

International Conference on Heritage Authenticity and Integrity in Africa

Nairobi, Kenya, 5 – 9 May 2025

CONCEPT NOTE

BACKGROUND

Africa is endowed with rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The UNESCO 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention) has proven to be an important driver of sustainable development, making significant contributions to peoples' identity and livelihoods. Despite the universal ratification of the World Heritage Convention by all African States Parties, the African continent, which has 150 World Heritage sites, constitutes just 12.26% of the 1223 properties on the World Heritage List. Moreover, Africa also has the highest number of sites inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger, with 14 out of 56.

The adoption of the *Global Strategy for a Representative, Balanced and Credible World Heritage List* by the World Heritage Committee in 1994, aligned with UNESCO's mid-term strategy which prioritise Africa and Gender, led to many positive achievements in Africa, like the identification and inclusion of heritage more specific to the African continent (e.g. cultural landscapes and archaeological and paleontological sites); the development of capacity-building programmes in the heritage sector such as *Africa2009* which made possible the establishment of two regional training centers (the *Ecole du Patrimoine Africain* – EPA, based in Benin and the Centre for Heritage Development in Africa – CHDA, based in Kenya); the founding of the African World Heritage Fund (AWHF) in South Africa in 2006 which through its World Heritage Nomination Training Programme assisted African countries in preparing more robust nomination dossiers; the introduction of the fifth 'C' (for Communities) in the strategic objectives of the World Heritage Convention in 2007, leading to the recognition of the role of 'local communities' in World Heritage matters including the recognition of traditional systems as legitimate mechanisms for management of World Heritage sites.

Despite its achievements, the Global Strategy has also fallen short in ensuring a more representative and balanced World Heritage List as African heritage remains under-represented on the List. Although the reasons for the difficulty faced by the African continent in increasing the number of sites on the World Heritage List are manifold, one of the challenges is that approaches to heritage management, including the understanding and application of the concepts of outstanding universal value (OUV), authenticity, and integrity, are yet to be adapted into the context of the cultural transformation of Africa. This has resulted in a dichotomy between the understanding of heritage discourses, largely developed in academic contexts, and the local and regional applications of the concepts.

Therefore, African heritage authenticity and integrity require further study and adaptation into the continent's context, taking into account what various communities consider heritage. African heritage authenticity is, *inter alia*, fundamentally an enduring cultural, socioeconomic, and political process of self-definition. It must be stressed that there are no unified African traditions or approaches in this regard. Often, the insistence on originality with concepts of

authenticity and integrity overlooks the fact that changes over time and the meaning of significance may evolve as time passes. Hence the concepts of authenticity and integrity cannot be fossilised. What counts as authentic has continually shifted in form, space, and time. However, some traits are common on the continent. For instance, heritage sites play a significant role in daily life. The lines between intangible and tangible nature and culture are unconventional and blurred. Particularly noteworthy are the theoretical and philosophical commonalities between notions of heritage and its discursive forms, which enable their collective identification and characterization.

A multitude of regional and national meetings have been convened, resulting in the adoption of declarations and policy documents. Notable events include the *First Global Strategy meeting in Africa*, held in Zimbabwe in 1995; the *First African Position Paper* presented at the 29th Session of the World Heritage Committee in Durban, South Africa in 2005; and the consultative meetings during the *Three Cycles of Periodic Reporting Exercise for the Africa Region*, endorsed by the World Heritage Committee in its 26th Session (2002), 35th Session (2011), and 44th Session (2021), *African Position and Recommendations for the 40th Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention* (2012) and the *Ngorongoro Declaration on Safeguarding African World Heritage as a Driver of Sustainable Development* (2016) and the *Algiers Call to Action: Our Living Heritage for African Renaissance* endorsed by the African Union Ministers of Culture (2018). All these events and policy positions facilitated a comprehensive reflection on the evolving dimensions of World Heritage in Africa.

More recently, the African States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, in response to the discussions in the Open-ended Working Group for States Parties to the World Heritage Convention (OEWG) on ensuring a representative, balanced, and credible World Heritage List, propose an in-depth reflection on the issue of heritage and authenticity in the Africa context. The proposal was subsequently adopted at the 46th Session of the World Heritage Committee in New Delhi (2024), which, in Decision 46 COM 11, recommended carrying out “an in-depth reflection on heritage in Africa, as well as in other regions, on understanding and application of authenticity as expressed by the 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity and the 1964 Venice Charter on conservation and restoration.” The decision also took note of the “intention by the State Party of Kenya to host a meeting in Kenya in May 2025 on the topic of heritage authenticity and integrity in Africa.” This decision is significant in view of the fiftieth anniversary of the World Heritage Convention and the dawn of new possibilities for African world heritage and the global implementation of the Convention.

RATIONALE

Undertaking a robust regional consultation on heritage, authenticity, and integrity in Africa would present an opportunity to enhance existing strategies and approaches and create new prospects for better implementation of the World Heritage Convention in Africa, as well as increase the number of World Heritage nominations and enhance the management of existing World Heritage sites. A broad reflection and consultation will provide a platform to both African and non-African experts and communities that would foster an exchange of research, experience, knowledge, and observations to clarify heritage authenticity, integrity, and conservation in theory and practice in Africa.

Therefore, an International Conference on the topic of heritage authenticity and integrity in the African context will take place in Nairobi, Kenya, from 5 to 9 May 2025, with the aim of fostering an exchange of research, experience, knowledge, and observations. This conference will clarify heritage authenticity, integrity, conservation theory, and practice at all levels of the continent and contribute to the identification, documentation, protection, valorization, and promotion of humanity's heritage within and beyond the African continent. Participants will include government officials, scholars, heritage experts, community representatives, NGOs, and civil society concerned with world heritage from all the countries on the African continent and international partners.

The International Conference will seek to identify, through open discussion, issues concerning the understanding of heritage authenticity and integrity in Africa and ways to identify more African heritage properties in order to enhance efforts for their protection. As an output, the conference will contribute to the repositioning of heritage authenticity and integrity in theory and practice in an African context.

OBJECTIVES

1. Fostering a shared understanding of authenticity and integrity for better identification, protection, and validation of the heritage of humanity:

The International Conference will provide a dynamic platform and an opportunity through open findings, presentations, and discussions in order to have a shared understanding on the concept of outstanding universal value to recognise regional contexts, particularly the notions of integrity and authenticity in theory and practice in Africa and beyond. This will facilitate new approaches in the identification and World Heritage nomination of African heritage, contributing to enhancing the representation and balance of the World Heritage List through valorisation and protection of new types of heritage.

2. Engaging a wide range of stakeholders, notably local communities, minority groups and Indigenous¹ communities.

The International Conference will serve as an inclusive platform for participation by a diverse range of stakeholders, including policymakers, academia, heritage experts, NGOs, and concerned communities. The Government of the Republic of Kenya, UNESCO and the African World Heritage Fund are proud to announce this groundbreaking initiative focused on the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Africa, with an emphasis on sites managed in close collaboration with local communities, minority groups, and indigenous communities.

¹ No United Nations body has adopted an official definition of *indigenous peoples*. Although there are various preferred terms depending on the geographic contexts, such as first peoples/nations, aboriginals, ethnic groups, endogenous communities, etc., for the purpose of this International Conference, indigenous is used as a generic term as presented in the [UNESCO Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples](#) and [Glossary](#), which recognises that World Heritage sites are often located within land managed by indigenous peoples whose land use, knowledge, and cultural and spiritual values and practices are related to heritage.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

1. Recommendations to the World Heritage Committee

The International Conference aims to establish a shared understanding of heritage authenticity, which differs across regions based on individual and collective memories, while also advancing the concept of heritage authenticity and integrity in both theory and practice within an African context. Conserving elements of a resource is integral to authenticating a resource; thus, conservation is preserving what makes the resource authentic. This output will be shared with the World Heritage Committee as a recommendation for inclusion in the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, in order to meet the objectives of the *Global Strategy for a Representative, Balanced, and Credible World Heritage List*.

2. Documentation and publication

An academic publishing firm will pursue the documentation of the conference discussion by publishing a peer-reviewed volume. The publication will scientifically provide an account of various perspectives on the relationship between authenticity and conservation, as well as the implications of conservation ethics from all countries on the African continent and those invited from other regions, with the aim of reaching a mutual consensus on heritage authenticity and integrity in the African context. The proposed papers, communications and interventions will be reviewed by the Scientific Committee of the International Conference, and the authors of the selected papers will be contacted for further guidance and process concerning the publication.

DIRECT BENEFICIARIES (audience)

- States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, in particular the 54 countries in the African continent
- Local and indigenous communities, community representatives
- Scholars, heritage experts and community representatives from all regions and across the African continent,
- Advisory Bodies of the World Heritage Committee (ICOMOS, ICCROM and IUCN)
- UNESCO Category 2 Centres
- Heritage Training Institutions
- Universities, UNESCO Chairs, Research institutes and scholars
- NGO's
- Other regional representatives

SPEAKERS AND PARTICIPANTS

The *International Conference on Heritage Authenticity and Integrity in Africa* will bring together a diverse range of participants, including but not limited to:

- Representatives of the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention
- Representatives of the Advisory Bodies
- Heritage experts, academics and community representatives
- Category 2 Centres and Heritage Training Institutions
- Community people including indigenous peoples and minority group
- Representatives of NGO's

Selected speakers will be chosen through the abstract submission process, reviewed by the Scientific Committee as overseen by the Steering committee.

COMMUNICATION

UNESCO, in collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Kenya and the African World Heritage Fund, will ensure project visibility through a comprehensive, specially tailored communication plan. It will highlight all activities through a communication campaign that targets States Parties to the World Heritage Convention and World Heritage experts from all regions, emphasizing the achievements and positive impacts generated by this conference.

Global outreach will be maximised through UNESCO's websites (both Head Quarters and Field Offices), regional outreach through AWHF's website, the websites of the relevant authorities of the Republic of Kenya, of African heritage institutions, and other partners, and social media channels. Global and regional websites will publish news, feature articles, videos, photographs, infographics, and multimedia works. Material related to the project will also be disseminated alongside all activities implemented at regional and national levels.