

Sukur (Nigeria)

No 938

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Sukur Cultural Landscape
<i>Location</i>	Madagali Local Government Area, Adamawa State
<i>State Party</i>	Nigeria
<i>Date</i>	30 June 1998

Justification by State Party

The Sukur cultural landscape presents an immense potential for research which has a bearing on other African sites. The unsolved mystery of the Nyanga terraces in Mozambique and Zimbabwe as well as questions related to Kenyan terraces may have answers in further research at Sukur. Sukur's domesticated landscape, which is characterized by agricultural terracing, compares favourably with the Philippines rice-terraces. Her unique architecture and stone walls are reminiscent of the Ziea stone walls of Zimbabwe, which have pit structures, like Sukur. All these represent a living heritage as well as a unique effort of indigenous innovation and engineering unequalled in West Africa.

Criterion i

The Sukur cultural landscape is also unique in its inbuilt cultural components, which do not exist in the Philippines terraces nor in such complexity in the Kofyar of the Jos Plateau. The components include graves, furnaces, shrines, stone walls, and paved ways. These features make the Sukur landscape an unusual symbiotic interaction between nature and culture, the dead and the living, the past and the present, charging the whole landscape that is lacking in the silent but scenic Philippines environment.

Criteria ii and iii

The threshing floors, unique stone-built conical walk-in wells, and the iron-smelting furnaces are ingeniously adapted to a seemingly impossible ecological niche and exemplify the African's unique spiritual and physical resilience and adaptive skills, asserting his/her identity on the surface of the earth, thus contributing in a unique way in fostering the ongoing process of local development within the context of globalism.

Criteria v and vi

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*. It is also a *cultural landscape* as defined in paragraph 39

of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

History and Description

History

The evidence for Neolithic occupation of Sukur is slight, but a pre-Sukur Iron Age phase is shown by finds of furnaces, ore, and grindstones.

The present Dur dynasty of chiefs was established in the 17th century. It saw Sukur becoming a major iron-producing region, supplying north-eastern Nigeria with a vital raw material. This phase continued until the first decade of the 20th century. However, between 1912 and 1922 Sukur was subjected to raids and devastation at the hands of Hamman Yaje, the Fulbe Lamido (chief) of nearby Madagali.

Iron smelting continued to decline in the colonial and independence period, ending around 1960. As a result there were substantial migrations of Sukur people from the plateau to the plains lying to north and south.

Description

The Sukur cultural landscape is situated on a plateau in north-eastern Nigeria, close to the frontier with Cameroon. It is an area that has been occupied for many centuries, and its inhabitants have left abundant traces on the present-day landscape. The nominated area covers 764.40ha.

The *Hidi's Palace* or house complex of the *Hidi* (chief), the harem section of which is now in ruins, is of considerable political and religious significance for the Sukur people. Covering just under 1ha, its layout and siting on the hillside high above the settlements of the ordinary people are symbolic of the authority and power of the ruler. The buildings that make up the circular enclosure are relatively simple in design, and constructed of the local granite. Some of the large stones, such as the monoliths that flank one of the gates, are very large and were brought to the site over long distances.

Leading up to the Palace complex from the north and east there are *paved walkways*, 5-7m wide and made from slabs of the same granite that was used within the Palace itself. Within and around complex there are also paved paths, but composed of much larger slabs.

The *domesticated landscape* of the Sukur plateau is characterized by the extensive terracing, of a type known elsewhere in Nigeria (eg the lands of the Koma of the Atlantica Mountains in the Nigeria-Cameroon frontier zone and the Kofyar hill farmers of the Jos Plateau). However, the Sukur terraces have a sacred quality that is lacking in these purely functional terraced landscapes. The Sukur terraces are said to be the product of social organizations whose working parties maintained and progressively extended them. Whilst primarily intended to provide level areas for agriculture, they are invested with a spiritual significance, as shown by the many sacred trees, entrances, and ritual sites within them.

The villages in the Sukur cultural landscape, situated on low-lying ground below the Hidi Palace, have their own characteristic *domestic architecture*. Among its features are drystone walls, used as social markers and defensive enclosures, sunken animal (principally bull) pens, granaries, and threshing floors. Again, the local granite is the main

source of constructional materials. The living huts are simple circular structures made out of clay with roofs of thatch and woven mats. Integrated groups are surrounded by low drystone walls.

The traditional *cemeteries* are to be found in the hills. The tombs are simple stone structures, and different clans and social had their own cemeteries. The only exceptions were for the *Hidi*, whose bodies were buried within their own palace complexes, and children, who were buried close to the settlement.

Of considerable social and economic importance are the *wells*. These are below-ground structures surmounted by conical stone structures and surrounded by an enclosure wall. Within these domestic animals such as cattle and sheep were fattened, either for consumption by the family or for use as prestige and status symbols used in gift and marriage exchanges.

The remains of many disused *iron-smelting furnaces* can still be found. These shaft-type furnaces, blown with bellows, were usually sited close to the houses of their owners. However, it is clear that iron production involved complex socio-economic relationships and that there was a considerable ritual associated with it.

There is a number of *shrines* and altars in the Sukur cultural landscape. Many of these are ceramic and there is a concentration of them in and around the Hidi Palace.

The landscape as a whole is an integrated one, which symbolizes the political and economic structure of the Sukur people. Authority, in the form of the Hidi, is located in an elevated position overlooking the mass of the people in their low-lying villages. Complex social relationships can be observed in the disposition of the cemeteries, whilst the relationships between iron furnaces and settlements and within the agricultural terraces illustrate an elaborate economic pattern of production and distribution.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Local agreements have been reached with the Hidi-in-Council to the effect that the entire nominated property of the Sukur cultural landscape should be declared a State Monument, and this has now been gazetted by the Adamawa State Government.

This has the effect of automatically empowering the National Commission for Monuments and Museums (NCMM), under the provisions of Decree No 77 of 1979, to protect it as part of the National Patrimony and to participate in its management.

Management

Ownership in the Sukur cultural landscape is vested in the Hidi-in-Council and District Head of Sukur, under the aegis of the Madagali Local Government of Adamawa State.

By virtue of the powers conferred upon it by Decree No 77 of 1979, the NCMM has overall responsibility for management, together with the World Heritage Committee of the Nigerian National Commission for UNESCO. The NCMM maintains a resident archaeologist on-site, with relevant support staff. It collaborates closely with the

Adamawa State Council for Arts and Culture, the Madagali Local Government Council, and the Sukur Development Association.

The NCMM is about to set up a Sites and Monuments Department, which will be responsible for the management of Sukur. This department will implement the interim management plan now in force, which concentrates on the development and conservation of the site, measures against erosion, an inventory of the cultural heritage, restoration of those buildings most at risk, and identification of signage needs. The local community is closely involved in all these activities through the Sukur Development Association.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The practice of plastering parts of the Hidi's Palace was discontinued half-a-century ago. As a result there has been some disintegration of the structure, which is in need of limited conservation using traditional techniques. However, the occupied section is in a good state of repair.

The traditional prison and the former execution site, neither of which is still in use, are partly ruined and in need of conservation and possible reconstruction. Maintenance of the paved ways is carried out annually by local people, but some stretches are in need of more radical repairs.

One iron-smelting furnace has been reconstructed and used for experimental firings. The local Sukur community, with some support from the Adamawa State Arts Council, has established a small on-site museum.

Declaration of the Sukur cultural landscape as part of the National Patrimony means that there is now supervision of conservation and protection measures by the NCMM. However, these will continue to be provided primarily by the traditional owners and users of the property.

Authenticity

The key features of this cultural landscape have not been significantly modified since they were laid down. The way in which they have been maintained since that time has been in traditional form using traditional materials and techniques. It may therefore be asserted that the Sukur cultural landscape has an exceptionally high degree of authenticity and integrity.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Sukur in May 1999.

Qualities

The Sukur cultural landscape is an organically evolved landscape (as defined in paragraph 39.ii of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*) that faithfully reflects the social structure, religious beliefs, and economic base of the society that created it centuries ago and continues to live within it. The settlement and landscape of Sukur are representative of the traditional societies of this region of West Africa. Sukur has been exposed to no adverse external influences since its foundation and its continuance should be assured by the continuation of traditional practices combined with statutory protection.

Comparative analysis

The terraced landscape at Sukur with its hierarchical structure and combination of intensive and extensive farming is not unique. It exists elsewhere in Nigeria, practised by the Kofyar hill farmers of the Jos Plateau, and comparable systems are to be found in the Nuba lands of the Sudan and, further afield, among Amerindian peoples of the Americas. However, it has certain exceptional features that are not to be found elsewhere, notably the use of paved tracks and the spiritual content of the terraces, with their ritual features.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

The ICOMOS mission was carried out by an expert from a neighbouring sub-Saharan African country, who stressed the importance and effectiveness of the protection afforded to this cultural landscape by the long-established traditional customs of the local community.

The mission report makes specific proposals:

- The organization of a round table on the future development of Sukur in which government agencies, the local community, tourist bodies, and other potential partners should participate;
- Adoption of a cultural and tourist management plan involving the creation of a body responsible for its implementation, the production of authentic tourist material, the integration of reception and accommodation facilities with the environment, and the development of means of transport appropriate to the landscape and its environment. Part of the revenues from such activities should be committed to the management of the cultural and natural resources of Sukur.

Brief description

The historic terraced landscape of Sukur, with the palace of its ruler on a hill dominating the villages below, its terraced fields and their sacred symbols, and the extensive remains of a former flourishing iron industry, is a remarkably intact physical expression of a society and its spiritual and material culture.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iii, v, and vi*:

Criterion iii Sukur is an exceptional landscape which graphically illustrates a form of land-use that marks a critical stage in human settlement and its relationship with its environment.

Criterion v The cultural landscape of Sukur has survived unchanged for many centuries, and continues to do so at a period when this form of traditional human settlement is under threat in many parts of the world.

Criterion vi The cultural landscape of Sukur is eloquent testimony to a strong and continuing cultural tradition that has endured for many centuries.