Cultural World Heritage properties in Africa

Africa is a land of cultural diversity. It is the second largest continent, covering about a fifth of the planet’s land mass. Despite the fact that the African continent has some of the poorest countries in the world, it possesses a wealth of cultural and natural heritage. The World Heritage Centre and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), working with CHDA and EPA, has identified a number of themes and groups of properties that could be considered for nomination in Africa. It is hoped that this exercise will assist African States Parties considering cultural World Heritage nominations.

The approach

The approach used to measure the viability of properties has emerged from different sources, including the ICOMOS gap analysis of 2005, a situational analysis of African States Parties Tentative lists of 2009 and information collected by the AWHF through iterative listing processes and nomination training programmes. Further studies on potential themes for nomination are required, especially at State Party level, where updated inventories and documentation are recommended. The analysis is by no means exhaustive and there are other forms of heritage themes and properties that require investigation.

The nomination process

Only States Parties to the World Heritage Convention can submit nominations for properties in their territory to be considered for inclusion in the World Heritage List. Before a property can be nominated, it must be included on the State Party’s Tentative list. The State Party will prepare a nomination dossier following the standard format available at the World Heritage Centre. The process of preparing a nomination dossier can take several years and should involve all relevant stakeholders, including local communities within and surrounding the property. Once completed, the nomination dossier is submitted to the World Heritage Centre from where it is sent to the appropriate advisory bodies for evaluation. The World Heritage Committee then makes the final decision.

Comparative analysis

One of the most critical components of the nomination dossier is the comparative analysis. The property shall be compared to similar properties, whether they are on the World Heritage List or not. The comparative analysis shall explain the importance of the nominated property in its national, regional and international context and shall include a gap analysis of 2005, a situational analysis of African States Parties Tentative lists of 2009 and information collected by the AWHF through iterative listing processes and nomination training programmes. Further studies on potential themes for nomination are required, especially at State Party level, where updated inventories and documentation are recommended. The analysis is by no means exhaustive and there are other forms of heritage themes and properties that require investigation.

The Basics of Outstanding Universal Value

To be included on the World Heritage List, properties must meet at least one of the ten criteria as well as requirements for authenticity, integrity, protection and management. The criteria concern cultural properties:

(i) represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
(ii) exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, town-planning or landscape design;
(iii) bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;
(iv) be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) (i) the evolution of human creative genius and (b) human creative genius and (c) human creative genius and (d) human creative genius and (e) human creative genius and (f) human creative genius and (g) human creative genius and (h) human creative genius and (i) human creative genius and (j) human creative genius and (k) human creative genius and (l) human creative genius and (m) human creative genius and (n) human creative genius and (o) human creative genius and (p) human creative genius and (q) human creative genius and (r) human creative genius and (s) human creative genius and (t) human creative genius and (u) human creative genius and (v) human creative genius and (w) human creative genius and (x) human creative genius and (y) human creative genius and (z) human creative genius and (aa) human creative genius and (bb) human creative genius and (cc) human creative genius and (dd) human creative genius and (ee) human creative genius and (ff) human creative genius and (gg) human creative genius and (hh) human creative genius and (ii) be directly or indirectly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, or with artistic and literary works that are of outstanding significance.

The World Heritage Convention

The World Heritage Convention, adopted in 1972, is one of the most important global conservation instruments and has almost universal adoption amongst the nations of the world. The Convention establishes a voluntary state that some places are so important that their protection is not only the responsibility of a single nation, but is also the duty of the international community as a whole and not only for this generation, but for all those to come.

The primary mission of the Convention is to identify and protect the world’s cultural and natural heritage properties considered to be of “Outstanding Universal Value”. At the end of 2011, the World Heritage List comprised 936 properties, including 725 cultural and 210 natural. These properties include famous locations such as the Pyramids of Egypt, the Rock Hewn Churches of Lalibela in Ethiopia and the Great Wall of China.

The Convention is governed by the World Heritage Committee supported by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the advisory body on cultural heritage is the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Rehabilitation of Cultural Property (ICCROM) is the advisory body for training in the field of movable cultural heritage.

Support for the preparation of nominations

States Parties can request financial support for the preparation of Tentative Lists and nominations from the World Heritage Fund as well as from the African World Heritage Fund. Technical support for the preparation of nominations is also available from the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS, IUCN, ICCROM and the WHC network including CIDA and EPA.

The themes and properties presented in this document are not a guarantee for a successful nomination, but should be seen as a possible way forward.

Relevant online resources

• World Heritage Centre (WHC): http://whc.unesco.org
• International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS): http://www.icomos.org
• International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN): http://www.iucn.org
• International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Rehabilitation of Cultural Property (ICCROM): http://www.iccrom.org
• Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA): http://www.chda.org
• Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA): http://www.chda.org
• Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA): http://www.chda.org
• Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA): http://www.chda.org
• Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA): http://www.chda.org
• Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA): http://www.chda.org
• Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA): http://www.chda.org
• Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA): http://www.chda.org
• Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA): http://www.chda.org
• Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA): http://www.chda.org
• Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA): http://www.chda.org
• Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA): http://www.chda.org
• Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA): http://www.chda.org
• Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA): http://www.chda.org
• Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA): http://www.chda.org
1- CROSS-CUTTING PERSPECTIVES

Serial nominations and trans-boundary nominations where States Parties cooperate are recommended. A serial or trans-boundary nomination creates a need for joint management committees or similar bodies to oversee the management of the whole of the property. These kinds of nominations therefore have capacity to create good neighbourliness and positive cooperation between State Parties. Potential properties concern trade, slave, migration, pilgrimage and freedom routes.

2- HOMINID PROPERTIES

Hominid properties are prevalent in the continent as Africa is the Cradle of Humankind. Such properties in South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya and Ethiopia are already on the World Heritage List. The Rift valley in Eastern Africa as well as hominid properties in Chad, Ethiopia and South Africa continue to produce new evidence. A serial nomination at global level in collaboration with concerned State Parties could be encouraged.

3- ROCK ART PROPERTIES

Rock art properties are a global phenomenon and properties from all over the world are already inscribed on the World Heritage List. Africa has rich collections of rock art including exceptional ones found mostly in the Sahara and in Southern Africa, e.g. Tchitundu-Hulo in Angola. As there are already many rock art properties in the World Heritage List and rock art is found in nearly every part of the continent, a serial nomination is recommended.

4- THE EARLY KINGDOMS OF AFRICA

The archaeology of Africa shows evidence of past powerful kingdoms and empires across the continent, for example: in West Africa the Ghana, Mali and Songhai; in Central Africa the Mbanza Kongo and Luba-Lunda; and in North Eastern Africa, the evidence of huge empires and kingdoms. Potential properties to consider include Aduli Archaeological site in Eritrea and Bunyoro in Uganda.

5- PLACES OF MEMORY AND SPIRITUALITY

Places of memory and spirituality have already been inscribed on the World Heritage List, such as Matobo Hills in Zimbabwe and the Sacred Kaya forests in Kenya. There are also series of sacred forests and groves in West and Central Africa worth documenting and assessing for potential nominations. Places to consider include Tongo Tengzuk Tallensi sacred landscapes in Ghana and Bunyoro in Uganda.

6- VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

Africa is a continent still rich in vernacular architecture, including earthen architecture. However the effects of globalization have become a threat to the heritage and a study to identify and record the different types of architecture is recommended with a view to selecting some of the best preserved properties for possible serial trans-boundary nomination. This will be in line with UNESCO World Heritage Centre’s programme on earthen architecture. Potential properties to consider include Iya Sungbo’s Eredo in Nigeria and the calime architecture of the Bandal Kingdom in Senegal.

7- VILLAGES, QUARTERS/MITAAS IN CITY-SCAPES, NEW TOWNS, MODERN ARCHITECTURE AND SPATIAL DESIGN

African city quarters created through rural-urban migration since the colonial period are found in most countries. These are worth considering and some examples include the Ngegge in Kampala and Soweto in South Africa. In addition, there are colonialist influenced towns that have potential as World Heritage properties. New towns representing 20th century architecture like Aramara in Eritrea are one type of properties that needs to be considered as well as Grand Bassam historic town in Cote d’Ivoire and Casablanca in Morocco.

8- ANCIENT TECHNOLOGY AND KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

Technology and knowledge systems around mining and metallurgy, fortifications, salt processing and irrigation systems assist in understanding the evolution of the socio-economic context of Africa. Some of them contributed to the long distance trade that connected the continent with the rest of the world. Potential properties include Kibiro salt producing village in Uganda, Ngwenya mines in Swaziland, Zien in Zimbabwe and Qohaito landscapes in Eritrea.