
The Gedeo Cultural Landscape

(Ethiopia)

No 1641

1 Basic information

Official name as proposed by the State Party

The Gedeo Cultural Landscape

Location

Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State

Ethiopia

Brief description

Lying along the eastern margin of the southern Main Ethiopian Rift on the steep escarpments of the Ethiopian highlands, the Gedeo Cultural Landscape is an area of agroforestry characterised by multilayer cultivation with large trees sheltering indigenous *enset*, the main food crop, under which grow coffee, the main cash crop, and other shrubs. The area is densely populated by members of the Gedeo people whose traditional knowledge underpins the forest regimes. Within the cultivated mountain slopes are small areas of sacred forest traditionally used by local communities for rituals associated with the Gedeo religion. And along the mountain ridges are found dense clusters of megalithic monuments, which came to be revered by the Gedeo and cared for by their elders.

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*.

In terms of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (2021)* paragraph 47, it has also been nominated as a *cultural landscape*.

Included in the Tentative List

28 January 2020

Background

This is a new nomination.

Consultations and technical evaluation mission

Desk reviews have been provided by ICOMOS International Scientific Committees, members and independent experts.

Comments on the natural attributes of this nominated property, their conservation and their management were received from IUCN on 4 March 2022 and have been incorporated into the relevant sections of this report.

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the nominated property from 19 September to 1 October 2021.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent to the State Party on 5 October 2021 requesting further information about the maps, the comparative analysis and boundaries, the megalithic monuments, the justification for the criteria, the Gedeo cultivation, the protection, the management, and the documentation.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 12 November 2021.

An Interim Report was provided to the State Party on 20 December 2021 summarising the issues identified by the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel.

Further information was requested in the Interim Report including: the agroforestry practices, the documentation, the sustainable land use plan, and the megalithic monuments.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 23 February 2022.

All additional information received has been incorporated into the relevant sections of this evaluation report.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

9 March 2022

2 Description of the nominated property

Note: The nomination dossier and additional information contain detailed descriptions of this property, its history and its state of conservation. Due to limitations on the length of evaluation reports, this report provides only a short summary of the most relevant aspects.

Description and history

Spread along the eastern escarpment of the Ethiopian highlands, the nominated property is home to just over a quarter of a million Gedeo people.

The steep mountain slopes of the property, the abundant alluvial rivers and the fertile soils together support long-standing agroforestry practices based on trees and shrubs combined with crops and livestock. The indigenous *enset* is the main food crop and coffee is now the main cash crop. These are grown together with other indigenous trees, root crops, shrubs, etc., each species occupying a distinct layer.

There is evidence that *enset* has been cultivated in Ethiopia for at least 5,000 years in the south-west of the country, but authors differ as to which particular group of people were the first to cultivate the crop. While the Gedeo are Indigenous to Ethiopia and have been associated with the cultivation of *enset* for perhaps a few thousand years, oral traditions suggest that they moved to the southwest from the north sometime during the last

two millennia, and, since their arrival, have migrated around the area including in the recent past, as a response to population growth. At the end of the 19th century they looked for new territory beyond the chain of hills running southward along the Rift Valley escarpment that they then inhabited, and expanded southwards and eastwards into Guji territory with settlers establishing agroforestry practices in the new forest areas. Quite when the current community arrived in the nominated area is not fully documented.

The Gedeo communities who practice this agroforestry system are still largely guided by indigenous knowledge, and traditional institutions including the *Songo*, or Council of elders, as well as the *Ballee* system that regulates interaction with nature. The Gedeo people believe in Mageno, the one and only one Supreme Being who created all living things and who manifests Himself in the nature he created. Parts of the natural forest are set aside as sacred areas for ritual purposes, where no trees are felled or cultivation practised, and indigenous tree species have been preserved.

The incorporation of coffee into this traditional system appears to be quite recent. Although coffee originated in the southwest highlands of Ethiopia, it was mostly gathered from wild coffee forests until the early years of the 20th century when communities were obliged by landowners to cultivate coffee as a valuable cash crop. Over the past one hundred years, the percentage of coffee cultivated alongside food crops has increased in the forest areas.

The overall agroforestry system is seen as a testimony to Indigenous peoples who, with their ecological knowledge and local culture, achieve a balance between environmental management and subsistence farming that is capable of sustaining high densities of people. The initiative for inscription came from the elders of the community who some ten years ago urged support for a nomination which, if successful, could recognise the very specific local practices as well as offer support to sustain them for their cultural, environmental and social benefits. Within the property are many clusters of megalithic steles mainly on high ridges, which, until the mid-1930s, were associated with rituals and annual sacrificial ceremonies.

Only three clusters are seen to be part of the nomination: Tuto-fela (320 steles), Chelba-tutiti (1,530 steles), and Sede-merkato (663 steles). While some steles sites were used for burials, the original purpose of these sites remains unclear, as does when the steles were erected and which community was responsible for their construction. There is currently no evidence to link the Gedeo people with their creation. The nomination dossier suggested a construction date sometime between the 8th and 15th centuries CE, but during the course of the evaluation, findings were published of radio-carbon dating at the Sakaro Sodo site, just outside the property, which suggest a much earlier date of the 1st century CE.

In 2010, fifty-two megalithic sites were documented through surveys in Gedeo but additional sites await documentation as there have not yet been exhaustive surveys away from main paved road running north to south through the property. The nomination dossier acknowledges the need for more surveys, as well as documentation and research of the megaliths. What also needs to be clearly established, is how the comparatively small number within the nominated property relate to a very much larger number of megaliths in a wide 1,000-kilometre long band in southwest Ethiopia. Currently, except for the already inscribed site of Tiya, Ethiopia (1980, criteria (i) and (iv)) which lies to the north of the nominated property, none of the south Ethiopian sites have been studied in detail. Given the very high numbers that may exist, perhaps several thousands, it will take many years for a clearer picture to emerge. Meanwhile the steles are vulnerable. Some 10,000 individual steles were said to be extant in the wider Gedeo Zone at the beginning of the 20th century, and now only around a hundred clusters still survive.

Two prehistoric rock art sites are also present in the property and their images reflect pastoral communities, perhaps precursors of those who created the steles.

Within the property are several hundred settlements. No details of these were provided in the nomination dossier but their disposition was indicated in an annotated satellite map of the property submitted as part of supplementary information. Outside the settlements, almost all the nominated area is covered by agroforestry except for around 0.5 percent of natural forest, now maintained by Gedeo elders for its sacred and ritual importance.

The nominated property has an area of 296.2 square kilometres; there is no buffer zone as it is stated that there is no difference between the landscape within the property boundaries and the landscape beyond, as both are part of the Gedeo Zone.

The Gedeo people were absorbed into the Ethiopian Empire in the 1890s. Under the feudal system that prevailed until 1975 they had to deliver a proportion of their produce to their overlords. And from the 1920s the community was obliged to increase the cultivation of coffee as a valuable cash crop.

In 1950s Christian missionaries came to the area, established churches, and exerted far-reaching changes. Today some forty percent of the Gedeo population is Protestant Christian, while those who maintain the Gedeo religion make up about a quarter.

Over the past half century, a combination of a rapid increase in population and changes in religion have combined to weaken traditional practices and to put the traditional social systems under stress, to a degree that threatens their long-standing resilience.

State of conservation

Although the layered cultivation practices can support much large numbers of people than other types of cultivation, compared on an area by area basis, and has possibly the highest rural population in Africa living on finite natural resources, there are limits to the intensity of cultivation and where it can be practiced. ICOMOS notes that in the nominated property those limits have been more than reached in response to social and economic changes and particularly a combination of population growth, the loss of land to new settlements, and the introduction of new crops, such as khat and sugarcane. Cultivation has been extended higher and higher up the mountain slopes (advancing some 200 metres in twenty years) to areas that are both ecologically and geologically unsustainable and could lead to disastrous landslides. And within the agroforestry area, non-indigenous species such as eucalyptus are being planted. Cultivation is even threatening the sacred forests and while small areas do survive, IUCN notes that there is a need for action to be taken to sustain the tree species within them. These areas reflect high levels of biodiversity and are also refuges for indigenous floral diversity, hosting endemic, threatened and traditional medicinal plants.

So intensive is the present level of cultivation that pastoral activities which formed part of the traditional farming system have been reduced to minimal levels. More fundamentally, the long-standing and effective symbiotic relationship that the Gedeo have with their land is under threat and with it the resilience and sustainability of the entire agroforestry system.

Social changes are also impacting adversely on the steles which are no longer protected as part of community traditions, and are being damaged or even used for building stone. Only three clusters have been fenced and protected in the nominated property and the nomination dossier acknowledges that one of these, the Tuto-fela site, is in an extremely bad state of conservation and needs immediate attention, and/or protective shelter.

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation of the nominated property is exceedingly fragile and under threat. This situation has arisen as a result of the cumulative impact of many interrelated threats listed above.

Factors affecting the nominated property

Based on the information provided by the State Party, and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the main factors affecting the nominated property are the following, most of which were very clearly set out in the nomination dossier. These are a dramatic generational gap and the abandonment of traditional ways of life by young people; a shift in value systems and changes in economic engagements that reflect departure from the culturally embedded local knowledge, belief, norms and environmental ethics of regulating human-nature

relationship; population growth above the national average; fragmentation of land plots; no premium paid to farmers for high quality Yirgacheffe organic coffee; the absence of protection for megalithic monuments outside the three main clusters; the vulnerability of sacred groves to poaching and encroachment; and the unlimited growth of settlements and roads.

These pressures are pushing people to cultivate the steepest slopes with marginal hill lands of more than seventy percent inclination now heavily planted with *enset*. The landscape is acknowledged in the nomination dossier as being “*beyond its carrying capacity*” and as experiencing intensive cultivation that could eventually lead to environmental degradation unless urgent conservation measures are put in place.

The nomination dossier further acknowledges that “[*t]he land Vs [versus] population imbalance is a major threat that will impact, in the near future the integrity and OUV of the agricultural scape*”, and further that “the economic condition of the region and its dependence on coffee could not sustain itself” unless a sustainable land use plan is developed and implemented.

The absence of protection of the megalithic monuments (outside the three main clusters), is leading to most being subject to destruction or use as building materials.

There are several hundreds of settlements in the nominated property which do not contribute directly to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value, although they are an integral part of the overall agroforestry system in supporting local communities. The settlements were not mentioned in the nomination dossier but supplementary information provided in November 2021 by the State Party plots their locations and the large network of roads that link them. Currently it appears that there is little regulation applied to the scope of these settlements, to how they are provided with services, or to how road development is constrained to avoid sacred sites and cultural heritage. The State Party acknowledges that the expansion of settlements, driven by rapid population growth and development of road infrastructure, is uncontrolled and will in time threaten the sustainability of the system if no measures are taken.

Overall the factors affecting the property are extensive, on-going, and cumulative all of which could lead to an unstoppable downward trajectory unless immediate actions are taken that embrace and integrate social, economic, and cultural aspects in ways that aim to reverse the current adverse trends.

The State Party fully accepts the need for the exceedingly fragile conservation of the property to be strengthened and put onto a sustainable basis in order to address acknowledged dangers, and there is also acceptance from local administrators, elders, traditional leaders, women and youth representatives that the threats affecting the cultural landscape need to be urgently addressed.

In ICOMOS' view, a sustainable land use plan specifically designed for the nominated property is urgently needed to address the specific dangers that it is facing, and to frame actions in the short-term as well as in the medium- and long-term to ensure that forces for drastic and irreversible change can be contained and their impacts mitigated. This is explored further in Section 4.

ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation of the property is extremely fragile and under threat, as a result of factors affecting the nominated property that are extensive, on-going, and cumulative, all of which could lead to an unstoppable downward trajectory unless immediate actions are taken that embrace and integrate social, economic, and cultural aspects in ways that aim to reverse the current adverse trends.

3 Proposed justification for inscription

Proposed justification

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- The Gedeo agroforestry system is a self-regenerating land use system, which is developed and managed through culturally embedded knowledge system and practices.
- The system is a multi-layered and multi-purpose system composed of mainly coffee, *enset*, indigenous trees, root crops and shrub, which occupy distinct layers of vertical space of the plant community.
- The Gedeo Landscape is marked by abundant megalithic archaeological sites, illustrating an extraordinary steles tradition, which attained its peak between the 8th and 15th centuries, of which three are nominated.
- A prehistoric rock art site is testimony to the occupation of the region by prehistoric pastoralists.
- The landscape is endowed with sacred forests under the custody of Gedeo traditional leaders.
- Overall, the landscape is an example of rich evolving culture, resilience and sustainability.

Based on the nomination dossier and the additional information, the key attributes of the nominated property are the indigenous multi-layered agroforestry system based on *enset* and coffee sheltered by native trees and combined with herbs, fruits, root crops and some cereals; indigenous agroforestry systems including related beliefs and taboos related to the protection of trees; a harmonious relationship between people and nature, traditional Gedeo institutions including the *Songo*, or Council of elders, and the *Ballee* system; sacred forests; and the incorporation of megalithic sites within the Gedeo value system.

Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis has been developed on the grounds of comparing other sites with similar attributes – that is agroforestry and megalithic monuments. It has examined properties with a limited number of sites in Ethiopia and around the world but mainly sites already inscribed on the World Heritage List. The analysis would have benefitted from being underpinned by a clearly defined geo-cultural area.

Within Ethiopia, a comparison is made with the Konso Cultural Landscape (2011, criterion (iii) and (v)). While this property reflects agroforestry systems and has stone monuments, the nature of both is seen as being fundamentally different from Gedeo. Konso is an arid area with abundant terraces and walled towns, and with stelae that are still part of a living tradition for marking graves.

Some comparisons have been undertaken separately for agroforestry landscapes and megalithic monuments. For the former, the nominated property is compared with the Archaeological Landscape of the First Coffee Plantations in the South-East of Cuba (Cuba, 2000, criteria (iii) and (iv)) and Coffee Cultural Landscape of Colombia (Colombia, 2011, criteria (v) and (vi)). Both of these are seen to be characterised by single focus crops, and neither are worked by Indigenous communities or based on very long-standing local traditions. For the latter, further comparisons were made with Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites, (United Kingdom, 1986, criteria (i), (ii) and (iii)) and the Stone Circles of Senegambia (Gambia, Senegal, 2006, criteria (i) and (iii)), both of which are seen to demonstrate completely different topography, forms and uses.

The most relevant comparisons are those with sites in South West Ethiopia. This area is inhabited by distinct ethnic groups and is characterised by *enset*-coffee agroforestry, together with, in most cases, megalithic as well as sacred sites. These include, within the Gurage zone to the north of Gedeo, the megalithic stelae of the inscribed site of Tiya, (Ethiopia, 1980, criteria (i) and (iv)). These are seen as being contemporary in date with those of Gedeo, but all appear to be linked to graves and none are in an agroforestry landscape.

The second comparison is with the neighbouring Sidama Zone. There, agroforestry system is seen as almost identical with that of the Gedeo Zone, as the Sidama Zone follows the same agricultural traditions in a similar environmental setting to Gedeo, and a recent survey has demonstrated that wild *enset* is still present in eastern Sidama. The megalithic tradition which abounds in the Gedeo Zone is equally significantly present in the Sidama Zone. The only difference noted is that the megalithic monuments in Sidama are currently less well conserved than those in Gedeo.

The nomination dossier also mentions the following areas which have similarities with the agroforestry systems in the Gedeo nominated areas: Gamo-Gofa, Ari, Kaffa,

Shakka, Yem, Gurage, Wolayta, Dauro, Konta, Jimma, Kambatta and Hadiya.

In terms of the megaliths alone, while it is stated megalithic monuments exist in all regions of Ethiopia most are located in zones within and adjoining the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State. In its additional information sent in November 2021, the State Party did make clear though that the nominated area cannot be considered as representative of these other south and southwestern megalithic areas of Ethiopia, as each region has its own typo-morphological specificities, chronologies, and functions.

In terms of agroforestry, the supplementary information provided by the State Party in February 2022 offers some clarity on comparisons. It reports that recent surveys have demonstrated that the nominated agroforestry landscape of the Gedeo area, although under considerable pressure, has changed far less than other areas with similar systems. The Sidama area is undergoing a significant change as there has been a considerable shift towards economically lucrative cash and woody trees such as eucalyptus, khat (*Catha edulis*) and pineapple all of which are impacting on traditional processes and landscape patterns. Khat cultivation in Sidama increased from five percent in 1991 to thirty-five percent in 2013; while *enset*-coffee declined from forty-five percent in 1991 to twenty-five percent in 2013, in contrast to the Gedeo area were no such marked changes were identified. And in the Gurage area, it is confirmed that *enset* is grown mostly in rows, and in Hadiya along with wheat and barley. A further dimension has emerged from studies of biodiversity. Among the agro-ecosystems that exists in Southern Ethiopia, the Gedeo agroforestry system stands alone due its structural complexity, diversity, density, and species abundance, whilst it also stands out in relation to the number of medicinal species – some 198 – that have been identified in the forestry areas.

ICOMOS considers that what has become clear from the comparisons undertaken is that the agroforestry systems and the megalithic monuments need to be considered separately. While both are found in the Gedeo and neighbouring areas, the two traditions are not linked by a shared culture, rather communities have absorbed the megalithic sites and included them in their traditions.

On their own the megalithic sites are clearly of great importance for their scope and extent – tens of thousands of sites extending over some 1,000 kilometres. The Tiya sites have already been inscribed and it is understood that work is in progress to enlarge the boundaries and encompass more sites. Apart from this initiative and the detailed dating of some specific sites, the huge ensemble of megalithic sites remains little researched and documented. They clearly need to be the subject of surveys to identify what survives and also to allow definition of local types, chronologies, and functions, in order to understand which might be considered to have the highest importance. In the nominated area, the three clusters cannot be seen to have a rationale as a group or

on the basis of present knowledge to be particularly outstanding – rather their importance lies in the way that they were appropriated into the Gedeo culture as sacred sites.

The long-standing, distinctive indigenous agroforestry practices and the resulting extensive agroforestry landscapes are the most important aspects of this nomination. It is these alone that need comparisons to demonstrate how they might be differentiated from other similar areas. And ICOMOS considers that the appropriate geo-cultural area for such comparisons is southwest of Ethiopia where these agroforestry practices appear to have originated, where they have persisted, and where they are still worked by Indigenous communities.

While the initial comparisons showed many similarities between the Gedeo landscape and its surrounding areas, the later information has clarified that recent changes in economic systems outside the Gedeo area have brought marked changes to traditional practices in those areas and to their landscape structures. By contrast, the Gedeo area has remained largely intact and thus can be seen to stand out in comparison to these other areas.

On this basis, ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis has justified consideration of this property for the World Heritage List but on the basis of agroforestry practices rather than a combination of these practices and megalithic monuments.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of the agroforestry aspects of this property for the World Heritage List.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (iii) and (v).

Criterion (iii): *bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living, or which has disappeared;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the megalithic sites are conserved by the Gedeo community through being embedded within a rich and vast indigenous agroforestry system that is supported by traditional management which revolves around traditional belief systems.

ICOMOS does not consider that the three clusters of megalithic sites can be seen as the justification for this criterion. Rather, ICOMOS considers that the focus should be on the agroforestry traditions.

For centuries, even millennia, in what is now the southwest of Ethiopia, the traditional agroforestry practices involving *enset* and more recently coffee, combined with variety of trees and shrubs, as well as other food crops, have provided a sustainable living for communities, based on traditional knowledge and belief

systems that until recently incorporated the three megalithic clusters as ritual sites.

ICOMOS considers that the property can be seen as an exceptional testimony to this long-standing and still living indigenous Gedeo cultural tradition of agroforestry with its layered cultivation of mature trees providing shelter for *enset*, coffee and other food crops.

Criterion (v): be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;

This criterion is justified by the State Party in relation to the agroforestry system and its complexity in terms of the large numbers of local varieties of *enset*, that are cultivated, and the clearly differentiated layers, in which larger indigenous trees provide shade for *enset*, which in turns shades the underlying coffee. This symbiotic system is said to sustain livelihoods while ensuring environmental sustainability.

ICOMOS considers that the Gedeo agroforestry landscape can be seen as an outstanding example of how communities over time have devised systems to optimising the constraints and opportunities of their natural environment. The Gedeo indigenous *Ballee* system combines customary laws, rules, regulations, norms, and codes of social relations to govern interaction with nature. The resulting landscape not only supports the highest density of population in Africa, but it also maintains harmony with species, rich bio-diversity, and produces high quality organic coffee. It is though highly vulnerable to a range of social and economic pressures that are threatening its resilience and sustainability.

ICOMOS considers that criteria (iii) and (v) have been justified.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

Integrity relates to the wholeness and intactness of the property and its attributes, as well as to whether all the attributes are included in the boundaries and can be considered to be intact.

The nominated property is large, extending to some fifty-eight square kilometres and the rationale for the precise delineation of the boundaries is not entirely clear.

While ICOMOS considers that all the key attributes are present within the boundaries, it also considers that some of the landscape areas immediately beyond the boundaries may also include the attributes.

It is clear, though, that the overall ensemble of attributes is extremely vulnerable to a large number of social and economic pressures as set out above. Although traditional

management underpins the management of the property, the *Ballee* and *Songo* institutions that govern management are no longer adhered by all community members and have been weakened. Any failure of the traditional processes could lead to systemic collapse, as has happened to many other rural communities around the world. Thus, if the property is to survive in a sustainable form and keep its value, the whole network of attributes must be sustained and urgent measures are needed to support and strengthen the traditional framework, as part of a wider strategic approach to development.

Authenticity

Authenticity is about the ability of the attributes to convey its value truthfully and credibly.

In relation to the Gedeo landscape this means considering how well the agroforestry landscape reflects traditional agroforestry practices and traditional governance, as these underpin and shape the whole landscape. Thus, the attributes are all interlinked and vulnerability of one part of the system leads to vulnerability of the whole property.

ICOMOS considers that the traditional practices and governance still persist but have been weakened and are extremely vulnerable to a host of different economic and social factors, as already outlined, which means that their ability to reflect meaning is compromised to a degree.

If authenticity is to persist, traditional practices and governance both need strengthening as a matter of urgency, if the overall landscape is to reflect its meaning truthfully and credibly in the long term.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity of the nominated property have been met but that both are extremely vulnerable.

Boundaries

As per 2020, the estimated number of inhabitants living within the nominated property is 271,305.

Quite how the boundaries were delineated has not been clearly set out. The nomination dossier states moreover that the area beyond the boundaries is similar to the area within and that this justifies the absence of a buffer zone.

ICOMOS considers that the boundaries do need particular attention and might need minor adjustments to allow a clearer understanding of how they relate to cultural communities or cultural systems. Given the large size of the property, such a reflection could not be considered by the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission.

The immediate setting of the property is vulnerable to dense development and a buffer zone needs to be considered that could offer appropriate protective measures to ensure a gradation between the property and its wider setting in terms of the impact of development and other changes.

Evaluation of the proposed justification for inscription

In summary, ICOMOS considers that criteria (iii) and (v) have been justified and that the conditions of integrity and authenticity of the property have also been met but are highly vulnerable. The boundaries are adequate but may need minor refinements, while the addition of a buffer zone to protect the immediate setting needs to be considered.

The state of conservation is extremely fragile and under threat, as a result of factors that are extensive, on-going, and cumulative, all of which could lead to an unstoppable downward trajectory unless immediate actions are taken that embrace and integrate social, economic, and cultural aspects in ways that aim to reverse the current adverse trends.

4 Conservation measures and monitoring

Documentation

There is little mention of documentation in the nomination dossier. If traditional agroforestry practices, traditional knowledge and belief systems, and traditional tree species are to be protected, there is clearly an urgent need to document all of these, through communal participation. Furthermore, the survey of steles sites within the property needs to be extended.

A detailed land use map is needed which could be developed using remote sensing. Such a map could illuminate the pattern of crops, as well as the distribution of archaeological sites, including within the sacred areas. But databases are also needed to capture cultural practices and indigenous knowledge associated with the cultivation processes and particularly *enset* and coffee.

Overall what is needed is a research agenda that could progress such interconnected databases, perhaps carried out with the support of Dilla University. There is an urgency to start this process in order to establish a baseline upon which to define and develop a sustainable way forward.

Conservation measures

While measures have been identified in the management plan including to collect tree seeds, to replant certain areas of the forest, and to strengthen traditional practices, ICOMOS notes that this work appears to have not yet commenced to any significant extent. And it remains unclear what precise initiatives are underway to strengthen traditional practices and to address other negative impacts and their causes.

Currently the conservation response is not commensurate with the threats facing the property.

Currently no conservation work is being undertaken on the archaeological sites that are fenced, or those elsewhere.

Monitoring

A set of eight monitoring indicators have been identified but these are broad in nature, such as the coffee-*enset* landscape, the conservation and deterioration rate of the steles, population increase, development and natural disasters. Monitoring will be undertaken by zonal and regional culture offices. While these indicators are not inappropriate, they do not encompass all the attributes of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value and need to be augmented.

How the overall coffee-*enset* landscape can be meaningfully monitored twice a year by these offices is not set out. Given the size and complexity of the nominated area, monitoring needs to be much more detailed if it is to be helpful in identifying the drivers for change, as well as the cumulative impacts of change, in ways that can inform management. It would also appear essential that monitoring is mainly a community-based activity, as has been successfully demonstrated in the Gedeo area for environmental indicators.

Given the rapid pace of change that is facing the property, there would appear to be an urgent need to establish a more extensive, detailed and at least partly community-based monitoring system that could align with measures to address the underlying threats, could support the management and sustainable development of the property, and could facilitate regular monitoring.

Such a community monitoring system would need to be based on adequate databases, as discussed above, and clearly linked to the attributes of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value.

ICOMOS considers that the monitoring system must be extended to encompass all the attributes of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value and their inter-relationship. It should also be at least partly community-based and designed to allow easy integration of its outcomes into the Periodic Reporting questionnaire.

5 Protection and management

Legal protection

The status and protection of traditionally used land by local communities is enshrined in the Ethiopian Constitution. At the federal level, the Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage Proclamation (209/2000) recognises the value and heritage status of a property that '*describes and witnesses to the evolution of nature and which has a major value in its scientific, historical, cultural, artistic and handicraft content*', which, according to the nomination dossier, means that such properties are protected by law. This provides general protection for cultural aspects of the nominated property while more specific local instruments address the specificities of protecting the overall Gedeo cultural landscape.

There are two key local instruments adopted by the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State. The first is the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region Rural Land Administration and Utilization Proclamation (110/2007), that states that *"land for communal use [...] which includes social and cultural affairs and religion is reserved"* for the communities. The second, which specifically relates to the Gedeo cultural landscape, is the Proclamation for Conservation and Protection of South Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region State Cultural Landscape Heritages of Gedeo (189/2021). This covers heritage sites, sacred sites and agroforestry which is defined as a *"land management system for the cultivation and use of a wide range of valuable tree species, animals, combined with annual and permanent crops"*. This Proclamation also sets out the management structure and operational mechanisms that will translate its clauses into practice within the property.

Until the Proclamation (189/2021) was approved, farmers were free to plant the crops they wished where they wished and thus could move to the cultivation of cereal crops instead of *enset* and coffee, provided indigenous trees were protected. The Proclamation is a very clear and ambitious instrument that, in effect, seeks to put in place constraints in the interests of conservation of traditional practices. But if it is to be effective, ICOMOS considers that there will be a need for much clearer definition of what is meant by agroforestry in terms of the proportion of *enset*, coffee, and other crops in different areas of the property, the limits of cultivation, and much more detailed documentation of the current situation. All of these needs are acknowledged. It is stated that the scope and details of the landscape to be protected shall be determined by directives, and that both Ethiopian and foreign universities will be encouraged to undertake research and documentation to underpin these directives.

Management system

The management structure is set out in Proclamation (189/2021) as consisting of a Bureau, a Gedeo Zone Heritage Management Committee, a *Woreda* or Town Heritage Management Committee, a *Kebele* or Local Community Heritage Management Committee, and a Heritage Management Office with a property manager. It will be the responsibility of all the committees to deliver the protection and conservation measures set out in the Proclamation.

The management system is well structured and underpinned by the involvement of local authorities, local communities and particularly local elders and ritual leaders, through the *Ballee* and *Songo* systems that *"enact different rules and regulations that dictate human interaction with the environment"*. But the structures do not yet seem to be fully in place.

While in the future, there are plans to *"upgrade the qualification of the heritage protection experts in Gedeo zonal Culture and Tourism office"*, in the meantime, it appears that staff will only be engaged at the archaeological sites and that *"for the agricultural*

landscape, the whole community will be in charge, using the traditionally acquired skills and there will be no need to hire additional people".

Although the dossier states that the local management will be supported by regional heritage and tourism offices and by periodic follow-ups from the Federal Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritages (ARCCH), it is clear that heritage and tourism staff alone are not sufficient to address the key issues, such as the controls envisaged in the Proclamation (189/2021) for which the engagement of staff providing local services such as planning, housing and the environment would seem to be necessary. For the Proclamation states that people who hold a Land Certificate *"shall not have the right to change the cultural and historical content, shape and place of the heritage or heritage sites"*, and that any type of modern construction that impacts adversely on the Gedeo cultural landscape is not permitted, and that permission will need to be given for projects in advance of work being undertaken, who is to implement such regulations is not at all clear. Given the many thousands of farmers in the property, enforcing such edicts will be a major challenge.

A management plan has been prepared with the full engagement of the local communities and local authorities and is based on the advice of an agroforestry expert. It sets out good aspirational aims and actions to address the key threats that have been identified. Its weakness is that the actions are directed solely at local actors who simply do not have enough resources or tools to combat the larger issues facing the property. As set out above, more integration is needed between local actors and regional and national authorities if measures are to be taken to address the causes that underpin the threats at the property.

The additional information submitted in November 2021 stated that in order to address these challenges the government has designed and implemented various conservation-livelihood approaches, including sustainable land management, climate action for land management, and integrated watershed management programmes, which have started to be implanted in certain zones. These will focus on conservation of the agroforestry system, improving the livelihood of communities, and halting rapid population growth, while a watershed development cooperative association with access to financial support through loans and subsidies has been mandated to prepare an action plan based on environmental and socio-economic problems.

What remained unclear was how these regional or national programmes will be adapted to respect the need to protect the proposed Outstanding Universal Value, and how they will be integrated into the management structures for the property so that, for example, development loans fully respect and support traditional agroforestry and social practices.

In ICOMOS's view in the light of the acknowledged vulnerabilities the property is facing, as a result of fast changing demographic, economic and landscape management issues, the proposed structure need augmenting to defines how national approaches will be translated into actions, and how major challenges facing the property will be addressed.

A sustainable land use plan for the property is needed that could define ways of achieving a balance between the many competing needs at the property such as protecting traditional practices, improving prices for the high-quality organic coffee, and raising the overall standard of living of communities. Moreover, such a plan could provide both incentives and appropriate constraints in relation to the expansion of settlements, the scope of cultivation and the type of crops and trees planted, while respecting and, if necessary, strengthening traditional management structures.

The State Party supports this approach and has undertaken a consultative meeting with stakeholders to discuss the preparation of a sustainable land use plan for the nominated area which they agree is urgently needed and have enlisted the collaboration of Dilla University. And moreover, it is reported that the higher government officials of the Gedeo Zone, including the chief administrator and the chairman of the Gedeo Zone Management Committee, are determined to realise this task in a short period of time.

To this end, the zonal administration has established a committee consisting of sixteen members selected from different sectors in the zone. Dilla University who will prepare the plan has pledged to assign academic and research staff, while the zonal administration will finance the work. The plan is scheduled to be completed before the end of the year.

ICOMOS commends the work that is being undertaken on this plan but considers that given the size and complexity of the property and of the multi-dimensional nature of the threats with which it is faced, a six-month timetable is unrealistic, particularly as such a plan needs not only to identify aims and strategies but also delivery mechanisms and any strengthening that might be needed to the formal governance structures which could extend beyond the property.

Visitor management

A Cultural Landscape Tourism Plan 2019-2023 has been prepared. This identifies the aesthetic and agroforestry aspects of landscapes, sacred forests, and megalithic sites as all having potential to attract visitors. It enumerates the difficulties in attracting tourists such as the lack of all-weather roads, clean water supplies, accommodation, interpretation, tour guides, and sets out strategic objectives and an action plan for moving forward. Commendably, it encourages non-vehicular access and simple camp site developments, stresses the need for sustaining intangible and tangible cultural heritage, and promotes engagement of local communities

and local organisations as well as an incremental approach.

The plan lists responsible bodies and partners but no information is provided on what has so far been achieved over the past four years.

Community involvement

Community practices underpin this nomination and the management structures envisage their involvement but these appear not yet to be in place. While several discussions have taken place with local communities and officials, elders, the youth, stakeholder institutions at local, regional and federal institutions, it appears that this dialogue is at an early stage and how communities will advise on and be incorporated into the much needed sustainable strategic approaches to development remains unclear. What is clear is the commitment that local stakeholders have shown to the nomination processes.

Effectiveness of the protection and management of the nominated property

In summary, ICOMOS considers that the legal protection measures put in place at federal and in particular the specific proclamation (189/2021) at state level, provide a good basis for management. A sustainable land use plan for the property is needed that could define ways of achieving a balance between the many competing needs at the property such as protecting traditional practices, improving prices for the high-quality organic coffee, and raising the overall standard of living of communities.

6 Conclusion

The Gedeo Cultural Landscape is an exceptional testimony to a long-standing and still living indigenous Gedeo cultural tradition of agroforestry with its layered cultivation of mature trees providing shelter for *enset*, coffee and other food crops.

This symbiotic, system linking culture and nature, is underpinned by traditional knowledge systems of the Gedeo community, and has the capacity to sustain livelihoods while ensuring environmental sustainability; it not only supports the highest density of population in Africa, it also maintains harmony with species, a rich biodiversity and produces high quality organic coffee.

But this large property extending to almost 300 square kilometres and supporting just over a quarter of a million people is highly vulnerable, as acknowledged in the nomination dossier, to fast changing demographic, economic and landscape management issues. The population in Gedeo is increasing at an alarming rate; the land holding capacity has decreased by about twenty percent in less than a generation; intense cultivation is extending to unstable slopes of more than seventy percent inclination; and the sacred forests are under threat.

As the State Party acknowledges in the nomination dossier: “*The land Vs population imbalance is a major threat that will impact, in the near future the integrity and OUV of the agricultural scape*” and “*[i]t seems that the landscape is reaching beyond its carrying capacity and that will eventually leads environmental degradation if proper conservation and livelihood measures are not taking place*”.

While ICOMOS commends the State Party for the legal and management structures that have been defined, and their key emphasis on traditional structures and processes, it does not consider that sufficient measures are yet in place to address the severe challenges that the property is facing or to halt the highly negative trends that it is already experiencing, and thus overall to ensure that the landscape will continue to reflect distinctive agroforestry practices into the future in a sustainable and meaningful way.

ICOMOS considers that a sustainable land use plan is the key to achieving a balance between the many competing needs such as protecting traditional practices, improving prices for the high-quality organic coffee, and raising the overall standard of living of communities. Such a plan could provide both incentives and appropriate constraints in relation to the expansion of settlements, the scope of cultivation and the type of crops and trees planted, as part of a wider strategic approach to development.

Such a defined plan could build on the existing national government initiatives, and provide a context for the management plan but above all could focus on the specific aspects within the nominated area for which long-term protection is needed.

ICOMOS welcomes the commitment by the State Party to producing such a plan and notes that work on its development has started, with the aim of completing the plan in six months. This timeframe appears very tight in relation to the scope of the project. ICOMOS considers that if the plan is to be conceived at the level of detail required, and to have the support of the agroforestry communities, a longer timeframe will be necessary in order to allow for documentation to be gathered and full consultation to be undertaken. Perhaps more crucially such a plan would need to demonstrate specific measures for addressing the dangers that the property now faces, and how it might achieve an overall state of conservation that would ensure its proposed Outstanding Universal Value is sustained in the long term.

In spite of the progress that is being made, ICOMOS considers that the property is faced with specific and proven imminent dangers, which could lead to significant loss of historical authenticity and of cultural significance. The major threats that the property is facing could be considered as ascertained danger, in accordance with paragraph 179 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

Inscription alone is insufficient to address these dangers. Accordingly, ICOMOS recommends that The Gedeo Cultural Landscape should be inscribed on the World Heritage List but at the same time be inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. This recommendation should be seen as a way to ensure that sufficient time can be given to the development of a sustainable land use plan and that it can deliver the specific corrective measures that are needed to ensure the property will move forward in ways that sustain the proposed Outstanding Universal Value, strengthen traditional management, and overall deliver sustainable livelihoods for the Gedeo communities.

ICOMOS considers that inscription on the World Heritage List in Danger should be the opportunity to gain the attention and support of the international community for the protection of the property and for the conservation of its remarkable agroforestry system, to ensure that it can survive in a meaningful way.

Such an approach could also be seen as a continuation of the processes of dialogue that were started during the evaluation process, and of the much longer-term efforts by the Gedeo communities to have the significance of their landscape recognised by the international community.

7 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that The Gedeo Cultural Landscape, Ethiopia, be inscribed as a cultural landscape on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (iii) and (v)** and at the same time on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

ICOMOS recommends that a reactive monitoring mission be invited to the property to establish a Desired state of conservation and a programme of corrective measures to remove the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger.

Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

The Gedeo Cultural Landscape spread along the eastern escarpment of the Ethiopian highlands, is an exceptional testimony to a long-standing and still living indigenous Gedeo cultural tradition of agroforestry, with its layered cultivation of mature trees providing shelter for *enset*, coffee and other food crops. This symbiotic system, linking culture and nature, is underpinned by traditional knowledge systems of the Gedeo community, and has the capacity to sustain livelihoods while ensuring environmental sustainability.

The abundant alluvial rivers and fertile soils of the escarpment support the agroforestry layers spread over

the twenty kilometres that separate the top of the escarpment from the lowlands. Large trees shelter indigenous *enset* – (*enset ventricosum*) the main food crop under which coffee grows, and now the main cash crop – together with other indigenous trees, root crops, shrubs, etc., each species occupying a distinct layer. The Gedeo Cultural Landscape property is home to just over a quarter of a million Gedeo people.

While the Gedeo are Indigenous to Ethiopia and have been associated with the cultivation of *enset* for perhaps a few thousand years, oral traditions suggest that they moved to the southwest from the north sometime during the last two millennia. The Gedeo communities are still largely guided by indigenous knowledge, and traditional institutions including the *Songo*, or Council of elders, as well as the *Ballee* system that regulates interaction with nature. Parts of the natural forest are set aside as sacred areas for ritual purposes, where no trees are felled or cultivation practised, and where indigenous tree species and medicinal plants have been preserved, while on the mountain ridges dense clusters of megalithic monuments, some steles and others in phallic form, were also revered by the Gedeo and cared for by their elders. The Gedeo traditional systems and practices underpin the forest regimes.

Criterion (iii): The Gedeo Cultural Landscape is an exceptional testimony to the long-standing and still living indigenous Gedeo cultural tradition of agroforestry with its layered cultivation of mature trees providing shelter for *enset*, and more recently coffee as well as shrubs and other food crops. For centuries, or perhaps even millennia, in what is now the southwest of Ethiopia, these traditional agroforestry practices have provided a sustainable living for communities, based on traditional knowledge and belief systems that reserved certain parts of the forest as sacred areas and protected megalithic clusters of steles as ritual sites.

Criterion (v): The Gedeo Cultural Landscape is an outstanding example of how communities over time have devised systems to optimising the constraints and opportunities of their natural environment. The Gedeo indigenous *Ballee* system combines customary laws, rules, regulations, norms, and codes of social relations to govern interactions with nature. The resulting landscape not only supports the highest density of population in Africa, but it also maintains harmony with species, rich biodiversity and produces high quality organic coffee. It is though highly vulnerable to a range of social and economic pressures that are threatening its resilience and sustainability.

Integrity

The key attributes are present within the boundaries, though some of the landscape areas immediately beyond the boundaries may also include some attributes. The overall ensemble of attributes is extremely vulnerable to a large number of social and economic pressures. Although traditional management underpins the management of the property, the *Ballee* and *Songo* institutions that govern

management are no longer adhered to by all community members which means that the traditional processes that support the overall layered agroforestry practices have been weakened. This could result in systemic collapse. In order for the Gedeo cultural landscape to survive in a sustainable form and to keep its value, the whole network of attributes that convey the Outstanding Universal Value must be sustained as a single integrated system. Urgent measures are needed to support and strengthen the traditional framework, as part of a wider strategic approach to development, in order to address the extreme vulnerability of integrity.

Authenticity

Traditional agroforestry practices and governance underpin and shape the whole Gedeo cultural landscape. The attributes are all interlinked and vulnerability of one part of the system can lead to vulnerability of the whole property. Thus, how well the agroforestry landscape conveys its value depend on the resilience of the traditional processes. The traditional practices and governance still persist but have been weakened and are extremely vulnerable to a host of different economic and social factors, which means that their ability to reflect meaning is compromised to a degree. Authenticity is thus highly vulnerable. If authenticity is to persist, and if the overall landscape is to reflect its meaning truthfully and credibly in the long term, traditional practices and traditional governance both need strengthening and supporting as a matter of urgency, in order to address the extreme vulnerability of authenticity.

Management and protection requirements

The status and protection of traditionally used land by local communities is enshrined in the Ethiopian Constitution. At the federal level, the Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage Proclamation (209/2000) recognises the value and heritage status of a property that describes and witnesses the evolution of nature and which has a major value in its scientific, historical, cultural, artistic and handicraft content. This general protection for cultural aspects of the property is augmented by more local instruments that address the specificities of protecting the overall Gedeo cultural landscape.

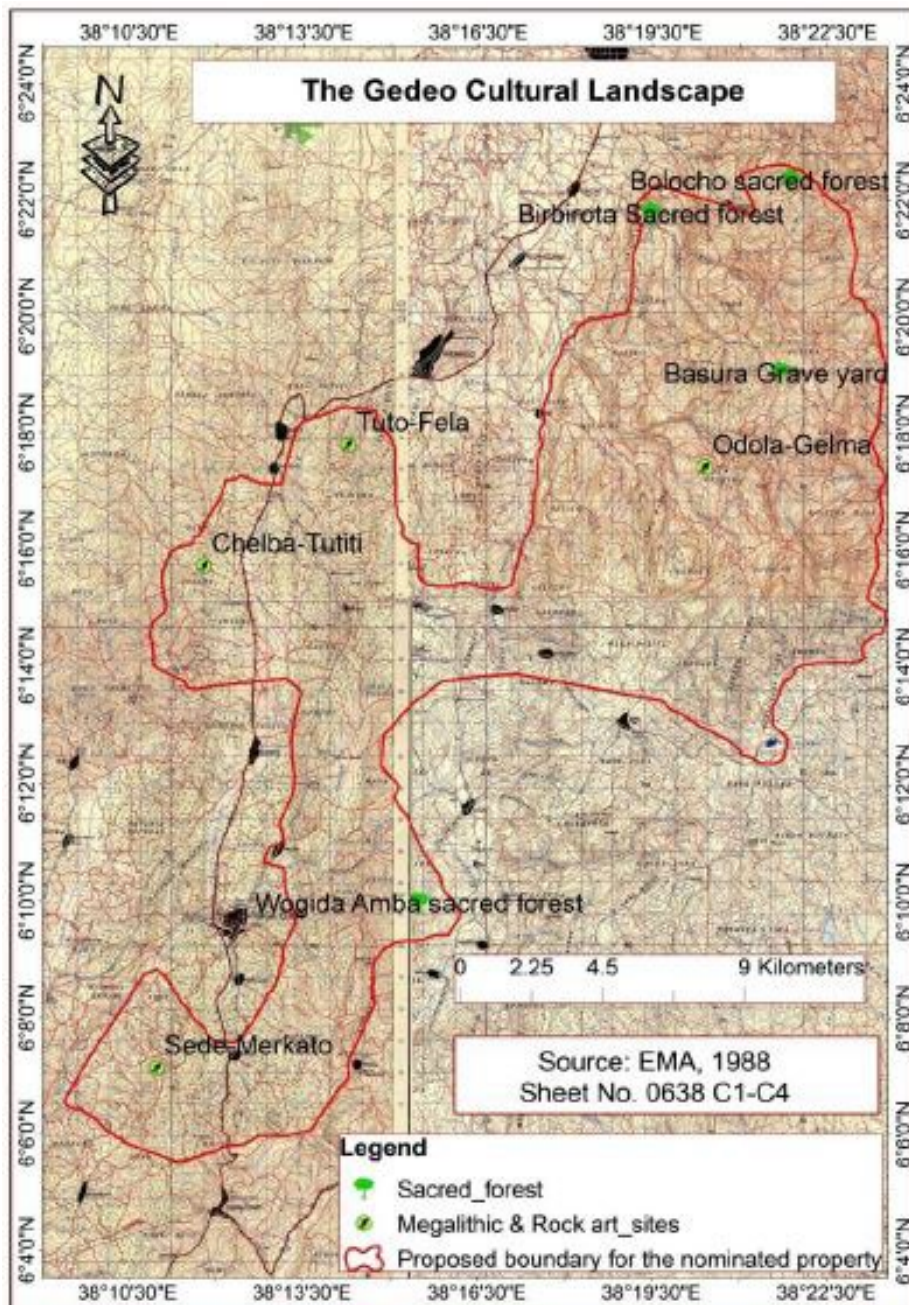
The two key local instruments that were adopted by the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region are: 1) The Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region Rural Land Administration and Utilization Proclamation (110/2007), that states that "*land for communal use which includes social and cultural affairs and religion is reserved for the communities*"; and 2) the Proclamation for Conservation and Protection of South Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region State Cultural Landscape Heritages of Gedeo (189/2021). This second Proclamation is specific to the property and covers heritage sites, sacred sites and agroforestry which is defined as a "*land management system for the cultivation and use of a wide range of valuable tree species, animals, combined with annual and permanent crops*". It also sets out the management structure and operational

mechanisms that will translate its clauses into practice within the property, including constraints on where crops are planted, and support for traditional practices. The scope and details of the landscape to be protected will be determined by directives, and both Ethiopian and foreign universities are to be encouraged to undertake research and documentation to underpin these directives. These will need to define the traditional agroforestry of the property both generally and for specific areas as well as the limits of cultivation.

Additional recommendations

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party give urgent consideration to the following:

- a) Continuing to progress the sustainable land use plan in order to:
 - i) Define a strategic approach for the development of the property that encompasses the need to provide incentives and support for traditional agroforestry practices; to improve prices for high-quality organic coffee; to raise the overall standard of living of communities; and put in place appropriate constraints for the expansion of settlements, the scope of cultivation and the type of crops and trees planted,
 - ii) Ensure that the plan builds on existing national government initiatives, and provides a context for the management plan but also focuses on the specific aspects within the property's area for which long-term protection is needed in order to address the many acknowledged threats that it faces so as to ensure its resilience and sustainability,
 - iii) Consider, in the context of the large scale of the property and the size of the Gedeo community, extending the timescale for the plan beyond the six months envisaged to allow for more in-depth assessment and documentation to be gathered, full engagement and consultation with agroforestry communities, and delivery mechanisms to be developed,
 - iv) Ensure that the plan defines specific measures to address dangers that the property faces, and frames actions in the short-term as well as in the medium- and long-term to ensure that forces for drastic and irreversible change can be contained and their impacts mitigated, and overall defines how and when the property might achieve a state of conservation that would ensure its Outstanding Universal Value is sustained for the long-term,
 - v) Include within the plan a strategy to protect the local and national natural values of the property in ways that support traditional knowledge and the livelihoods of local communities,
- b) Implementing fully the management plan and strengthening the property management office,
- c) Extending the monitoring system to encompass all the attributes of Outstanding Universal Value and consider introducing a partly community-based monitoring system,
- d) Undertaking a detailed analysis of the boundaries of the property to justify its specific alignment in relation to cultural communities and cultural processes and identify whether any minor adjustments are necessary,
- e) Considering putting in place a buffer zone for the property that provides appropriate protective measure to ensure a gradation between the property and its wider setting in terms of the impact of development and other changes,
- f) Submitting to the World Heritage Centre by 1 December 2024, a report on the implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 47th session;



Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property