

## **STATE OF CONSERVATION REPORT ON OSUN-OSOGBO WORLD SACRED GROVE, WORLD HERITAGE SITE**

1. **NAME OF WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTY**  
OSUN OSOGBO SACRED GROVE, OSOGBO, OSUN STATE
2. **STATE PARTY**  
NIGERIA
3. **IDENTIFICATION NUMBER**  
1118
4. **DATE OF INSCRIPTION**  
2005
5. **CATEGORY**  
CULTURAL LANDSCAPE
6. **CRITERIA**  
(II), (III) & (VI)
7. **PROPERTY DIMENSIONS**  
75 ha (Buffer Zone = 47 ha)

*Response from State Party to World Heritage Committee's Decision, paragraph by paragraph  
[Note: this information has to refer to developments over the past year or since the last decision  
of the Committee for this property]*

In response to the information received by the World Heritage Centre on land allocations to tourism investors in Osun State, with reference to an article published by the News Agency of Nigeria on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2013; The National Commission for Museums and Monuments wishes to clearly state that the article is inaccurate. There has been no land allocations within the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove World Heritage Site.

In actual facts, the event referred to by the News Agency of Nigeria article took place at Ikirun town in Ifelodun Local Government Area of Osun State, a distance of 19 - 22 kilometers outside Osogbo metropolis and Osun-Osogbo Grove. The Akirun of Ikirun, His Royal Highness, Oba Olayiwola Adedeji donated twenty-five (25) hectares of land to a tourism organization called Webisco International Federation of Nigeria Entrepreneurs of Tourism, to support the growth and development of culture and tourism in Osun State. The whole idea is to encourage investors to invest in the rich cultures, traditions and tourism endowment of Ikirun community which is neither in the core nor buffer zones of the Osun Osogbo heritage site. Whatever development that might take place in the allocated land will not affect the authenticity and the integrity of the grove.

In response to the statement credited to the World Monument Fund on its inclusion of Osun Osogbo on its current watch list, it is true that the site remains a place of worship, due to the fact that it is a focal point of Yoruba traditional religious activities where different deities are worshipped and revered on daily, weekly monthly and annual basis. The Grove is a hallmark of Yoruba identity and rich sense of deep oral tradition which remain the testimonies to a living culture.

The annual festival called Osun Osogbo Festival has been held at the site long before its inscription as a World Heritage Site and formed a vital part of the intangible aspects of the heritage of the grove as documented for its nomination to the World Heritage List. The festival which takes place in August every year is a symbolic event that brings all indigenes of Osogbo and Yorubas in Nigeria and from all over the world to cherish their traditions as well as revive their spiritualism. The grove is the site of the renewal of the mystic bond of association between the Osun goddess and the Osogbo people. The festival also celebrates the establishment of Osogbo town with activities that honour the bond between the founder of Osogbo and the goddess which was consummated in the first palace situated inside the grove.

These events have not in any way impacted negatively on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property; rather it buttresses **Criteria VI** under which the site was nominated into the World Heritage List in 2005.

The intended purpose of putting the World Heritage Site on the World Monument watch is to prevent any negative development on the periphery of the buffer in order to ameliorate increasing development pressure by alerting the State Government in curtailing the development and the need to take into account the sensitive nature of the grove and the preservation of its Outstanding Universal Value in its Urban Renewal Programme for the State.

*Other current conservation issues identified by the state party*

Modern challenges such as the growth of the city have not in any way affected the Outstanding Universal Value of the site and are still limited to areas outside the buffer zone. The pollution of the Osun River which resulted from violation of drainage within the Osogbo metropolis has been curtailed with actions being taken to address the problem in the city. Bush burning is also highly controlled and monitored especially within the scared area where it is prohibited. These potential threats are always in the buffer zones and been monitored closely.

In the 2010 – 2014 Conservation Management Plan, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments enumerated the factors affecting the site such as development pressures, environmental pressures, natural threats and disasters, as well as visitor/tourism pressures. Along with these factors, plans and programmes were also listed that were being put in place in collaboration with stakeholders to handle these challenges. There is a standing arrangement with the National Environmental Standards Regulation Agency (NESREA) in Osogbo to assist in curtailing any pollution of the Osun River. There is also an arrangement with the Federal Fire Service to assist in case of fire outbreaks especially during the dry season due to haphazard and illegal bush burning activities by residents around the buffer zone.

The NESREA carries out clearance of the river course once every year while the fire service render immediate service whenever there is any outbreak of fire in buffer zones to prevent it reaching the core zone.

The strong attachment of the community to the site as stated by the World Monument Fund is an advantage towards the preservation of integrity of the site as this engenders greater community support for conservation of the site. So while there is obvious growth of the city with its attendant pressures on land and water resources, these pressures are outside the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove as the size of its core and buffer zones at inscription remains the same today.

*In conformity with paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, please describe any potential major restoration, alterations and/or new construction(s) within the protected area and its buffer zone and/or corridors that might be envisaged.*

Some minor and major restoration and rehabilitation activities have taken place in the Osun-Osogbo Grove within 2010 -2014.

The median road bisecting the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove has been of concern to both the National Commission for Museums and Monuments and the Osun State Government. It has been agreed that the State Government will provide funding for the construction of a new road that will by-pass the grove such that the existing road is closed to vehicular movement. However, funding has become a major constraint more so when the project involves construction of two major bridges across the Osun River. Currently we are considering approaching other organizations involved in road construction and maintenance to provide funds for this project.

In January 2014 the National Commission for Museums and Monuments embarked on the rehabilitation of the First Palace. The palace is the most important historical structure in the Osun courtyard. The palace houses the Osun shrine, Temple and sacred stone of authority regarded as the first stool of *King Larooye*, founder of Osogbo town. The palace has suffered some deterioration as the corrugated roofing sheets have rusted and the wood frame decayed due to termite attacks and weather conditions. It had become uncomfortable for the worshippers and devotees to use during daily, weekly and monthly consultations and most importantly during annual Osun-Osogbo Festival. In view of the above, the Commission embarked on the rehabilitation of the palace which took ten days (10 days).

The traditional workmen used for the rehabilitation are Chief Adebisi Akanji, Kasali Akangbe Ogun and their apprentices who worked on the palace during the lifetime of Susanne Wenger. During the rehabilitation, all the rusted roofing sheets were removed while all the decayed woods dismembered. After the removal, the entire building was fumigated by conservators to forestall termite attacks on the new materials to be used. Two days after the fumigation, new woods comprising of coconut and teak were brought in and the conservators treated them with appropriate chemicals and left to dry. After the drying, the workmen resumed work on re-roofing the structure which lasted for about five days. Finally, the entire palace came back to its original form without any major interface in form, design and structure. However some of the carved wooden house-posts holding the structure had to be treated and restored by the conservators. It was noted that four (4) out of eight (8) house-posts had deteriorated beyond restoration and so new ones would need to be carved by the original sculptor Chief Akanni Ogun.

All the processes of rehabilitation have been documented in photographs and kept in electronic and hard copies.

*In conformity with paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, please describe any potential major restorations, alterations and/or new constructions within the protected area and its buffer zone and/or corridors that might be envisaged*

There are two major developments going on the site which are the reconstruction of the pavilion and the provision of a car park for visitors.

The pavilion is to be reconstructed on its original site at the protected zone while car park is at the buffer zone. The design of the pavilion and Heritage Impact Assessment have all been sent to UNESCO as requested.

In the case of the car park, at the North portion of the buffer zone close the entrance has been cleared of bushes to allow visitors to park their vehicle. This will eventually help in crowd control during the festival. While this is in line with our Conservation Management Plan for 2010 -2014, it is pertinent to indicate that this has not compromised the site in any way because the only trees removed are regenerative and abundant in the buffer zone.

This project will surely assist in crowd control during Osun-Osogbo Festival as all vehicles will be parked at this entrance while people walk leisurely into the grove. This proposal is within the Conservation Management Plan 2010 -2014 and will be actualized before the festival in August 2014. Traditional beautification of the former sandcrete wall dividing the core and buffer zones is also planned. All these activities would be properly documented.