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Conservation and Preservation of Immovable Heritage from Below: Local Community Involvement in the Management of Shimoni Caves in the South Coast of Kenya

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Abstract:

The archaeological heritage, both movable and immovable, is part of the country's cultural heritage. This heritage not only documents the past but also defines people and gives society its identity and sense of belonging. Cultural heritage resources have various values and contribute to the overall development of societies where they exist. In Kenya, according to National Museums and Heritage Act 2006, all the archaeological heritage is managed by the National Museums of Kenya (NMK). Among other responsibilities, the institution is required to protect and conserve these cultural resources as part of its management obligations. Besides, Kenya is a signatory to many international conventions on archaeological heritage management, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 1972 World Heritage Convention that sets out international standards on cultural heritage management in the world. Despite the existence of these local and international protocols, challenges mostly relating to effective immovable archaeological heritage management still abound. Of essence is a management model deployed to ensure that immovable heritage as finite resources survive to posterity. To this end, many innovative approaches have emerged to bridge the gap, the key of which is the enhanced role of the local community in archaeological heritage management. This new paradigm shift ought to be embraced in the country since immovable heritage derives immediate value from the communities around it before assuming relevance to national or global human heritage. This article employs qualitative research methods to unravel the level and framework under which the Shimoni Caves' community in the South Coast of Kenya is involved in managing this resource as an immovable heritage.

The key is the threat of modernization and despite the potential the approach holds in promoting ownership and identity of locals with the heritage for sustainability in management and utilization, there is a lower level of knowledge towards conservation. Utilization for touristic value derivation is a double-edged sword. The NMK, as custodian of heritage laws, needs to collaborate with the communities to guide and lead preservation and conservation efforts to attain sustainable usage.

Keywords: Conservation and protection, community and heritage management, sustainable utilization

1. Shimoni Slave-Caves Historical Site: Value Derivation, Preservation and Conservation through Local Community Involvement

Shimoni historic site is found along the Southern coastline of Kenya, not far from the Kenya-Tanzania border and overlooks the Wasini Island across the Indian Ocean. This site is a composite site, that is, it has several other historic sites in the area, including a graveyard, the first British colonial prison in East Africa now existing as ruins and the Imperial British East Africa Company administration building established in the area in 1988 all managed by the National Museums of Kenya through a top-down management model and Shimon slave caves managed by the local community as a community project through a local Community-Based Organization (CBO) using a bottom-up management model. The top-down management model involves all decisions to manage these heritages being made and implemented by the NMK, including the protection and conservation of that heritage. On the other hand, according to one of the members of the CBO, the bottom-up management model means the community undertakes all decisions, including management and utilization of that heritage through the CBO leadership structure comprising "Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer" (J. Nasoro, personal communication, September 23, 2022).

Shimoni slave caves have several heritage values, which include slave chains that are still stuck into the wall. This documents the history of slave trade along the Eastern coast of Africa during the time of the Indian Ocean trade that was a key factor in the East-West exchanges between the seventh and which reached its apogee in the fifteenth century. Thus, the site is historic and an important source of history. Besides this educational value, the site has economic benefits to local Shimoni community members who perceive it as a source of income whereby proceeds derived from site entry fees are, according to one of the site guides, used to "sponsor bright and economically disadvantaged students in schools in the form of bursary, buying drugs for a local dispensary, buying food for the deaf unit at Kichakamkwaju, paying salaries for school and madrasa (Islamic based schools) Parents Teachers Association (PTA) teachers and supporting other community needs" (J. Nasoro, personal communication, September 23, 2022). The site has cultural significance to the people of Shimoni. Some members visit the caves, burn candles and perform other cultural rites in the form of offering sacrifices as a way of seeking divine intervention on various issues affecting them/community. Community management of this heritage is key to Shimoni residents since they associate with it in many ways.

According to one official of the CBO managing the heritage, the NMK ceded the management of Shimoni slave caves to "the local community in 2001" (C. Ramadhani, personal communication, September 24, 2021). The participation of the community in heritage management is very critical in enhancing the protection and conservation of these cultural resources. However, there is one challenge in this purely bottom-up management model being applied here (see plate 1). The question that begs is, does the community living in Shimoni and managing the slave caves have the requisite skills to carry out that mandate? The World Heritage Convention emphasizes the fact that the duty of ensuring the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage situated in the territory belongs primarily to the state. Therefore, such responsibility should neither be abdicated nor ceded to any other party, as is the case at Shimoni Caves.

2. Community Involvement in Heritage Management

Management of the archaeological heritage as part of the country's cultural resources involves many aspects. This includes the preservation, maintenance, restoration, and protection of the heritage against various dangers, especially from traditional causes of decay and others such as those that are either human-induced or brought about by natural causes. Protection and conservation of the archaeological heritage against the various agents of deterioration is key and an important element in the management of these cultural resources. One critical element in heritage management is the people, that is, the community living in places where the archaeological heritage is found.

The relationship between local populations' and official authorities' perceptions of heritage is highlighted by Tayi (2017), who advocates for values-driven community site management and points out that just as cultural heritage's "values" evolve through time, management systems must also be flexible and adaptable. Drawing on the example of Zimbabwe, he notes that many heritage sites frequently ignore the opinions of local communities and the importance they place on heritage sites. He advises against heritage institutions such as the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) neglecting the importance of stakeholders' involvement in the process of value identification for effective heritage management.

Effective heritage management cannot be realized if existing heritage laws in the country and World Heritage Conventions are not enforced and implemented. The "Budapest Declaration on World Heritage" adopted in 2002 recognized the importance of maintaining the authenticity and originality of the heritage through a proposal based on what came to be referred to as the "Four Cs": Credibility (ensure credibility of world heritage sites), Conservation (ensure effective conservation of world heritage properties), Capacity-building (promote development and effective capacity-building measures to ensure implementation of the World Heritage Convention and related instruments), Communication (ensure communication to increase awareness involvement and support for world heritage and Community (enhance the role of communities in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 2002). An ignorant community cannot be of importance to heritage management. Rather, archaeologists and cultural resource managers should make efforts to bring the public or community on board first by equipping them with skills in archaeological heritage management and second through both parties playing complementary roles in that endeavour at Shimoni.

In an effort to obtain the best results, UNESCO has set universally accepted standards for carrying out different archaeological heritage management practices that are expected to yield more or else similar outcomes all over the world. These standards are in terms of conventions/guidelines/ on archaeological heritage management practices applied in the countries that are member states or signatories to ratified charters so far developed. This has been made possible through globalization, which is applying global standards to local situations to solve problems.

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) was established in 1965 due to the Venice Charter of 1964, which established international standards for managing and conserving cultural resources. The first international agreement devoted solely to archaeology was the Lausanne Charter, which was created in 1990 by the International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management (ICAHM) (Comer & Willems, 2014). ICAHM is the only global organization solely focused on managing archaeological heritage. Despite their variations, all of these papers describe the conservation process as one that is governed by a strong sense of moral obligation and complete regard for the object or location's aesthetic, historical, and physical integrity (Matero, 1993). Freeland (2009) reaffirms the significance of the global community in the area of cultural heritage, particularly with regard to the preservation and safeguarding of the heritage. He emphasizes the significance of considering intangible heritage as a vital aspect of cultural heritage. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge that this has resulted in a cutting-edge methodology that acknowledges communities and groups as the primary protagonists of cultural heritage. Therefore, if effective management of the archaeological heritage is to be implemented, local inhabitants of the heritage places cannot be ignored.

Most countries in the global South, and Kenya is one of them, have not realized what can be termed a meaningful level of involving the local community in archaeological heritage management. According to Morgan (2015), the situation of heritage preservation in Africa can be characterized as deplorable, with a few glimmering spots where local communities have worked cooperatively to raise funds, enforce greater protection, and demonstrate the possibility for sustainable development in Africa. Africa is plagued by a lack of workforce and government heritage management competence.

Cody and Fong (2007) emphasize that humans are the starting and finishing point of conservation. They argue that the creators of technology, historical development and cultural progress are embedded in our constructed history. Although, occasionally, these meanings and values are forgotten, they serve as the proof of our existence. The preservation of heritage is crucial for all of these reasons. As a result, archaeological heritage is a crucial component of a people's history and cannot be taken from the society in which it is present. As a result, the community should take an active role in heritage conservation. Even though the importance of people in the protection and conservation of particular immovable heritage is acknowledged, these individuals must be well-versed in the importance and necessity of sustainable utilization of the heritage at Shimoni.

Deisser & Wahome (2016), while examining the subject of cultural heritage as a human rights issue, noted that participatory conservation seems to be a solution if better outcomes are to be obtained in efficiently managing these cultural resources. They assert that during periods of economic growth and strife, either through trafficking or destruction or through rescue and preservation, the significance, especially of the heritage, is brought to light once more that beyond just protecting the cloth, conservation should be practiced. They further add that focus should be placed on the fundamental rights of the custodians, or groups who live near or around the property, with regard to access, value interpretation, and use of the heritage. This is a crucial consideration while determining which management approach is best for the conservation and preservation of archaeological heritage.

Even if the nation's immovable archaeological legacy has difficulties in effective protection and conservation, steps must be taken to lessen the harm to the heritage. In an era of accelerating globalization, protecting, conserving, interpreting, and presenting the cultural diversity and heritage of any given location or region is a significant task for everyone (Brooks, 2002). Selecting the best conservation actions is a difficult job. Respecting the site's or object's entire set of values is the main concern. Where communities continue to use the resource, it becomes more complicated. It is not easy to decide which principles to follow or strategies to employ. There are conflicting interests and claims to archaeological remains worldwide, with various interest groups claiming varying levels of interest and value in the resource (Ngoro, 2018). A foundation for the development of "heritage conservation and human rights" in practice is provided by the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008). Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and preserve their cultural traditions and customs, according to Article 11. This includes the freedom to preserve, develop, and use historical and archaeological sites, artifacts, rituals, technology, performing arts, and literature, as well as other past, present, and future expressions of their cultures (Deisser & Wahome, 2016). The public will always have access to their archaeological legacy.

Buhozi (2014) observes that the majority of African states are to fault for ignoring the contributions made by local populations to the protection and conservation of cultural heritage assets. He points out that this has led to a decline in locals' sense of morale and ability to support effective heritage management and protection and further noted that locals feel that heritage legislation has abandoned them by ignoring local custodians who want to advance their own cultural past. As a result, there is still mistrust between stakeholders, including local community members and heritage organizations. The argument is that it is the people who "own" the archaeological heritage and institutions such as the NMK only act on behalf of the people to provide "guardianship" to that heritage. Thus, both the local community and the NMK play independent but complementary roles to each other and remain inseparable in heritage management in the country. Such partnerships must be strengthened where they exist, be seen to be practically working and also reflected in the management models exhibited at archaeological sites in different heritage places or sites in the country. However, in many places in Kenya, the top-down management model whereby decisions are made elsewhere, mostly at the main office in Nairobi or the regional office at Mombasa in this case, and imposed on the people at the local level. This seems a common approach with little or no consultations with local populations carried out on heritage management except at Shimoni historic site in the south coastal part of the country. At Shimoni, the slave caves have been under local community management from as far back as 2001.

3. Analysis

In the analysis of the question of management of Shimoni Caves as an immovable heritage and towards its sustainable utilization through deliberate efforts for preservation and conservation, this article employed McGregor's Theory X. It evaluated the top-down management model used by the national government where the NMK Act is applied and enforced. Also, McGregor's Theory Y was further used where there was virtually no NMK input in the management of this heritage. The community is motivated in the heritage management of this site because of the benefits accruing from the heritage to the community. However, rather than being on opposite extremities of the same continuum, theories X and Y are two distinct continuums in themselves. A blend of the two approaches may be appropriate to get the most effective production (Hattagandi, 2015).

Keitumetse (2016) observes that local communities have long developed strategies for managing cultural resources using psycho-social behavior, relationships, and regional indigenous knowledge systems. This is despite the fact that management of cultural and heritage resources is frequently associated with international conventions, particularly

those of the UNESCO 1972 and 2003 conventions. However, communities are currently confronted and driven by various contemporary needs that have a detrimental effect on their relationships with their cultural and heritage resources. As a result, cultural heritage practitioners have been forced to develop management initiatives that address the risks posed by socio-economic transformation. Thus, the community exploits the heritage for various uses. However, there must be a balance between heritage utilization and conservation as part of the management of that resource. Cultural heritage is our way of knowing the world and how we influence it. It is ingrained in our cultural identities and serves as a reservoir of wisdom and knowledge that can be used to promote sustainable development policies and practices (Feary et al., 2015). Thus, one cannot remove the heritage from the people, the real owners. Both the intangible and tangible aspects of culture are inseparably tied together.



Figure 1: Shimoni Slave Caves Is Heritage Managed by the Local Community through a Community-Based Organization

Source: Photo Courtesy of Benard Busaka, 2022

4. Recommendations

These recommendations for the involvement of the local community in heritage management must be implemented carefully. This is so because the local community members may, on many occasions, lack the necessary knowledge and expertise in heritage management. Existing traditional knowledge systems might not be wholly applicable when it comes to archaeological heritage management. It is limited to a great extent. At Shimoni slave caves, for instance, the hard documented evidence of the harsh treatment of slaves in the holding pens are the two metal chains that have remained stuck in the walls over the years. However, due to environmental factors inside the cave, especially oxidation, the chains continue to rust without any mitigation from the community members who are currently managing this heritage. Unfortunately, one out of the two chains has been cut and fallen off. The only remaining chain is rusted and, with time, will undergo the same fate as the first one. Lack of complementary management, especially conservation of the heritage, has proved catastrophic for this irredeemable loss. Use of this heritage must never be at the expense of the very heritage. The heritage properties of Shimoni caves must be retained not just for the current generation but also for the future. Management of Shimoni slave caves should guarantee the originality and authenticity of the heritage so that it continues to serve the purpose for which it was intended. Deterioration of the caves means loss of heritage value and diminished usage. Consequently, the economic and social benefits will all dwindle and ultimately disappear if the community remains unaware of the threat to these cultural resources. Mitigation measures must be urgently put in place and NMK must be called in to spearhead this process (see plate 2).

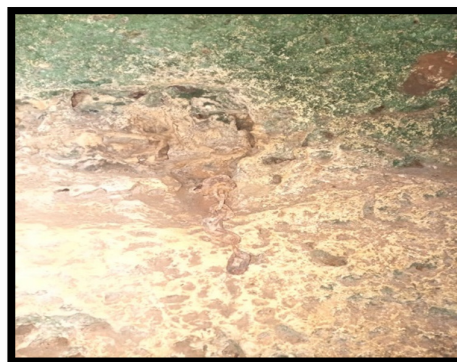


Figure 2: Slave Chains That Were Used to Detained Slaves in the Slave-Holding Pens Inside the Caves Provide First-Hand Historical Evidence of International Commerce

When Human Beings Were a Commodity of Trade. Environmental Causes of Decay Are Quickly Erasing This Heritage for Future Reference

Source: Photo Courtesy of Benard Busaka, 2022

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, associating the local community with their own heritage is critical in modern-day heritage management. Appreciating the values derived from this archaeological heritage prompts the people to protect and conserve the heritages found in the area they live. The laws and policies exist as guidelines for cultural resource management and should not be seen as rigid rules to be so strictly adhered to. Rather, they must be flexibly applied and adjusted depending on the prevailing realities but under the watch of heritage institutions such as the NMK. A site management plan should be made a necessary and mandatory tool for every archaeological heritage site in the country and not just for the UNESCO-listed world historical sites. This would commit every heritage manager in the country to develop and adhere to recommended and accepted standards. It is only when there is such commitment that the country will be guaranteed that the finite archaeological heritage will be available now and in the future to promote development in a sustainable manner. There is a need to use the heritage in a measured manner so as not to compromise heritage properties. More importantly, both the state through the NMK and the local community in areas where the archaeological heritage is found must adopt a multifaceted approach to heritage management. Traditional and indigenous knowledge in environmental conservation within local communities is a big asset in ensuring that the archaeological heritage is well protected and conserved.

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