

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION PERIODIC REPORT
PART I

1.1 INTRODUCTION

- a. State party/Country**
Republic of Seychelles
- b. Year of ratification or acceptance of the Convention**
1977
- c. Organisation or entity responsible for the preparation of the report**
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- d. Date of report**
November 2001
- e. Signature on behalf of the State Party**

Ronny JUMEAU
MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT
November 2001

1.2 IDENTIFICATION OF CULTURAL AND NATURAL PROPERTIES

a. National inventories

Seychelles Islands Foundation (SIF) is responsible for the preparation and updating of national inventories and lists, and initiating necessary research or scientific studies such assessments would entail.

Prior to inscription on the World Heritage list, (1982/83), a description of natural properties was prepared as part of the nomination process. The inventory of natural features at both sites is still valid. The SIF Executive Officer recommends an update of the inventory of natural World Heritage properties and tentative lists, as per the schedules cited in the Convention. This proposal will be put forward to the Seychelles National Commission for UNESCO (SNCU) early 2002.

The identification of cultural values that would meet criteria listed in article 2 of the Convention in view of submission to the World Heritage Committee will also be proposed to the SNCU.

b. Tentative List

An updated tentative list of natural or cultural properties has not previously been submitted. The Seychelles Islands Foundation is currently responsible for identifying and delineating World Heritage properties in liaison with relevant authorities and stakeholders.

c. Nominations

Nominations are prepared at National level via the Ministry of Environment in liaison with the SNCU and in consultation with relevant local authorities. Any difficulties in reaching a national consensus would stem from conflicting interests among some stakeholders, particularly those who hold vested interests in certain commercial enterprises in the areas of tourism or fishing, which a World Heritage nomination would prohibit. A stakeholders meeting is a useful mechanism to involve all relevant parties and to facilitate co-operation in the nomination process.

1.3 PROTECTION, CONSERVATION AND PRESENTATION OF CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

a. General Policy development

The Seychelles Islands Foundation operates under the mandate of a 14 member Board of Trustees, which currently consists of 7 members representing local government authorities, and always includes not less than 5 members representing organisations concerned with the conservation of wildlife and natural history or national academic of science. Three of the local government members including the Chairman represent the Ministry of Environment through which policy planning and development activities are initiated and implemented. The SIF

Scientific Sub-Committee provides a body of consultants which liaises with site managers.

Policies relating to environment protection are determined by the Seychelles government in liaison with the SIF Board of Trustees in relation to matters of the World Heritage sites. These policies are meant to provide protection, conservation, presentation and transmission of future generations of the natural heritage.

Management policies at site level have been integrated into a seven-year management plan for Aldabra produced by local consultants, which runs from 1998 – 2005. The development of a management plan for Vallee de Mai is currently in progress. A consultant has been contracted and local stakeholders meetings were held in 2001. Completion date of the management plan is anticipated late 2001.

Community function

There is no local population permanently residing at the Aldabra Research Station. Due to the remote location and lack of development on Aldabra, the current management plan does not include policies to accommodate community involvement at the site.

Since Vallee de Mai lies in the heart of the local community on the island of Praslin, the completed management plan will incorporate provisions for an active function in community life.

National Development plan/conservation strategy

There is a comprehensive national strategy for the environmental protection of all the islands of Seychelles. Both sites are currently covered under the umbrella of the second national Environment Management Plan for Seychelles (EMPS), which currently runs from 2000 – 2010. This management plan details programmes structured to enhance environmental protection of Seychelles as a whole.

This is the second EMPS for Seychelles, the first that ran from 1990 – 2000, and resulted in 90% of programmes being successfully implemented. The first EMPS tackled such difficult issues as the dismantling the Hawksbill turtle trade, which directly effected preservation of an important animal species which inhabits Aldabra Nature Reserve.

While EMPS management programmes for Aldabra primarily fall under the framework of Outer Islands Biodiversity, and the Vallee de Mai under Developed Islands, both sites are protected under various programmes incorporated in the EMPS; from National Parks and Wildlife Conservation to Coastal Management.

One of the fundamental principles adopted in designing the new EMPS is that the process should also lead to a greater capacity to understand, monitor and cope with emerging environmental issues. Its development has called upon greater public participation in the hope of incorporating new ideas and innovations for improved sustainable development in the country.

b. Status of services for protection, conservation and presentation

The Ministry of Environment provides services for protection, conservation, and presentation which supplements those provided by SIF in the management of World Heritage Sites.

Resources

Adequate human resources have been maintained at both sites to conduct rudimentary maintenance, conservation and monitoring activities, but more scientific input is required.

All current posts are filled under contract by the SIF. Some foreign nationals are contracted for specialised posts that cannot be readily filled locally due to a shortage of qualified personnel. A volunteer programme also provides temporary overseas staff. Special project staff are occasionally provided by the Ministry of Environment. A staff exchange programme in liaison with other local nature reserves was initiated in 2001.

c. Scientific and technical studies and research

Listed below are some of the more significant scientific studies, which have taken place at both sites since inscription on the World Heritage list, with emphasis on more recent studies. Numerous scientific studies were conducted by the Royal Society, UK prior to 1979, many of which have been continued under SIF management.

1) Vallee de Mai

Black Parrot population: 1982 - Present

Buffer zone study: 2000

Vegetation monitoring: 2000

Coco de Mer ecology: 2000 – present

Coco de Mer census: 1995 & 2001

2) Aldabra

Hydrographical & Topographic study: 1995

Endemic avian fauna studies: 1999 - present

Turtle monitoring: 1979 - present

Marine programme: 2000 - present

Tortoise population: 1995 - 1997 & 2000

Drongo ecology: 1997 - present

Vegetation dynamics: 1997

Beach Erosion: 1995

Sea Bird Population: 2000

The results of all scientific studies are available to site managers and the local and international scientific community upon publication. These results are quite useful to publicize and promote protection and conservation of the sites.

Information related to the results of these studies have been published in reports, relayed to the local media, and discussed at seminars and conferences. Plans are currently underway to make such information available on the SIF website.

A well-defined methodology for the application of data extracted from scientific monitoring projects is required with more focus on setting targets and achieving goals. SIF is currently participating in a 4 year UNESCO/IUCN project aimed at the enhancement of management and monitoring skills. It is hoped that sound systems for managing and monitoring these sites are further developed and sustained.

d. Measures for identification, protection, conservation, presentation and rehabilitation.

Legislation and policy

Under current legislation Aldabra is classified as a Special Nature Reserve. Within this legal framework the site is defined as: “an area set aside in which characteristic wildlife requires protection in which all other interest and activities are subordinated to this end.”

The development of more comprehensive protection policies is required at the Vallee de Mai Nature Reserve. Currently the site is protected under polices governing nature reserves, under the jurisdictions of the National Parks and Nature Conservancy Act (1982), and the Wild Bird & Animal Protection Act (1961). This legislation does not provide restrictions for the enforcement of certain regulations imposed by SIF, which would provide greater protection to the Reserve. An ideal example would be the no-smoking ban imposed by SIF, which would be strengthened by government legislation.

Both sites are protected under the Environmental Protection Act (1994).

The legislation under which the sites are respectively governed is adequate to secure the protection, conservation, and presentation of the natural heritage. A more active regulatory body would be useful in ensuring objectives are accurately identified and met.

Restoration and rehabilitation

Restoration and rehabilitation of facilities at Aldabra atoll is one of the immediate priorities of SIF in order to improve the site’s potential to earn sufficient revenue to fully support conservation activities. At present the site relies heavily on revenue earned from tourism at the Vallee de Mai site.

In September 2000 the Board of Trustees sanctioned an increase in the visitors landing fee for Aldabra from Sr 250 per day per person (\$US 50), to US\$ 100 per day per person. Notification was posted 12 months in advance of the increase and the new rates took effect from September 2001.

Community involvement

On the whole, there has been insufficient involvement from the private sector at both sites. As of the year 2000, efforts have been made to raise the profile of SIF as a non-governmental organisation and promote greater involvement from

private organisations and the community at large. As a result of promotional events, media publications, and the web site launched in 2001, some progress is being made which is evident with the increase of donations from private organisations.

Other international conventions concerning the protection of the heritage signed or ratified by the State Party: -

- Convention on Biological Diversity (1992)
- Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992)
- Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (1973)
- Convention on the Prevention of Pollution of Ships (1973/78)
- Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine Coastal Environment of the Eastern African Region (1985)

The above biodiversity related conventions are coordinated and integrated into national policies and planning via the EMPS.

Scientific and technical measures taken to protect conserve and present the natural heritage.

A broad range of monitoring programme are on-going at Aldabra atoll, regulated by the SIF Scientific Sub-Committee and the SIF Board of Trustees, and implemented by SIF staff. The Division of Environment makes a significant contribution by way of technical assistance with conservation projects, where funds are raised independently.

SIF is in the process of building relationships with overseas institutions of learning such as the University of Cambridge in the UK and the University of Cape Town in South Africa, where assistance has been provided for the implementation of specific research projects. The Royal Society of London also provides some resources in this respect.

In December 2000 a Scientific Workshop was held on Aldabra, attended by a group of international scientists with extensive experience and expertise on the science of the atoll. A significant publication resulting from the workshop is to be produced in 2001

Media use to diffuse information

- Commercial books have been published locally in recent years entitled: "Focus on Aldabra" 1991, (currently out of print), "Aldabra World Heritage Sites" 1995, both by the SIF and Vallee de Mai, 1992 (out of print) by the current Executive Director.
- A new SIF brochure is in progress for publication 2001.
- In 2001 a web site was launched as an international information base and will be updated every 6 months.
- A film on both World Heritage sites was released by SIF in May 2001 for general distribution.
- An annual report reflecting the year 2001 will be published early 2002.
- The national newspapers and television news regularly report on all events related to both World Heritage sites.

e. Training

Staff training needs have been somewhat neglected over recent years. A capacity building programme is much needed but little progress has taken place thus far. Funding is currently being sought to invest in a training programme for SIF staff.

The education system in Seychelles provides education to polytechnic level, which limits further education to private funding, some government funded schemes and overseas scholarship. The new national curriculum includes environmental education, and has been greatly encouraged at national level. This development will hopefully provide future candidates for careers in fields of environmental science and ecology.

World Heritage Site staff training needs were identified in a report produced by the SIF Executive Officer in 2001 for staff on Aldabra and SIF administration. It is thought that staff at the Vallee de Mai would benefit from similar types of training as identified for the other two groups and could be trained as part of the same programme, should funding be made available for a long term staff training project. It is hoped that SIF's efforts to promote ties with international universities will generate capacity building opportunities.

Current site staff have not received specific heritage training, with the exception of two staff attending a workshop in April 2001 on World Heritage periodic

reporting. In July 2001 three staff attended a workshop on Enhancing World Heritage.

1.4 INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND FUND RAISING

Publications or documents, which would help other countries, promote and improve the application of the guidelines of the World Heritage Convention

- Aldabra Atoll Management Plan 1998 - 2005
- Environment Management Plan for Seychelles 2000- 2001

Bilateral or multilateral activities for the protection and conservation of World Heritage

Neither site is twinned with another at national or international level but there are certain issues that arise in relation to conservation infringements on other territories where international cooperation is warranted.

- **Exclusive Economic sea territory zone cooperative with Tanzania**
A sea zone less than 200 miles separating the two countries is to be equally designated as the domain of the respective countries. Finalisation of this agreement is still in progress
- **Turtle tag returns**
By informal unilateral agreement, neighbouring countries in the region supply tag returns, which provide information on migrating animals from Seychelles.

National, public or private foundations or specific site foundation for protection and conservation.

The Seychelles Islands Foundation was established in 1979 to manage and conserve the natural life on Aldabra. In 1989 the management of Valle de Mai was transferred to SIF. Prior to 1979, the Royal Society in the UK managed Aldabra atoll for 13 years. To date the Society provides an annual contribution of 5,000 Pound Sterling toward scientific activities for Aldabra.

In 1999 SIF set-up a fundraising committee, which had not been very active. The SIF Executive Officer was newly delegated this responsibility in 2001 and is endeavouring to raise funds from various sources.

Government assistance

The Government of Seychelles provides an annual contribution of Sr 100,000 towards management of both sites in addition to funds allocated to the Ministry of Environment for national conservation work, of which The World Heritage sites benefit to some degree. The Government also allows a provision for duty free imports on goods and fuel to SIF.

The government also offers financial assistance to SIF by way of tax-free funds from the sale of a quantity of Coco de Mer nuts harvested from the Vallee de Mai Reserve. SIF are obliged to sell all the Coco de Mer harvested to the government at a nominal cost, and allowed to buy back up to half at a pre-determined mark up for sale to the public. Similarly, the government allows SIF to make use of tax-free revenue from visitor's ticket sales. In addition, the government encourages corporate donors by listing SIF under the 7th schedule of the Business Tax Act (1995), whereby donations to the Foundation qualify for deduction of 200% from the assessable income of the donor. No other fundraising activities have been initiated by the government or funds provided for other countries.

There is no formal advisory mechanism between the SIF and any governmental department responsible for training. There is a productive partnership between the Ministry of Environment and the SIF in terms of sharing expertise and some training opportunities.

The Government has not made any other voluntary contributions locally or globally to improve the work on the Convention. Seychelles is currently up to date with World Heritage Fund contributions. Previously Seychelles was in arrears, an issue that was rectified in 1999. In June 2001 the SIF. Board of Trustees designated the responsibility for payments of annual contributions to SIF.

1.5 EDUCATION, INFORMATION AND AWARENESS BUILDING

National policy encourages programmes and activities that educate and raise public awareness about environmental issues in general, through the media and the Ministries of Education and Environment in particular, which accommodates World Heritage values. Many of these programme are aimed at young people at secondary level via environmental activities and clubs. Many of these youth groups visit the Vallee de Mai site frequently, and some participate in volunteer programmes aimed at enhancement of the reserve. In the year 2000, an annual exhibition was launched nation wide for the promotion of greater awareness and participation in conservation issues involving the Vallee de Mai site.

An annual Eco school competition sponsored by SIF in league with a private sector organisation encourages children in the community to be environmentally active. The grand prize is a one-week trip to Aldabra Atoll Nature Reserve. SIF also offers an annual two-month visit to Aldabra for the two best polytechnic students in the fields of biology and geography. SIF believe that these school trips are an investment in the local youth and may inspire young visitors to later embark upon a career in conservation of the Aldabra Reserve.

To date Seychelles does not participate in the UNESCO Special Project for World Heritage Preservation and Promotion.

1.6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDED ACTION

Identification of cultural and natural heritage properties

Both properties were originally identified for their natural heritage values, which remain in tact. There is a need for regular national inventories and lists to ascertain whether the State Party has maintained these properties in line with the Convention, and to ensure that the properties still meet the criteria for which they were nominated as World Heritage Sites.

Within the limitations of the available resources of a small developing country, adequate facilities and mechanisms are in place for the protection, conservation, and presentation of the natural heritage of both sites, though they could greatly benefit from greater resources towards development, conservation management and continued sustainability of natural resources. More intensive scientific input and the enhancement of ecotourism facilities on Aldabra atoll would greatly contribute to the overall management objectives.

International cooperation has been forthcoming but is limited to non-monetary contributions. The SIF presently have the primary responsibility for fund raising, which needs to be pursued more aggressively and with more focus on raising international support. Perhaps the government could assist in this direction and should be proposed at SIF Board level for presentation at a national level.

Greater awareness of SIF as an organisation and its activities needs to be brought into the limelight at a national and international level. This is currently being activated with publications in the media, SIF books, bi-annual newsletters and the new website. Forming greater ties with international universities will also increase education, information and awareness building of the SIF goals and initiatives, which as a whole are compatible with the main objectives of the World Heritage Convention.