

Remarks by the Director of the World Heritage Centre, Ms. Mechtild Rossler, on the occasion of the African World Heritage Day webinar organized by AWHF 5 May 2020

Greetings from UNESCO to all speakers and participants!

Many thanks to the organizers for the invitation and for putting forward critical topics this year. I will link in my intervention the impact of Covid-19 on World Heritage sites, resilience and sustainability of World Heritage sites, and opportunity for Youth and Entrepreneurs in Africa.

Impact of Covid-19 lockdown.

- The data from the UNESCO World Heritage Centre shows that, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in 90% of the countries with World Heritage properties, these sites have been closed wholly or partially – you can all see the map which is weekly updated on our website whc.unesco.org
- In Africa, more than 75% of natural and cultural sites are partially or totally closed, although the situation varies between cultural and natural sites and between monuments, landscapes and cities.
- The lockdown has negatively affected social and cultural aspects and has a considerable economic impact for conservation and communities living in and around these sites. It has also created a number of monitoring and security concerns. Not related to this, however I need to mention it: we unfortunately deplore victims at our sites, including rangers to protect the outstanding heritage of humanity, with an attack at Virunga National Park (RDC) with 17 victims.
- The livelihoods of many communities (especially in rural areas) depend completely on activities within or around World Heritage sites. The current “recession” of international, regional and national tourism as well as related creative industries, will take considerable time to recover and may change fundamentally. This may also provide for a turning point for more culturally and ecologically sustainable tourism approaches.

Resilience and sustainability of heritage and part of culture.

- Despite challenges from the lockdown, it has created a demand to access culture and heritage, including through new technology and virtual tools. Last Sunday, nearly 5 Million people watched the World Heritage series on German ZDF starting with the African continent. This shows great interest and, remarkably proves the resilience and sustainability of culture and cultural/natural heritage.
- Until end of April 2020 and as part of our [#ShareOurHeritage](#) Campaign, the World Heritage Centre has received 23 videos from site managers in Africa including from Lamu (Kenya), National Parks (RDC), Madina of Fes (Morocco), Asante Tradition buildings (Ghana), Ile de Gorée (Senegal) and Robben Island (South Africa). You can watch them on our web-page and we promoted them globally through social media!

Opportunity for Youth and Entrepreneurs

- With these videos, the site managers not only showed the consequences of Covid-19 in their sites, but also mobilised new technologies for promotion, awareness raising and communication. The global audience shows that there is a growing demand and broad interest.
- The linkages between new technologies and heritage, or culture in general will continue to grow. This gives us an idea of future trends despite some challenges of the “digital gap” in Africa:
 - I would like to just mention growing interest in virtual and remote visits with the example of the livestreaming from “Ngorongoro”, Tanzania;
 - Or the Webinar and great live sessions through Instagram today.
- Clearly, the use of new technology for the promotion, interpretation and management of heritage is a new opportunity and also demonstrates that we can work differently!
 - In this regard, I would also like to mention that the Centre has provided Internal Assistance on the use of drones for monitoring at Tai National Park (Côte d’Ivoire) from the World Heritage Fund.
- Youth and entrepreneurs in Africa should be further encouraged and supported to explore this opportunity. This is an idea to be advanced for Heritage Curricula in Africa and an area to be considered for investment.
- In this regard, I would also like to recall the Recommendations of the two Workshops on World Heritage and Educational Institutions in Africa which took place in Great Zimbabwe and Saint-Louis, respectively.
- “*The future of World Heritage lies in the hands of young people, who are not sufficiently involved in World Heritage ... (to address) their aspirations as future leaders of Africa*”;
- Finally I would like to inform you that tomorrow a new publication will be launched ‘*Empowering Youth for Heritage*’ dedicated to the World Heritage Volunteer’s Initiative. I strongly believe that an enhanced link between new technologies and heritage, its interpretation, monitoring and promotion can create new prospects for youth, entrepreneurship and heritage sustainability in Africa.

Thank you so much and happy African World Heritage Day!