

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 a basement complex of pre-Cambrian rocks, from which the fairly fertile clay-loam soil 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 in particular and the Yoruba people in general. 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 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, the Adunni Olorisa Trust Foundation (AOTF) 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.

An example of this is seen in the combined efforts to clean, clear and reclaim the River bed from refuse washed down-stream from upstream areas and at erosion sites along the river's course.

Additionally routine maintenance of thatch roofs of shrines, traditional wall motifs and other sculptures including treatment against termite and other insect attacks are carried out by NCMM and AOTF. In 2023, the Osun State Government made significant financial contributions to support restoration works and give the grove a 'face-lift' before the annual Osun Osogbo Festival held in August. The Osun State Government has also made renewed commitment to help divert the bisecting road.

In August 2023, a joint Reactive Monitoring Mission by UNESCO/ICOMOS/ICCROM was carried out. However over 5 months after, there has been no report sent to the State Party for necessary follow-up action of key stakeholder and management issues.

2. RESPONSE TO THE DECISIONS OF THE WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

3) As a follow-up to this extensive digital documentation, a document of interventions as they relate to maintenance and repairs in detailing material context and changes over time is being developed by AOT and NCMM.

4) The review and updating of the management plan has been put on hold pending the report of the Reactive Monitoring Mission of August 2023. Outputs from the report are to be included in the updated Management Plan in several areas as a result of stakeholders' deliberations on the report and responses.

5) Discussions are still ongoing with the Ataoja of Osogbo land to outline details of this agreement.

6) Discussions are still ongoing with the Osun State Government on this issue and based on a recent letter of commitment from the State on the subject.

7) The waters of the Osun River within the grove **are not polluted**. Change of seasons affects water volume which may make the water clearer or cloudy in appearance. This is not an indication of pollution. The use of the water for several ceremonial and ritual practices by devotees is an integral part of the living heritage and religious practices of the site that give credence to its OUV as well as its intangible cultural heritage. There continues to be public awareness and enlightenment to prevent dumping of refuse upstream. Devotees have also been encouraged in recent times through radio jingles and other news media to boil the water before use. A new set of water tests have been requested from the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), who are the federal agency responsible for such activity.

8) This claim has been investigated by NESREA and detailed reports are pending. **IT'S IMPORTANT TO NOTE**, that there have been no valid or published test results to support this claim. The claims also do not refer to any documented incidence within the Osun grove, neither have there being any public health outcry or incidence related to water pollution traced to the grove. However, in addressing the issue of illegal mining upstream and at great distance outside the grove, the Federal Ministry of Environment and Federal Ministry of Mines and Steels have taken actions to curtail and dislodge illegal miners in the region.

9) It has been established during the Reactive Monitoring Mission (**which report is still being expected**) and by previous State of Conservation Reports (2022 and 2021), that cement has always been a basic material used by Suzanne Wenger. Some sculptures are made entirely

of cement and iron rods. This knowledge as well as understanding of the spiritual context of materials has been passed down to the current generation of New Sacred Artists, the group founded and mentored by Suzanne Wenger to carry on her works. These artists have been and continue to be integral to all conservation and maintenance works carried out by AOT and NCMM.

The Authenticity of the sculptures and shrines has not been affected or tampered with. A formal Conservation Strategy document, which in essence the efforts and approach to preservation adopted by AOT and NCMM is being developed as part of the conclusion of the NFiT grant. This will be sent to the World Heritage Center in due course.

10) The failure to report the collapse of Busanyin Shrine due to impact of periodic floods is regrettable and an oversight. This is partly due to the fact that the shrine is not in the core area although it is of great importance to a sect of the devotees of the Osun goddess. The extensive digital documentation of the shrine as well as the Flood Mitigation Masterplan based on digital modeling have been successfully completed with the support of the United States Ambassadors Fund. The Flood Mitigation Masterplan/ proposal will be sent to the World Heritage Center while a search continues for funding to support its execution. In the interim local flood control measures are in place while the priestess of the shrine and her acolytes have been sensitized to the issues and is working in collaboration with NCMM and AOT to protect the site and monitor the river levels.

11) The fragility of the shrine, river and the natural forest are a reflection of the balance between nature, culture and other human activities which has existed for decades and is now better managed through the instrument of the Site Conservation Management Plan. There are **no extreme threats** and therefore no basis for the consideration of “*extreme fragility*.” There remains an active monitoring of the site and its OUV features as a result of the collaboration of the NCMM, AOT, the Ataoja-in-Council, Osun State Government and other key stakeholders who are concerned about the preservation of this site and its associated customs, which have significance for Yoruba’s across the world beyond its World Heritage status.

There are of course challenges which have been identified and are being addressed, however, **it is important to note that the OUV of the site is not threatened!**

12) THE STATE PARTY IS CONCERNED THAT MORE THAN 5 MONTHS AFTER THE JOINT REACTIVE MONITORING MISSION WAS COMPLETED SUCCESSFULLY, THERE IS STILL NO REPORT MADE AVAILABLE TO THE STATE PARTY FOR FURTHER ACTION.

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

There are no other conservation issues that impact on the site and its Outstanding Universal Value at present beyond what has been discussed.

Some significant progress has been made over the 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: Abubakar Usman

Designation: Ag. Director, Department of Heritage Services/ World Heritage National Focal Person

Organization: National Commission for Museums and Monuments

Signature: 

Date: 21st February, 2024