

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION – IUCN COMMENTS TO ICOMOS

‡KHOMANI CULTURAL LANDSCAPE (SOUTH AFRICA)

IUCN provides the following brief comments to ICOMOS based on a review of the nomination by the World Heritage Panel, a field mission report and 3 desk reviews.

The nomination comprises the entire area of the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (KGNP) (<https://www.protectedplanet.net/874> - IUCN protected area category not specified). The total area of the nominated property is reported as 959,100 ha, with no buffer zone.

The nominated area forms, with the adjacent area of Gemsbok National Park (GNP) to the north in Botswana, the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (KTP - c 3.6 million ha) with an unfenced boundary between the two parks. To the west, the property is abruptly truncated by the North-South straight line boundary of the border with Namibia, and in Namibia the area comprises game and commercial farms. To the south, KGNP has a fenced border, and adjoins a landscape that is under mixed uses (farming, wildlife ranching, tourism development, villages), which are not intensive. Land use is governed in this area through a system of territorial plans.

No buffer zone has been proposed for the property; the KTP provides a direct buffering function to the north, but otherwise the buffering functions are limited.

Nature conservation values of the nominated property

The nominated property is not nominated under natural criteria, and IUCN has not made a specific assessment of its nature conservation values. The nature conservation values are reported via a short section in the nomination to be significant due to the large intact protected ecosystem of KGNP, and the wider KTP which has been strongly protected from illegal uses and intensive development. It is not clear that these values are at the level sufficient to have considered the application of biodiversity criteria (criteria ix and x), but this could be further considered to see if there might be potential. Neither of the two component parks of KTP has been identified amongst the world's most irreplaceable protected areas for the protection of threatened species; nevertheless a rapid analysis suggests the presence of a range of threatened species and the presence of a large scale and intact functioning ecosystem, including top predators, which is of international conservation significance.

Review information suggests that the wider landscape to the south of the property, which, as discussed below (boundaries), is a crucial element of the ‡Khomani Cultural Landscape, has suffered from threats. According to elders, historically the whole of the Kalahari used to be lush when it was unfenced and migration followed natural patterns. Poaching, possibly including threatened tortoise species and pangolin, is also reported outside KGNP, mainly by outsiders but with some past (early 2000s) reports involving officials. The current situation requires further consideration with the State Party. Fencing is a further notable problem to the south-west of the property with a direct impact on migration routes.

Nature/culture values

The IUCN evaluation and desk reviewers confirm the importance of the connection between the ‡Khomani San people and nature, both due to a high degree of reliance on natural resources, and as a source of community identity. This connection was severed in the nominated property in 1930 when the ‡Khomani San were forcibly removed from the land on the creation of the National Park, and the basis of the nomination is the reestablishment of the connection with nature since the colonial and apartheid period. Their re-emergence is closely linked to knowledge of nature, an historical connection with the territory in and around the nominated property, and economic opportunities associated with landscape and biological knowledge. Despite displacement, remarkable ecological knowledge has persisted and the potential to re-establish intergenerational connections between people and place is real. This is the last original San community in South Africa, and notable for the detail of documentation and the sustained presence on the land and the intergenerational transmission of cultural and language. There has been intergenerational training and passing of knowledge as part of the return of traditional lands. But this is also a fragile situation, and the implementation of a possible World Heritage nomination needs to be addressed to supporting and nurturing these connections.

It is paradoxical that whilst there was clear and inexcusable damage to the ‡Khomani San from their displacement from KGNP, the fact of conservation of nature achieved by the Park also now creates the opportunity to re-establish nature-culture connections for the ‡Khomani San people, provided that the KGNP and its surrounding area is managed in a way that can support and empower the recreation of those connections, and that necessary support is provided to the communities. Reviews also note the importance of assuring that changes to traditional use, including the introduction and management of livestock, are approached with great care to avoid damage to the values of

KGNP. A further key question is how the transition to sedentarism may impact the cultural aspects of the nomination. Analysis of human-wildlife conflicts currently and in the future re livestock-wildlife interactions need to be understood.

One area of concern to IUCN is that it is noted that many of the nature-culture associations of the †Khomani San people are intangible, and there is absence of tangible cultural remains (e.g. rock art) – this creates the same risk of limitations imposed by the World Heritage Convention’s criteria, and the separate treatment of natural and cultural criteria for values that are about the intimate relationship of people living for millennia in harmony with nature, but without significant physical evidence resulting. The possible artificial separation of tangible and intangible heritage may also be problematic. Although (unlike the situation with the nomination of Pimachiowin Aki, Canada) this nomination is for a Cultural Landscape, and not a Mixed Site, it may be important in view of the very notable nature conservation values of the property, that IUCN and ICOMOS should work particularly closely in providing feedback and discussing options with the nominating State Party, and the communities, rightholders and stakeholders who are participating in this nomination.

Boundaries

A crucial issue in the nomination appears to revolve around boundaries. IUCN reviews note that large areas of the landscape that represents the †Khomani relationship with the land, including the places where the †Khomani live, areas of nature conservation significance and areas that are cultural sites, is outside the National Park. Whilst much of this land is owned by non-San private owners, and thus potentially difficult to include in an inscribed area, it seems essential that this area should be more clearly considered as intrinsic to the identification, definition and protection and management of the relationship between the †Khomani San people and nature. This is a matter that ICOMOS should consider in more detail with the State Party, and IUCN will be willing to also further contribute to these discussions. The functioning of buffer arrangements to the south of the property (and transboundary arrangements with Namibia which are little mentioned in the nomination) could also be considered further.

Governance, protection and management

KGNP appears to IUCN to be an effectively managed national park in terms of the task of the conservation of nature. Whilst staffing could be further increased, the current staff is professional and effective, and the park has both a strong level of legal protection, and apparent relatively low levels of threat. As a large area, it appears, particularly in the wider context of KTP, to be delivering effective conservation results.

The nomination makes little reference to governance but this appears to be an essential aspect of the nomination, in particular in relation to the participation of the †Khomani San in the nomination, and the management of the property. IUCN considers that more attention should be given to the existing and intended governance structures, and to define the body/bodies that would be involved in decision taking and how any conflicts would be resolved. It should be clearer how all the different stakeholders and rights-holders will be able to engage with each other to assure their sustained relationships with the nominated property. The IUCN field mission noted the commitment of KGNP to community participation, which entails a Joint Management Board (JMB) and provision for cultural use in different zones within the property. As the result a land claim process part of KGNP has been passed back to full ownership by the Community. The mission further took time, to the extent possible, to verify that there was strong community support, and that appropriate representatives of the community had been met. The participation of the †Khomani in the management of the property remains still at an early stage and needs to be accorded progressive support. The IUCN mission noted that there will be room to improve the functioning of the JMB over time, so that communities are not only consulted but empowered and supported to take a greater role in management and leadership. This will rely on the building of capacity, supporting training needs and intergenerational transfer of knowledge, and the continuation of the evident commitment of the staff of SANParks in this regard.

Within and beyond the nominated property, the †Khomani San community is rich in cultural heritage – both tangible and intangible – but is in a state of chronic poverty and unemployment, and vulnerable to prejudice. It is not a traditional society with robust traditional authority, but a diverse, resettled group of people whose institutions have been weakened by past treatment. ICOMOS should pay particular attention to interrogating the nomination to see how these issues of institutional fragility, human rights vulnerability, and a history of sustained discrimination and poverty are to be dealt with. These matters need approaches that are not the primary responsibility of KGNP, but require a focus in the area where the communities live (notably to the south of the property). Issues include the provision of education; for instance schools do not teach in the mother tongue, Khoekhoegowab, to those that speak it and there are no qualified San school teachers and no integration of traditional ecological knowledge into curricula. There are low tourism numbers at present, so development in this sector needs to be established on the basis of shared benefits with the community and to ensure tourism supports cultural and natural heritage. Training and capacity building needs to be supported, in appropriate ways to enable transgenerational learning and opportunities. The capacity building and economic livelihood strategy needs to be clearly defined and implemented via shared governance and long term institutional and financial support.

In view of both the significant nature conservation values included in the nomination, and the indivisible relationship between the †Khomani San people and the nature of their traditional lands that is at the heart of the nomination, IUCN will be willing to continue to work jointly with ICOMOS during the conclusion of the evaluation of this nomination, and its discussion by the World Heritage Committee.