decolonisation of heritage management and informs policy reforms that acknowledge both formal and informal systems (Munjeri, 2005; Wijesuriya et al., 2013).

4. Results

According to Pikirayi (2011), the public is starting to show interest in the past, its presentation as well as its interpretation. It is these issues that communities have begun to show concern about, emanating from the survey on the question of the management needs of local communities and other associated stakeholders. Four responses were yielded. Out of these, three respondents stated that one of the primary needs of the communities is to manage heritage sites through traditional systems without interference from the heritage agency. Katsamudanga (2003) echoes the same, as he notes that it is best to leave monuments and sites to traditional leadership and the communities because they are the ones that know what is important to them from the vast cultural past bequeathed to them by their ancestors. The professional heritage manager should only come in as a consultant. Communities also indicated that they need a stake in the revenue collected through tourism, challenging the idea of placing revenue generated in government coffers as inappropriate, arguing instead that it should be channelled towards community development projects (Charumbira, pers. com 2015). In addition, local communities stated the need to be directly involved in the management of the landscape, as well as to have access to the site for rituals.

The World Heritage Convention of 1972 (Article 5) highlights the need to actively engage locals in heritage management. In light of this, Pikirayi (2011) notes that one of the themes of the 2008 World Archaeological Congress was advocating for community participation in managing heritage. According to Katsamudanga (2003), it appears the best method in preservation of heritage would be to allow local communities to carry on with their activities at these sites. This, however, should be done within a legal framework that allows ethical practices and observation of human rights issues, with heritage agencies playing a consultative and advisory role. Recognition of traditional leadership will ensure

the revival and preservation of intangible values at monuments and sites under formal and traditional systems.

This study sought to explore the interplay between Western and Indigenous systems of heritage management in the African context, with a specific focus on how local communities, traditional leaders, and heritage professionals perceive and engage with sites. Through interviews and focus group discussions, the research uncovered a series of recurring themes: exclusion from decision-making, contrasting definitions of 'management', contested access rights, benefit-sharing concerns, and the marginalisation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKSs). The results presented here reflect the lived realities and perspectives of the research participants, highlighting both the tensions and opportunities that lie in bridging these two paradigms of heritage governance. A female community member from Masvingo District stated, "We have been here for generations. We know what the sacred places mean. But no one asks us when they make decisions".

This statement captures a dominant sentiment among local community members: a feeling of historical and ongoing marginalisation in heritage management decisions. Despite their proximity to and historical relationship with heritage sites, communities often find themselves excluded from consultative processes initiated by authorities. This exclusion fosters resentment and perpetuates the belief that their cultural expertise and custodianship are undervalued or ignored. It also underscores the lack of mechanisms that facilitate meaningful participation at the grassroots level. A traditional leader from southern Zimbabwe re-echoed this:

> *Government officials only come during ceremonies or for inspections. But we are the ones who stay with these sites every day. They should consult us more.*

This response highlights the symbolic nature of government involvement, which is often limited to ceremonial functions rather than ongoing collaboration. Many felt that their role as stewards of the land and its ancestral significance is disregarded by state institutions. This perception reflects a broader critique of top-down heritage policies that tend to institutionalise Western approaches while overlooking the lived experiences and relational knowledge embedded in traditional leadership. According to an archaeologist with the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe:

> *Management means controlling visitor access, ensuring preservation, and monitoring environmental degradation.*

This interpretation, shared by many professional archaeologists, illustrates a prevailing definition of heritage management rooted in Western conservation ethics. From this perspective, management is about applying technical, legal, and regulatory frameworks to preserve the material fabric of heritage sites. It reflects a managerial and procedural understanding that is concerned with compliance, documentation, and environmental protection, often framed through the lens of international heritage standards.

In contrast, the community's understanding of management is embedded in ritual practice, spirituality, and oral tradition, as was highlighted by a Bikita District community elder. This illustrates how local custodians see heritage sites, not just as physical spaces to be protected but as living entities tied to ancestral presence and communal identity. Management, in this sense, is an act of care, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and sacred duty dimensions that are often invisible within Western conservation discourse. It is a case of paying homage to ancestral spirits as was stated by one traditional healer.

The issue of access to sacred sites emerged as a major source of conflict. Many community members, particularly those engaged in ritual and healing practices, reported facing restrictions that they found culturally inappropriate and spiritually offensive. The bureaucratisation of heritage access, such as requiring permits or regulating entry times, was seen as a form of cultural violence that alienates people from their heritage and interrupts sacred practices that require spontaneity and ancestral guidance. However, a heritage officer from the Midlands Province opined:

> *We are not trying to disrespect culture, but there are conservation standards we must follow. If too many people perform rituals involving fire or animal sacrifice, it could harm the site.*

This response shows that while acknowledging the cultural importance of rituals, some professionals advocated for a regulated framework that balances respect for tradition with conservation imperatives. This highlights a central tension: the desire to preserve material integrity versus the need to sustain living traditions that may, at times, pose risks to the physical site.

According to a village head:

> *Visitors come, pay money, and leave. That money goes to the capital, but our roads, schools, and clinics are still in poor condition.*

These words echo community members' concerns about the inequitable distribution of economic benefits derived from heritage tourism. They expressed frustration over the fact that while heritage sites generate revenue for the state, very little of that wealth is reinvested in the local areas that host them. This was seen as not only an economic injustice but also a failure to recognise the community's role as custodians and cultural interpreters.

In light of this, a local you leader stated that even if they were given 30%, they could build a clinic or drill a borehole, and this would help people to appreciate the value of preserving their culture. This insight reflects a practical solution proposed by many community members: revenue-sharing models that link heritage conservation with local development. Participants believed that if tangible benefits such as health facilities, water projects, or schools were visibly linked to the presence of heritage sites, it would strengthen community support for conservation efforts and deepen their sense of ownership and responsibility.

From a culture and identity perspective, one female community elder lamented, "Our children go to school and learn foreign histories, but they don't know our clan stories or sacred songs. We need heritage to be taught at home and in schools." This reflects a strong concern about the erosion of cultural knowledge among the younger generation. Participants lamented that formal education often prioritises Eurocentric curricula, leaving little space for local histories, oral traditions, or spiritual teachings. Many respondents advocated for the inclusion of Indigenous heritage content in school programmes and community-led cultural education initiatives to ensure the continuity of cultural identity and values.

According to another traditional leader from Masvingo Province, the need for laws that respect local knowledge, arguing that the spirits of the land recognise them as community members, not government offices. Such calls for the legal recognition of IKS were a common theme across interviews with traditional leaders. Participants advocated for a pluralistic legal framework that acknowledges customary laws, spiritual protocols, and local authority structures in heritage governance. Such frameworks, they argued, would not only legitimise traditional roles but also foster more sustainable and context-sensitive conservation practices.

Gender dynamics within heritage management also surfaced in the data, as was reflected in the insights of an elderly woman from Mwenezi District, Masvingo Province. Female participants, though often central to ritual and custodial duties, reported being systematically excluded from formal consultation processes. Their voices and roles are

typically rendered invisible in official dialogues, despite their deep involvement in the day-to-day management and transmission of cultural knowledge.

All is, however, not gloom and doom as an archaeologist in Harare confirmed:

> *We are beginning to realise that top-down models don't work. Conservation must start with the community. We can offer technical expertise, but they must lead the way.*

This is encouraging as it is an acknowledgment of the limitations of exclusionary management models and an expression of a willingness to move toward community-led conservation. These emerging perspectives suggest a growing recognition of the value of participatory approaches, where heritage professionals serve as facilitators rather than directors of conservation practice. However, challenges still remain as a heritage officer in Masvingo noted that there had been cases where traditional leaders sold off land near heritage sites or allowed construction that damaged them, developments that required that there be checks and balances. These observations underscore the need for robust accountability mechanisms and shared governance models that blend community agency with oversight.

A youth heritage activist expressed the need for training in conservation methods, highlighting that they needed the skills so that they can work together with the professionals. Rather than rejecting formal heritage systems, many sought collaboration based on mutual learning and respect. This creates an opportunity for joint training programmes and inclusive knowledge-sharing platforms. There was also the fact that people felt that the heritage laws were written without their input. He further pointed out that this was the reason the laws did not work. They called for laws that speak their language and respect their ways, something that was also buttressed by one local councilor in southern Zimbabwe. They noted that heritage laws were overly technical and often derived from colonial frameworks that exclude traditional authority and practice. There was a call for legal reform that incorporates community consultation, customary norms, and language accessibility. This was re-echoed by a local farmer who stays near a sacred hill

> *They tell us not to build here or farm there because it’s a monument. But our families have lived here for generations. Shouldn't we have a say?*

Tensions around land rights and heritage boundaries were also reported. Communities expressed frustration with restrictions on land use imposed by heritage agencies, which

they perceived as undermining their livelihood and ancestral claims. These tensions highlight the need for integrated land-heritage policies that respect both conservation priorities and customary tenure systems. According to a community development officer:

> *We tried to work with the authorities, but it felt like we were only there to rubber-stamp decisions they had already made.*

This quote illustrates the performative nature of many participatory processes. Respondents reported instances where community meetings were convened merely to validate pre-made decisions, with little room for genuine input. This reinforces the importance of designing consultation processes that are transparent, inclusive, and empowering. There is a need to build trust as one heritage professional stated.

Despite these challenges, several respondents shared success stories of co-management initiatives where communities and professionals collaborated effectively. These projects were characterised by mutual respect, regular communication, and a shared commitment to heritage stewardship. Such models offer valuable lessons for scaling participatory heritage management frameworks. This approach is best captured in the words of a spiritual custodian in the Great Zimbabwe area who said that they do not separate the stone wall from the spirit of the ancestors, emphasizing that both must be respected together. These sentiments encapsulate the holistic worldview underpinning Indigenous heritage management. For communities, tangible and intangible heritage are inseparable. Any effort to protect the physical structure must also honour the spiritual and social dimensions embedded within it. Bridging the divide between Western and Indigenous systems, therefore, requires more than technical integration; it demands a philosophical reorientation that places community worldviews at the centre of heritage discourse.

5. Discussion

Management approaches to heritage must accommodate the shift that has surfaced in recent times in various parts of the world. Approaches need to be wider and more inclusive to heritage management (Wijesuriya et al., 2013). According to Katsamudanga (2003), various academics have been calling for co-management or community participation. However, the degree to which communities should be involved was not specified. The safeguarding of intangible values in monuments and sites in Zimbabwe, and maybe anywhere else, requires the preservation of the social processes that created them.

This study has therefore been an investigation towards the development of an ideal management mechanism for African heritage that effectively captures the concept of community engagement in the management of cultural heritage in the African context. There has also been a growing need to actively engage local communities in contemporary heritage management and challenging of the heritage agency by communities as well as owners of the patrimony and not stakeholders (Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008). Consistent with Katsamudanga (2003), several chiefs have been appearing on national television yearning for the return to traditional values, like rain petitioning ceremonies at heritage sites. Granting more powers to traditional leaders to manage sites appears to be the ideal for the revival of intangible values. However, the study argues that the complex picture of local communities that claim a stake in the management of heritage sites makes it intricate to come up with a solid management system that captures both the formal and informal aspects because they are based on divergent principles.

It might seem feasible to implement a fusion of traditional and scientific management systems theoretically; however, it is not an ideal management mechanism. Munjeri (2008) argued that cultural heritage is challenging to manage with communities constantly questioning management and conservation approaches used by heritage agencies.

For Katsamudanga (2003), the protection of sacred sites can be facilitated through spirit mediums, which might also keep out the heritage managers through a system of taboos and other social controls. The success of indigenous management systems is demonstrated by the presence of sacred shrines and activities in many rural areas that are being managed without direct involvement of heritage agencies. In Masvingo at Nerumedzo, for example, a sacred forest located in Bikita District in the NMMZ's Southern Region, the management of the forest continues to thrive through a system of taboos and other social controls put in place by the local community with very little interference from the NMMZ. In this light, the NMMZ becomes a liability to the nation, as it would have been excluded from the management system. However, there might be other values to protect at the same monuments and sites, such as archaeological, historical, aesthetic and Western (scientific), whose management cannot be effected traditionally (Katsamudanga, 2003); therefore, a combination of the traditional and scientific management system proves a more viable option.

The management of heritage should encourage the active participation of the communities and stakeholders concerned with the property as a condition to attain its sustainable protection, conservation, management and presentation (Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention 2013, Para 119).

According to Chiwaura (2007), heritage management has transformed in the past decades as its emphasis is now on the involvement of ordinary people, particularly local communities, in the management. This has been seen in some countries worldwide, particularly New Zealand (Maori), the USA (Native Americans) and Australia (Aborigines) and in non-Western countries, the change has underscored the fact that heritage belongs to local people (Chiwaura, 2007). Hence, the management policies and legislation in place must reflect the people's customary and traditional practices.

The management of the royal tombs at Kasubi is placed under the Buganda Kingdom, with the *Kabaka* as the overall overseer, hence granting local communities power to effect management activities at the site. An example is the *Ngeye* clan, which does the thatching of the tombs, and conservation as well as management skills are passed down from the elders to younger members of the clan during apprenticeship (Kasubi Tombs Management Plan 2009-2015). However, the government of Uganda through the Department of Museums and Monuments with the help of other stakeholders like Makerere University, UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS and other NGOs act in supervisory and advisory capacities to ensure protection of the tombs through the legal framework (Kasubi Tombs Management Plan 2009-2015). Adopting an inclusive approach in the management planning process is central to the management process as it fosters unity and facilitates coordination between agencies, local governments and community groups, thereby contributing to problem-solving.

An ideal cultural heritage management mechanism in Africa would involve the active participation of communities through a collaborative model that integrates both Indigenous and Western (scientific) management systems. The centrality of such an approach fosters meaningful coordination among heritage agencies, local governments, and community groups, thereby ensuring inclusive and sustainable heritage governance (Wijesuriya et al., 2013). Great Zimbabwe is a cultural landscape just like Kasubi and a World Heritage Site as well. Certain aspects of it can be managed traditionally, for instance, the spirituality of the site can be managed traditionally, and the physical fabric scientifically. This scenario would involve placing certain parts that are considered sacred by the communities under the management of the traditional system and other parts under the scientific system. An example of such an arrangement would be when guests to the landscape and the NMMZ observe set traditional rules and regulations, such as removing shoes before one climbs the hill complex, as it is considered sacred. However, the NMMZ will continue to be in charge as the legal custodian to manage the site, to control and mediate conflicts between the communities that might surface, as they possess the administrative and political power to do so.

Removing shoes is a traditional practice in the Shona culture that shows respect for the guardian ancestral spirits of a given area. According to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre (2013), the same scenario is practised at the Taj Mahal World Heritage Site in India. Visitors to the historic sites take off their shoes when entering the Taj Mahal mosque or temple. I therefore recommend that the same arrangement be adopted for the Great Zimbabwe cultural landscape in conjunction with a scientific system as a possible management mechanism.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore that cultural heritage management in the African context cannot be effectively carried out in isolation from the social, cultural, and environmental realities of the communities that surround and sustain it. The perception that heritage sites can be managed purely through Western scientific methods, devoid of local involvement, is not only impractical but counterproductive. As highlighted by local leaders and community members during the study, heritage is lived and practised; it is not a static relic. Therefore, the relevance of Indigenous management practices rooted in cultural values, rituals, and traditional leadership structures must be recognised as not only valid but vital. It is therefore important to recognise that while Western systems provide essential tools such as documentation, scientific conservation techniques, and legal frameworks, they often fall short in capturing the intangible, spiritual, and communal significance of heritage. There is therefore a need to buttress and sustain the bottom-up approaches to conservation, where heritage value is defined by those who live with and relate to the site. The study also noted that there is a need to establish revenue-sharing models and legal mechanisms that directly support local development, ensuring that heritage becomes a tool for empowerment rather than marginalisation. Finally, and worth emphasizing, is the fact that the integration of Indigenous and Western systems of heritage management is not only feasible, but it is essential.

7. Recommendation

The central recommendation emerging from this study is the development of a hybrid model of cultural heritage management that values the scientific rigour of formal heritage institutions while drawing upon the lived knowledge and custodianship of local communities. Such an approach would require legal reforms, policy innovation, and institutional restructuring to accommodate diverse voices and values. Most importantly, heritage management must shift from being a technocratic exercise to a socially embedded practice that respects and revitalises both tangible and intangible dimensions of heritage.

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