

# STATE OF CONSERVATION REPORT FOR OSUN OSOGBO SACRED GROVE

Name of Property: **OSUN OSOGBO SACRED GROVE**  
State Party: **NIGERIA**  
Identification Number: **CIII8**  
Date of Inscription: **JULY 15, 2005**  
Criteria: **II, III & VI.**

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove is Nigeria's second property inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2005 under Criteria II, III, and VI. The grove is a mature, reasonably undisturbed forest canopy, covering about 75 hectares. Its rich bio-diversity supports a variety of fauna and flora which includes small mammals, birds, reptiles, insects and several medicinal plants.

The land mass of the grove is of pre-Cambrian rocks, the basement complex from which the fairly fertile clayed-loam of the grove is derived. During the dry season when the river cuts into pools/lakes within the banks, the underlying rocks at the bed are exposed. The microclimate within the grove is less humid than it is in a greater part of southern Nigeria.

The grove is the repository of the fundamental values of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Osogbo people. The Internationally recognized Osun-Osogbo Cultural Festival holds in the grove in August every year drawing large crowds of devotees and tourists. Osun grove is also an outstanding pilgrimage center where religious activities are conducted daily, weekly and annually.

The National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), Osun State Government, the Ataoja-in-Council as well as relevant Stakeholders work together in active participatory management of the site. This Community participation in site conservation and management has contributed significantly to resolving most of the identified challenges and ensuring sustainability through conservation, restoration and continuity of traditional practices.

This is evident for example in the combined efforts to clean, clear and reclaim the River bed and at erosion sites along the river's course.

Furthermore, the roof structure of the first palace which was destroyed by termites and droppings has been restored by NCMM, while it was also re-grassed in conformity to its original form before the 2022 Osun Osogbo International Festival.

## **2. RESPONSE TO THE DECISIONS OF THE WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE**

- A. *The digital documentation pilot project to digitize part of the sculptures on the property, and its proposed use as a communication tool in future edition of the Festival, and encourages the State Party to extend this documentation process to cover all the shrines, sculpture and art works in the property alongside photographic documentation.***

The extensive photographic and digital documentation of all the shrines, sculptures and art works in the property is a long-term project of the NCMM, planned with consideration of available funding. The collaboration between National Commission for Museums and Monuments, CyArk, the Adunni Olorisa Trust and Google Art & Culture has resulted in the launch of the first and largest digital library of content showcasing the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove.

Visit <https://artsandculture-google.com/partner/the-osun-osogbo-grove>.

- B. *That no satisfactory basis for conservation has been defined that is underpinned by research into appropriate alternative materials to cement, which does not provide a suitable long-term material given its susceptibility to cracks and water ingress in the local hot and humid climatic conditions, and notes that the complete or partial reconstruction of sculptures is still being undertaken:***

The conservation methodology employed for restoring the sculptures and shrines is based on the tried and tested techniques used by **Susanne Wenger** who created most of these sculptures. Susanne Wenger originally created the sculptures from mud but discovered that the highly humid environment of the

forest caused the sculptures to deteriorate rapidly and also mud didn't lend itself to the more complex sculptural forms.

She introduced cement into the mud mixture as a modern medium starting in 1959. Cement allowed the artists and artisans of the New Sacred Art Movement under her tutelage to sculpt the material into highly creative and modernist sculptures. They were creating sculptures and shrines in a new medium and Susanne Wenger used as much cement as she could afford when creating the works of art in the Grove with the New Sacred Art team. It is evident the methodology used was not a mud brick or rammed earth constructing method. Susanne used mud as a core only because cement was too expensive. However, when she could afford to use only cement, she did. *Saponna* and *Ela* two of her most important sculptures, as well as *Odu* (her unfinished work) are made entirely of reinforced cement.

In her writings and interviews, Susanne Wenger describes how important the artist **Adebisi Akanji** was to her because he was trained in molding cement into decorative ornaments for traditional Brazilian style houses in Osogbo. She often claimed that she perfected her cement sculpting techniques from Adebisi. The first artists that she recruited were cement block layers, **Rafiu** and '**Lani**, because they knew how to work in cement.

Adebisi Akanji who is still alive is currently the head of restoration team and the goal of the conservation methodology employed is to maintain the sculptures with appropriate application of cement as used in the original sculptures. Thus the artist of the New Sacred Grove under the supervision of NCMM Osogbo staff are able to restore the works to their former glory, primarily using cement with iron rods and netting as reinforcement as well. Mud is still used as the core of the larger works of art and walls but in lower concentrations.

However, further research work into the use of appropriate alternative materials to cement has been planned for in the UNESCO Netherlands Funds-in-Trust grant that has not been executed due to some administrative challenges.

In conclusion, the restoration works carried out to maintain the sculptures which are integral to the OUV of the site, takes into cognizance the construction history of the sculptures and has the added benefit of the first-hand knowledge of one of the original artisan (Adebisi) was involved in the creating the works.

- C. State Party to refrain from carrying out any non-urgent work on restoration of sculptures and to halt all reconstruction until a revised conservation methodology and phased conservation plan has been prepared and submitted to the World Heritage Centre for review by the Advisory Bodies, and, given the fundamental need to address the conservation of the large number of shrines, sculptures and art works in the property, encourages the State Party to put in place regular resources to ensure that skilled local craftspeople continue to be employed in this work:-**

While mostly routine restoration works have been carried out to preserve the sculptures and shrines, a few cases of urgent work have been carried out such as replace of sculptural component damaged by fallen tree trunk.

The Conservation Methodology/ Approach Underpinning the Restoration/Conservation Program remains the same as outlined in our previous State of Conservation report which takes into consideration the details stated in **2.A.** above. The Adunni Olorisa Trust (AOT) has also been in the forefront of all restoration activities in the property ensuring they conform to the guidelines advocated by Susanne Wenger.

- D. That although the Osun State has now agreed to carry out regular sampling of water in the Osun River, and is urging residents not to dump waste upstream as a safety precaution to be taken to avoid any risk of contamination, and also requests the State Party to take concrete steps to prevent direct consumption of drinking water from the river until adequate measures have been taken to improve purity to drinking quality levels, while encouraging it to find a temporary solution, together with traditional religious leaders, so that purified water can be given to festival participants:**

Apart from carrying out the River water analysis, the Osun State Government's Mineral Resources and Environmental Management Committee has looked into the coloration of the river and some Stakeholders were invited on the need for the community to avoid dumping of waste upstream in order to avoid risk of river contamination. Equally, National Environment Standards and Regulation

Enforcement Agency (NESREA) and Osun State Ministry of Environment has continued to sensitize the community, the devotees and traditional rulers on the need to allow the particles in the water to settle down before spiritual usage and for the community to boil properly before drinking.

NESREA has taken recent river samples for analysis and the results are still awaited. During the Osun Osogbo festival, The State Government through a radio jingle advised the participants on how to purify the water before drinking.

- E. That work to revise the Management Plan has been promised but no details have been provided as to how the management system might be more inclusive or how management might be funded at a sustainable level and benefit from Festival revenue:-**

The Management Plan has been reviewed and awaiting final production. The discussion on the benefit derivable to the site from the festival is ongoing with stakeholders and appropriately captured in the Management Plan. The Ataoja-in-Council is willing to contribute part of the revenue generated from sponsorship of the festival to conservation of the site, as sponsorship revenue improves. The last two years have been challenging due to Covid restrictions and the keenly contested State Governorship elections this year. These affected sponsorship significantly.

- F. That no progress has been made with the implementation of an alternative route to the road through the property, and also encourages the State Party to draw up viable proposals for the Osun State to implement:-**

While various political challenges with the State Government have stalled progress on the road diversion, the reality is that the road is part of the original track used by the communities for mobility to carry out domestic activities around the grove. However, remedial measures put in place for the use of this road by the communities has ensured that its uses do not constitute any serious threat to any of the attributes that convey the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the grove.

In addition, the State Government has made concrete efforts by approaching the Federal Government to assist with financial support from the Federal Ecological fund for the construction of an alternative bridge which will facilitate the

diversion of the road. The Federal Government Ecological Fund Committee has visited the proposed alternative bridge to ascertain the length and width of the proposed bridge and promised to expedite action to actualize the project.

- G. **That the Artists' Village is located within the buffer zone, but still expresses concern that no details of this were provided for review in the light of the concerns on its location expressed by the 2015 ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring Mission.**

The initial Management Plan for the site that accompanied the Nomination Dossier provides information on the development of the Artist Village in the buffer zone (*see page 9 of Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove "Cultural Tourism Management Plan, 2015 - 2019*). This is integral to the preservation of the indigenous art and craft culture connected with the site as well as providing a vital community linkage for a new generation of artist coming up from the heritage of the works done by Susanne Wenger and the artist of the New Sacred Art.

The Artist Village has also trained young Artisans in the production of wood carvings, bead making, *Adire* (tie & dye of local fabrics) and other indigenous craft which were part of mandate of establishing the Artists Village. In August 2019, the Artists Village was granted a programme sponsorship for entrepreneurship training by the United State Embassy in Lagos Nigeria.

Also, the location of the Artist Village in the buffer zone is an additional measure at putting it into compatible and sustainable uses, and also to check encroachment on the buffer zone.

### **3. OTHER CURRENT CONSERVATION ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY THE STATE PARTY WHICH MAY HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE PROPERTY'S OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE**

There were incident reports alleging contamination of the river up-stream (very well outside the grove) by waste from artisanal gold mining activities. While it is a fact that there has been a combination of legal and illegal mining activities in some parts of Osun State, no scientific evidence has been provided by those making the allegation of heavy metal poisoning of the water. In response to this,

the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), the National Environment Standards and Regulation Enforcement Agency (NESREA) as well as the Osun State Government through its State Ministry of Environment conducted a series of stakeholders meetings, carried out extensive field investigation and is currently awaiting laboratory results from water samples taken from various locations along the river course.

The NCMM has also written to the Federal Ministry of Environment as well as Ministry of Mines and Steel Development for intervention in regulating the mining activity in Osun State.

The Osun State Government has also carried out Radio sensitization programmes to alert the community of safety precautions for using the water presently.

There are no other conservation issues that may have an impact on the outstanding universal value of the property. Some significant progress has been made over the past two years in conserving the key attributes that contribute to the outstanding universal value of the site, mitigating threats while ensuring sustainable management of the site.

**4. IN CONFORMITY WITH PARAGRAPH 172 OF THE OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES, DESCRIBE ANY POTENTIAL MAJOR RESTORATIONS, ALTERATIONS AND/OR NEW CONSTRUCTIONS INTENDED WITHIN THE PROPERTY, THE BUFFER ZONE AND/OR CORRIDORS OR OTHER AREAS, WHERE SUCH DEVELOPMENTS MAY AFFECT THE OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE OF THE PROPERTY, INCLUDING AUTHENTICITY AND INTEGRITY**

Beyond the routine restoration of sculptures and shrines, there are no other major restorations, alteration or new constructions on the property that may have any effect on its outstanding universal value.

## **5. PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE STATE OF CONSERVATION REPORT**

The State Party has no objections to the granting of public access by UNESCO to this report.

## **6. SIGNATURE OF THE AUTHORITY**

Name: **Victoria N. Osuagwu**

Designation: **Director, Department of Monuments Heritage and Sites/ World Heritage National Focal Person**

Organization: **National Commission for Museums and Monuments**

Signature: 

Date: **28<sup>th</sup> November, 2022**