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CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

Forty-sixth session
New Delhi, India
21-31 July 2024

Item 10 of the Provisional Agenda:
10B. Mid-cycle assessment report on the implementation of the Third Cycle Action Plans in Africa and the Arab States

Summary

This document presents the mid-cycle assessment on the implementation on the Regional Action Plans of the Third Cycle of Periodic Reporting for the regions of Africa (Part I) and the Arab States (Part III) following their adoptions by World Heritage Committee in 2021. The reporting on regional activities since the 41st session of the World Heritage Committee is presented in a harmonised order.

Draft Decisions:

- ***45 COM 10B.1**, see Part II*
- ***45 COM 10B.2**, see Part IV*

I. MID-CYCLE ASSESSMENT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REGIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR AFRICA (2021-2027)

A. Background

1. The Third Cycle of Periodic Reporting in the Africa region was launched following Decision **41 COM 10A** (Krakow, 2017) and was carried out between September 2019 and July 2020.

2. The report on the results of this exercise (please see Document WHC/21/44COM/10B) was presented to the World Heritage Committee during its extended 44th session (Fuzhou/online, 2021). By Decision **44 COM 10B**, the Committee approved its subsequent Regional Action Plan for Africa (2021-2027) (also referred to hereafter as "Action Plan").

3. The Action Plan, which emerged from the collaborative and fruitful efforts of World Heritage site managers and national focal points of sub-Saharan Africa during the Third Cycle of Periodic Reporting[1], has been developed as a strategic framework to guide States Parties in the region. The overarching goal is to ensure that tangible heritage is identified, protected, monitored, and sustainably managed in Africa through the effective implementation of the Convention. The Action Plan is supported by 26 actions encompassed in 5 strategic objectives as follows:

Strategic Objective 1:	Strengthen the representativity and credibility of the World Heritage List in the Africa region.
Strategic Objective 2:	Improve conservation, effective management, and promotion of World Heritage.
Strategic Objective 3:	Develop capacity for conservation, management, and promotion of cultural and natural heritage.
Strategic Objective 4:	Enhance heritage education, communication, and awareness-raising in Africa region.
Strategic Objective 5:	Strengthen community and stakeholder engagement for effective management of World Heritage properties.

4. During the formulation of the Action Plan, it was recognised by national focal points that activities relating to governance, funding, women and youth, and capacity-building are integral and thus would be incorporated into national plans and strategies. This initiative aims to inspire States Parties to integrate selected actions from the Action Plan into their site-specific management strategies. It also encourages them to consider the findings of the Third Cycle of Periodic Reporting for their properties. The successful implementation of the Action Plan's objectives, as well, hinges on a collaborative effort that encompasses global, regional, and local partners, actors, and stakeholders.

5. In this regard, the Committee encouraged States Parties to appropriate the Action Plan for their national, sub-regional and regional heritage strategies and requested the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the African World Heritage Fund (AWHF), in collaboration with Advisory Bodies, to support States Parties in its implementation. States Parties were charged with the dissemination of the Action Plan to World Heritage site managers and stakeholders at national level.

6. This Action Plan aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, as noted in its Aspiration 5, 'an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics'. Additionally,

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[1] See workshop of African National Focal Points for Periodic Reporting finalise Draft Regional Action Plan (2021-2027): whc.unesco.org/en/news/2254

a particular emphasis is placed on engaging youth and women, underscoring the value of intergenerational dialogue within this framework.

7. The follow-up of the activities carried out in the implementation of the Action Plan from 2021 to 2023 was presented to the World Heritage Committee at its extended 45th session (Riyadh, 2023) (see Document WHC/23/45.COM/10C).

8. In accordance with Decision **44 COM 10B** and further reiterated in Decision **45 COM 10C.1**, the World Heritage Committee requested that the Secretariat carry out an assessment on the extent to which these actions have been appropriated and integrated at the national level, the Committee has also tasked the World Heritage Centre with monitoring implementation of the Action Plan through this mid-cycle assessment survey, halfway through the implementation period (2021-2027) and to present the results and evaluation for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 46th session. This document presents the outcomes of this assessment.

B. Mid-Cycle Assessment Survey

9. In order to monitor the progress achieved with the implementation of this Action Plan across the Africa region, as requested by the Committee, the Secretariat developed a survey form under the guidance of an external heritage evaluation expert. The questions of the survey format were framed to align with the Regional Action Plan for Africa (2021-2027) and covered all its 26 actions. The questions included both closed, multiple-choice and open-ended questions as well as a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions. Each action consisted of two to eight questions. Respondents were required to state whether each action had been appropriate – deemed relevant or irrelevant – and implemented within their national action plans. Each action featured at least one mandatory question to evaluate its appropriateness, and where applicable, straightforward, quantifiable and/or qualitative follow-up questions were posed to assess the further national progress in implementing this action over time. Whereas when an action was considered not relevant by the State Party, a follow-up question has been required to better understand the rationale.

10. Additional, optional questions were designed to gather insights on challenges, good practices, and lessons learnt, enabling respondents to submit further comments and provide quantitative information where feasible. This approach was aimed at enhancing the clarity and comprehensiveness of the information gathered. As some questions were mandatory, this allowed a homogeneous collection of data. In addition, respondents were strongly encouraged to respond to as many questions as possible with the utmost precision, particularly by providing quantitative data wherever feasible, to facilitate the compilation of a comprehensive dataset. On a technical aspect, the survey was pre-testing several times before its launch to ensure clarity, ease of understanding, and compatibility across various browsers and operating systems. The survey was conducted exclusively online through the UNESCO LimeSurvey platform.

11. The final survey was distributed to the national focal points of sub-Saharan African States Parties (1 questionnaire per State Party) on 18 January 2024, with a submission deadline set for 13 February 2024.

12. In the framework of the completion process of the survey, UNESCO organised 4 sub-regional meetings with national focal points of the sub-Saharan Africa States Parties to detail the mid-cycle survey and to assist them in completion, notably that they were to complete the survey together with their World Heritage site managers and all stakeholders. Advisory Bodies and mentees from the World Heritage Mentorship Programme had been contributed to these sub-regional meetings, notably at the in-person meeting gathered for the national points in the Western Africa sub-region.

13. Out of the 47 States Parties, 42 completed and submitted the survey, resulting in a high response rate of 89%.

C. Findings and evaluation

14. The results from the submitted survey on each action were compiled and aggregated at the regional level. The Secretariat, with the assistance of the evaluation expert, proceeded with a preliminary analysis, and the results were presented to the national focal points during the Mid-Cycle Review Workshop for World Heritage Focal Points, co-organised by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, AWHF, and South Africa which also generously provided financial support. The workshop was held from 27-29 February 2024 in Cape Town. Within this framework, the Secretariat took the opportunity to conduct interviews, case studies and focus groups with volunteer national focal points and site managers, heritage experts and the Advisory Bodies. This additional initiative served to provide deeper insights into the challenges and lessons learned, enhancing the evaluation for the assessment of the Action Plan.

15. It is to be noted that while fulfilling this mandate, the workshop also provided an excellent opportunity to discuss how to achieve the harmonisation of the above Action Plan with the Strategy for World Heritage in Africa, which was adopted by Decision **45 COM 5C** (Riyadh, 2023) as an implementation plan of Flagship Programme 3 of the Operational Strategy for Priority Africa 2022-2029. These two frameworks are vital in supporting the implementation of the Convention in Africa for a lasting impact.

16. The evaluation found that efforts are being made across all States Parties towards all 26 actions and 5 strategic objectives outlined in the Action Plan. Significant progress has been observed in actions that mirror previous mandates or routine activities compared to those in newly emerging areas. For example, there is progress in the development of the Desired state of conservation for the removal of properties from the List of World Heritage in Danger (DSOCR), the use of digital technologies, and participation in promotional or awareness activities. The African Site Managers' Network has been established and is actively used to disseminate information, and various resources are available to improve the capacity of African World Heritage site managers and heritage professionals.

17. However, the extent of progress differs significantly across different actions and States Parties due to various factors. Notably, some actions were not integrated into national plans, primarily due to budgetary challenges, limited expertise and support from governments. Additionally, it has been observed that the dissemination of the Action Plan was not significant in many States Parties. Progress lags in some areas, such as the establishment of databases, development and dissemination of World Heritage communication materials, development of disaster/risk and climate change plans, and development of online modules integrating the African context. Many reported that this could most likely be due to the low dissemination of the Action Plan among national stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Convention.

18. Respondents flagged that the level of financial support from their governments should be improved, and there is a need to develop innovative mechanisms to sustain World Heritage sites. Subsequently, progress on actions that require significant financial input or support from governments was substantially impeded. For example, only about 20% of States Parties have implemented other relevant indicators, such as updating or developing national inventories, updating Tentative Lists, and integration of World Heritage into national planning frameworks. Also, about half of the States Parties reported not yet signed the Charter for the African Cultural Renaissance. In the same proportion World Heritage site managers mentioned that they need to finalise the retrospective Statements of Outstanding Universal Value (rSOUVs) for their World Heritage sites. Furthermore, more efforts are required in developing national databases

of heritage professionals, as well as needs-based educational curricula and practical community engagement strategies to address the challenges faced by World Heritage properties in Africa.

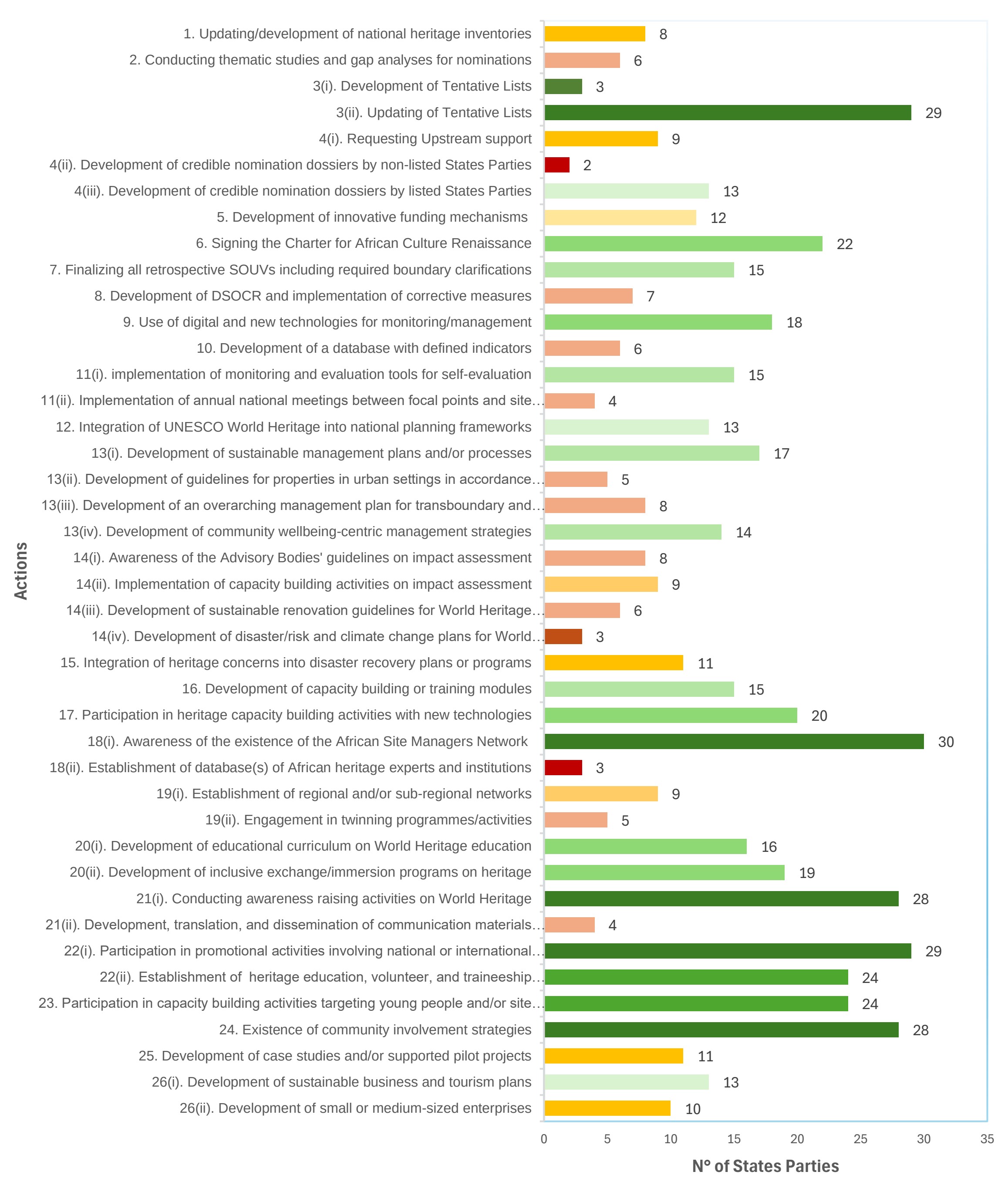

Figure 1: Overall picture of progress made by African States Parties towards indicators associated with the Regional Action Plan for Africa (2021-2027). The full action paragraphs can be read in the questionnaire available in the full survey.

19. Another significant factor that has constant progress in achieving the intended objectives of the Action Plan is the persistent challenges related to expertise and capacity-building, particularly among younger professionals. They expressed the need to continuously develop skills to address emerging challenges in the field and to create opportunities to practice the skills of trained experts.

20. All respondents agreed that the actions identified in the Regional Action Plan for Africa (2021-2027) are relevant to the heritage and conservation needs of the African region. They commended the bottom-up approach used for the development of the Action Plan, describing it as participatory and inclusive. Figure 1 above shows the overall progress by the States Parties of sub-Saharan Africa towards each of the indicators for all the actions. Details of the progress for each indicator and action are further discussed in the next sections, grouped by the strategic objectives. It is to be noted that the bars are color-coded to visually represent the progress made towards each action. Green bars indicate actions that are on a good track, reflecting successful progress towards the regional targets set in the Action Plan. Conversely, reddish bars represent actions that have not yet reached the expected targets, signalling areas where further efforts will be necessary to the way forward.

D. Progress towards the implementation of the Regional Action Plan for Africa (2021-2027) by strategic objectives.

Strategic Objective 1: Strengthen the representativity and credibility of the World Heritage List in the Africa region.

21. The results found that around 20% of States Parties have recently updated/developed their national inventories based on existing thematic studies while another 20% are in progress towards completing theirs. The remaining States Parties reported not having updated their national heritage inventories for two main reasons. Firstly, some States Parties mentioned having a specific frequency of updating the inventories. Secondly, some States Parties have been dissatisfied with the outcomes of previous attempts to update inventories due to inadequate resources and/or expertise being made available for the implementation. Nearly 50% of States Parties reported to have updated their Tentative Lists. Two States Parties previously were reported to have no Tentative List; now, there is only one. It is to be noted that the States Parties who have completed these activities also reported that this was possible thanks to the external support received, such as capacity-building activities or technical support from UNESCO since 2021.

22. Around 19% of States Parties reported having requested Upstream support since the adoption of the Action Plan in 2021. National focal points expect that they will seek support when needed in future, but many reported being of the opinion that the process involved in receiving financial support may be an obstacle. Also, States Parties reported that the requirements for receiving support are often complex and believe that simplifying these processes may encourage more States Parties to request Upstream support particularly from UNESCO and AWHF.

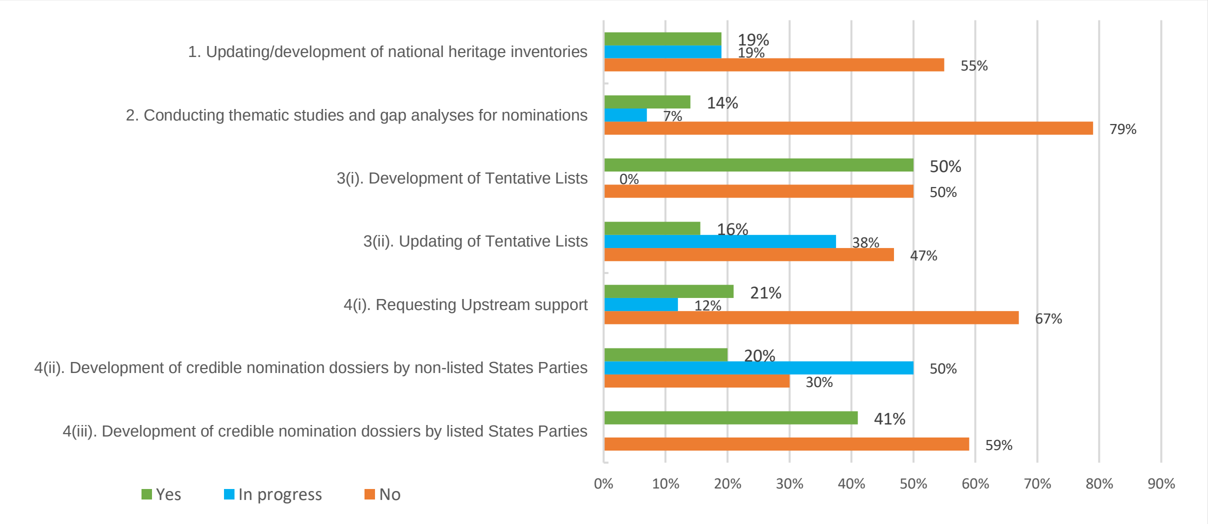

Figure 2: Percentage of States Parties that have made progress towards indicators associated with Objective 1.

23. Since the adoption of the Action Plan in 2021, five sites (out of a total of 45) in Africa have been inscribed on the World Heritage List: Forest Massif of Odzala-Kokoua (Congo), The Gedeo Cultural Landscape (Ethiopia), Bale Mountains National Park (Ethiopia), Memorial sites of the Genocide: Nyamata, Murambi, Gisozi, and Bisesero (Rwanda), and Nyungwe National Park (Rwanda). Three States Parties mentioned that they are currently working on nomination dossiers and receiving technical support from relevant stakeholders.

24. Overall, the evaluation found that the indicators leading to increased representation of Africa on the World Heritage List, as well as the challenges deterring the achievement of this objective, are interconnected. Many respondents mentioned that their national inventories are old, and no new national engagement for thematic studies and gap analysis carried out to inform their development or update. Hence, national focal points reported that national tentative lists developed from the old national inventories could lead to weak quality of nomination dossiers.

Strategic Objective 2: Improve conservation, effective management, and promotion of World Heritage.

25. About 30% of States Parties confirmed the existence of innovative and sustainable funding mechanisms through bilateral funding with other States Parties. However, the results did not find that these States Parties have been receiving sufficient funds through these mechanisms, partly because the States Parties reported a lack of the needed expertise to implement them. States Parties without funding mechanisms also confirm the need for capacity-building to advance sustainable funding, expressing that they require further training, particularly in areas such as securing adequate funding; navigating legal and regulatory frameworks; maintaining transparency and accountability in fund management; maintaining the fund's financial sustainability over time; and balancing the allocation of resources among competing heritage conservation priorities.

26. The evaluation found significant progress in the development of DSOCR. Since 2021, two World Heritage properties in the Eastern Africa subregion have been removed from the List of World Heritage in Danger namely the Tombs of Buganda Kings at Kasubi (Uganda) in 2023. However, progress is visible for properties whose problems are management-focused, while persisting for sites whose primary challenges are security or conflict-related, e.g., properties in Central Africa.

27. A significant number of States Parties reported to use digital technologies such as surveillance drone systems, inventory or trap cameras, satellite monitoring for fires or plant covers, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), GPS systems to track routes, animal collars, 3D digital modelling, tracking chips, weather stations, SMART platform, management effectiveness tracking tools etc., for effective monitoring. However, there is still a large gap between those who are using these technologies and those who are not. The latter group attributes the slowed progress to a lack of funding and technical know-how. The evaluation also found out that progress is limited in implementing databases with defined indicators. Nonetheless, at least one State Party has carried out activities to implement it. For example, one State Party mentioned using a management effectiveness tracking tool dedicated to this action. The survey responses showed that at least ten States Parties have integrated heritage priorities into their national frameworks, yet the evaluation found limited evidence from other sources to support this.

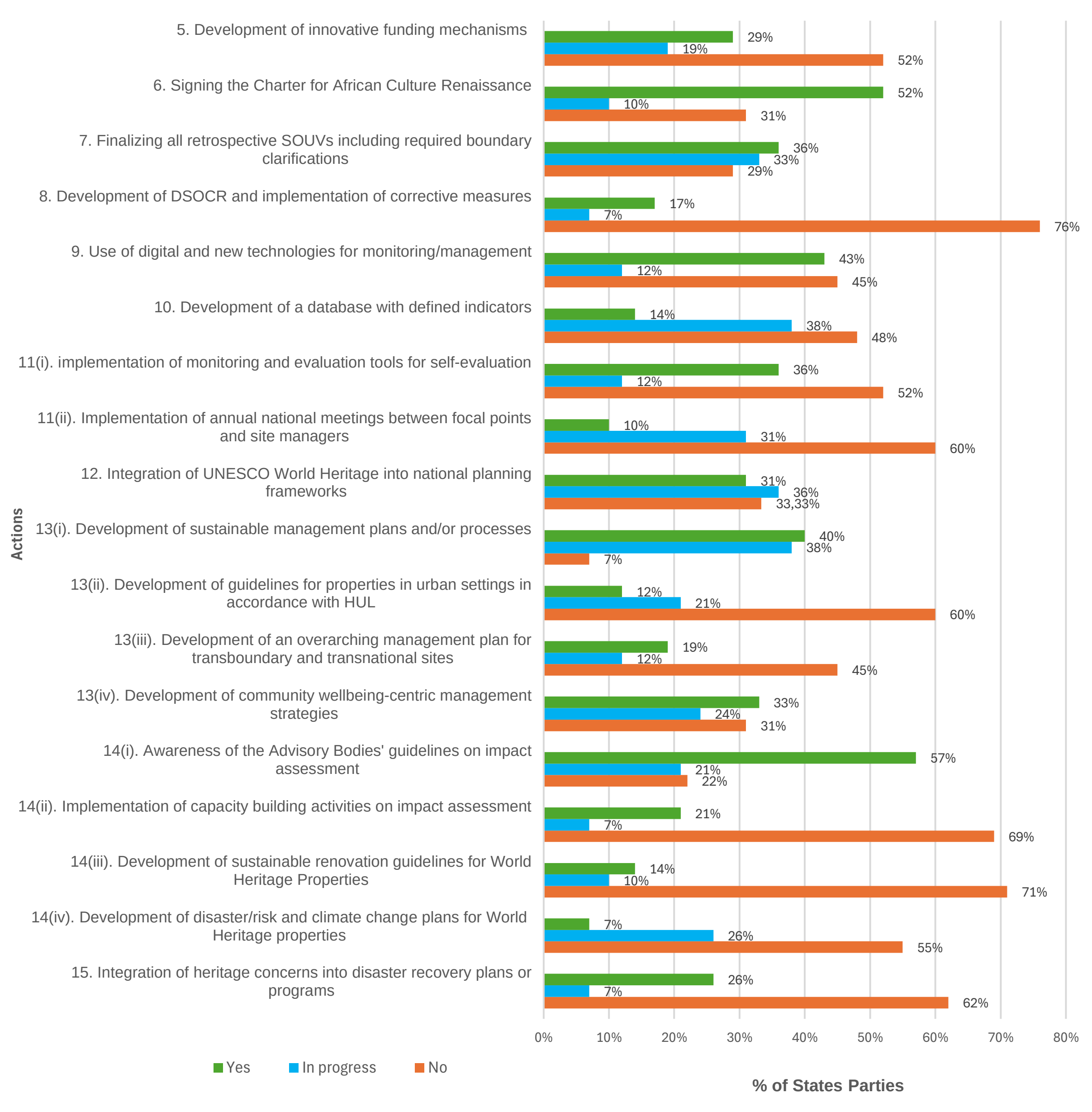

Figure 3: Percentage of States Parties that have made progress towards indicators associated with Objective 2

28. Only a few States Parties have regular gatherings (meetings, forum, conferences, etc.) between focal points and site managers. However, the evaluation found more effective management and implementation in the States Parties that carry out such engagements. For example, one State Party reported that the national focal points and site managers meet three times a year to share and exchange ideas on how to address challenges at the site and above site level, which are the main agenda items. These meetings, held in November or January each year, are opportunities to discuss and prepare their state of conservation reports.

29. The evaluation found extensive examples of management plans and/or systems provided by various States Parties in response to the survey. Interviewed experts caution that these plans may have been developed over a decade ago, and their concern was corroborated by the dates provided for a few management plans in the same survey responses.

30. The evaluation found several examples of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) projects and capacity-building activities, indicating that the majority of States Parties are aware of the Advisory Bodies' guidelines on impact assessment. Although the States Parties understand the importance of impact assessments, local experts express the urgent need to be knowledgeable about how to do them. There is also a need for more training efforts related to disaster recovery plans or programmes, particularly in the Central Africa subregion, which had or currently has the most significant number of conflict situations.

31. Overall, there has been progress towards improving conservation and effective management; however, these efforts were met with various challenges from both internal and external sources, such as inadequate funding, the need for government support, and security issues.

Strategic Objective 3: Develop capacity for conservation, management and promotion of cultural and natural heritage.

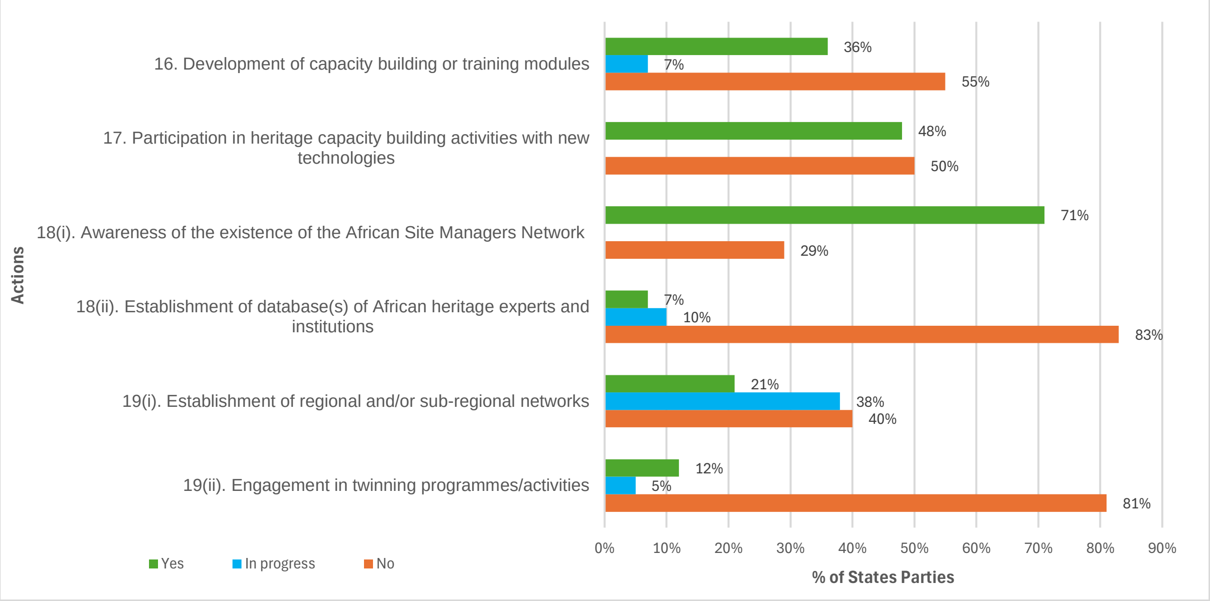

Figure 4: Percentage of States Parties that have made progress towards indicators associated with Objective 3

32. States Parties showed evidence of various capacity-building activities, ranging from university modules to national workshops and training sessions. However, it has been reported that modules specifically for Africa local experts or African professionals are needed, as the information covered may not integrate the local context to meet the needs of the professionals.

33. Several capacity-building activities have been carried out on new technologies, including training on the use of specific technologies such as drones, 3D photogrammetry technology, smart GPS tools, 3D digital modelling, GIS, etc., as well as workshops on the use of the SMART platform. Some States Parties secured funding to carry out these activities while at least one State Party included a similar action in their national action plans.

34. The African Site Managers' Network has been established since 2022. The interviewed site managers expressed that the network has been active in the dissemination of information but calls for more social media presence, greater awareness across the region, and the inclusion of upcoming professionals in the network. Additionally, there have been other subregional networks such as the Network of Young Heritage Leaders, Youth in Francophone and Lusophone Africa network, Youth Subregional Network for

Protection and Promotion of World Heritage, as well as the network of stakeholders involved in the strategy to remove properties from the List of World Heritage in Danger.

35. With regards to twinning programmes/activities, 12% of States Parties have responded that they have established at least one between their World Heritage properties within and outside the country, whereas 5% reported they are in progress to establish one.

36. States Parties reported that training activities should integrate emerging areas where stakeholders have expressed a need for more capacity building efforts such as community engagement, funding mobilisation, administrative management, poaching, vandalism, invasive species, climate change adaptation, etc. More importantly, stakeholders demand more opportunities to use the training they acquire through these capacity building activities.

Strategic Objective 4: Enhance heritage education, communication, and awareness-raising in the Africa region.

37. The results of introducing heritage education into lower education curriculums (elementary and secondary schools) are significantly higher compared to those seen in postsecondary education (universities and other higher institutions of learning). Experts from heritage institutions expressed that heritage curricula being offered by African institutions of higher learning do not sufficiently address the issues intrinsic to the World Heritage Convention in Africa, and a silo approach remains persistent between heritage institutions and institutions of higher learning. They further highlight the critical need for heritage institutions, institutions of higher learning, UNESCO chairs on African heritage, and other relevant stakeholders to jointly engage in research targeting thematic studies and gap analysis and the development of submitting credible and justifiable nomination files to further enhance heritage education and representativity in Africa. Survey respondents mentioned the existence of a few internships and fellowships, but participants in interviews and focus groups emphasize the need to consider more programmes/activities that can improve the technical skills of professionals and accommodate their schedules, e.g., online certifications, short-term certificates, or diplomas, etc., while also integrating practical experiences through missions, internships, or fellowships.

38. While the survey shows a 40% affirmative response to the existence of exchange/immersion programmes, all other lines did not find evidence that any formal exchange programmes have been established. However, stakeholders are generally aware of the UNESCO World Heritage Mentorship Programme, which has benefitted over 40 mentees and consider it an acceptable alternative to exchange programmes in the immediate term, particularly for working professionals who are not presently enrolled in academic programmes. Heritage experts added that the mentoring program has strong potential to bridge the generation gap between more experienced and younger professionals by allowing younger professionals to be observers or team members on UNESCO or Advisory Bodies' Advisory and/or Reactive Monitoring missions.

39. The evaluation found significant evidence of commemoration and awareness activities across the region. Examples of such activities included environmental education campaigns, workshops, sponsored school trips to World Heritage properties, World Heritage Day activities (e.g., games and competitions), social media channels, mobile apps, etc. A frequently mentioned awareness activity is the "50th anniversary conference on mentoring and World Heritage: Empowering African heritage professionals and improving gender equality" held in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, from 12 to 14 December 2022. While the Action Plan required the use of technologies, the evaluation found that States Parties were rarely aware of this caveat and only a few States Parties employed such technologies in their awareness activities, again suggesting that some of these activities were not motivated by the Action Plan. However, those who used technological tools found significantly higher reach in their awareness

efforts compared to those who did not. For example, one State Party reached a total of about 10,000 young people through innovative virtual activities such as Zoom, Facebook, YouTube, virtual classrooms, etc. Despite these results, the evaluation found that only a few of these activities made intentional efforts to engage women and young people, besides students.

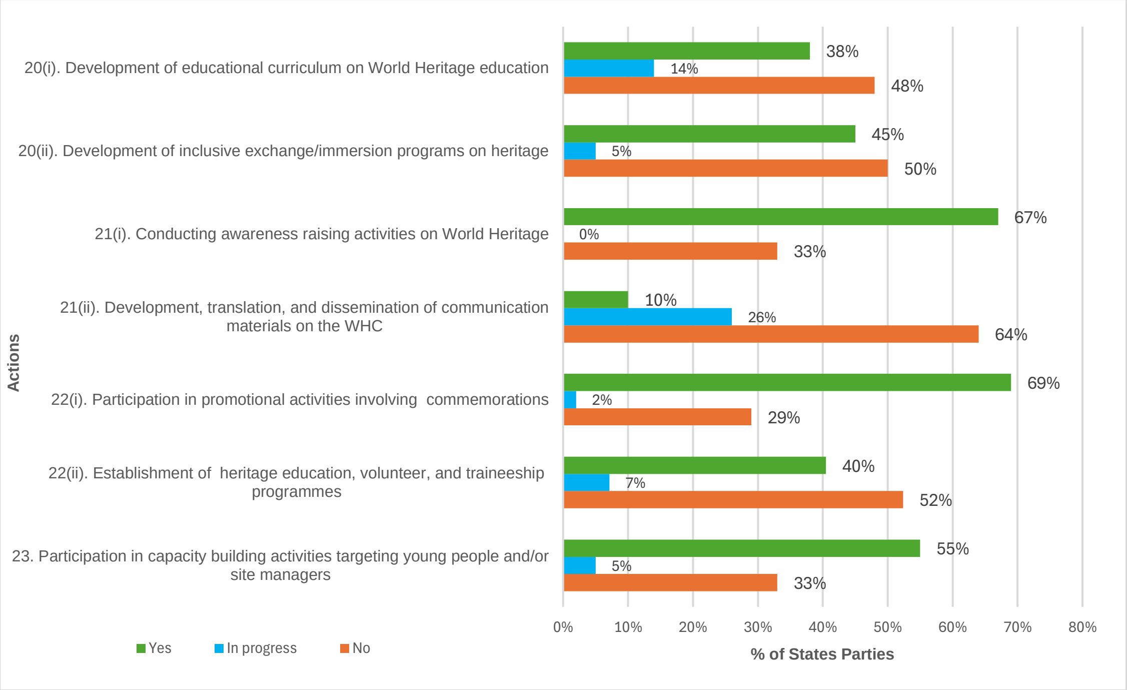

Figure 5: Percentage of States Parties that have made progress towards indicators associated with Objective 4.

40. There is very limited progress in the development, translation, and dissemination of communication materials on the World Heritage Convention*,* notably this has been raised in Lusophone countries. States Parties attributed this lack of progress to financial constraints.

41. Overall, there is significant progress towards enhancing heritage education at the lower levels and in raising awareness about World Heritage. The use of technology in awareness-raising activities has great potential to increase the reach of these efforts and, as such, should be encouraged. More deliberate efforts should be made to target youth and women in awareness activities, as well as in the dissemination of communication materials. Heritage institutions and other higher education institutions are in a strategic position to alleviate some of the challenges in capacity-building, representativity, and conservation management, provided they have adequate funding and work collaboratively.

Strategic Objective 5: Strengthen community and stakeholder engagement for effective management of World Heritage properties.

42. There has been limited progress on the integration of traditional knowledge through case studies/pilot projects, and the development of sustainable businesses and enterprises. Stakeholders attributed the slowed progress in these areas to the inadequate skills of heritage professionals to understand the relevant policies, frameworks, and guidelines needed to carry out such activities. The evaluation found the existence of engagement strategies between property authorities and local communities, integrated into overall management plans for the properties. However, without significant progress to enable sustainable livelihoods around World Heritage properties, site managers continue to face resistance from communities who have the misconception that the introduction of

heritage activities and its associated restrictions into their communities hinder their source of livelihood. This results in difficulties in communication between the communities and the relevant authorities. Interviewed UNESCO field officers and site managers call for more efforts to equip site managers with community empowerment strategies, particularly in conveying the relevance of heritage and ways communities can work together with the authorities to benefit from it.

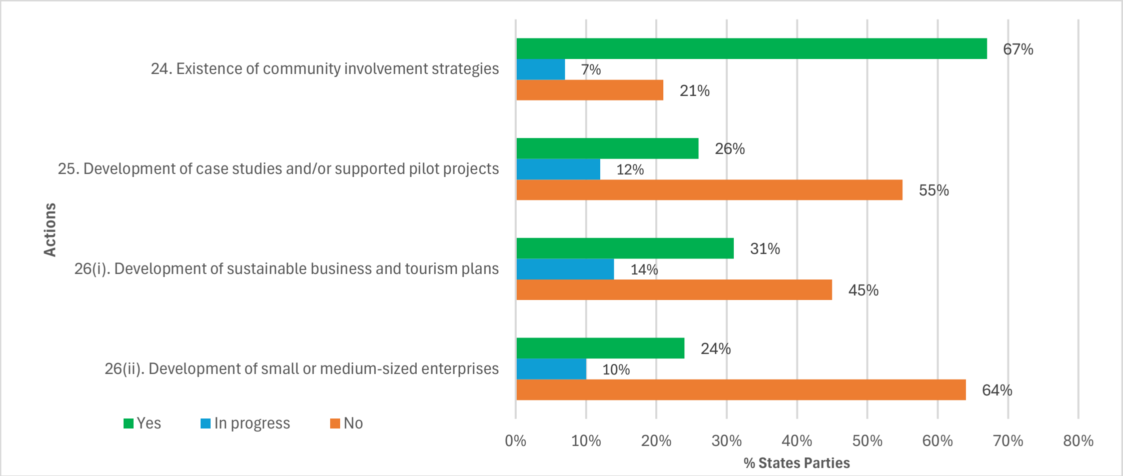

Figure 6: Percentage of States Parties that have made progress towards indicators associated with Objective 5.

43. Overall, more efforts are needed to materialise existing strategies into reality, particularly in communities around World Heritage properties. Professionals could use more support on community engagement strategies and their roles in the development of businesses and enterprises.

E. Conclusion and the way forward

44. The evaluation, three years since the adoption of the Regional Action Plan for Africa (2021-2027), concludes that the actions and objectives outlined in the Action Plan remain highly relevant to the needs of the States Parties and Africa as a region. With the implementation of these proposed recommendations, the evaluation is optimistic that the Action Plan's targets will likely be met or exceeded by 2027, regardless of whether the results can be directly attributed to the Action Plan. Based on the survey and evaluation findings, the following four recommendations are proposed as a strategy to achieve the expected results of the Regional Action Plan for Africa (2021-2027) for the next three years:

– **Pursue the integration of the Regional Action Plan for Africa (2021-2027) into national plans**.

States Parties should be encouraged to continue integrating the Regional Action Plan for Africa (2021-2027) into their national heritage plans and strategies. Each State Party should develop or enhance a national implementation plan tailored to its specific needs and priorities following the adoption of the Action Plan. These plans should involve relevant stakeholders, including site managers and local communities, and outline activities that align with each State Party’s priorities and resources within the overall Action Plan timelines.

– **Continue to support strengthening representation and credibility of the World Heritage List in Africa.**

There is a pressing need to continue enhancing the capacity of States Parties through targeted training and support, ensuring updates to national inventories and Tentative Lists are comprehensive and reflect thematic studies and gap analysis.

Actionable steps for the preparation of nomination dossiers could be accelerated by favouring a dedicated team at the national and sub-regional levels to increase efficiency in dossier preparation. Additionally, the Secretariat, with the assistance of the AWHF, Advisory Bodies, and relevant stakeholders, should implement a plan to engage in the Preliminary Assessment process from 2028, ensuring a three-year readiness period for comprehensive submission.

– **Enhance communication, awareness-raising, and heritage education.**

Efforts should continue to establish regular communication channels and meetings with national focal points and, where possible, national implementation teams. These meetings will serve as platforms for disseminating information, exchanging best practices, and identifying learning opportunities. National focal points should actively disseminate information about the Action Plan and its progress to site managers and other relevant stakeholders within their respective States Parties. Support and expand the African Sites Managers' Network and establish national site managers networks to foster multisectoral collaboration. Leverage these networks to enhance Mentorship Programmes, integrating mentees into various heritage activities. There is a need for a comprehensive review and strategic overhaul of capacity-building and education plans to tackle the ongoing challenge of limited expertise among heritage professionals. Curriculum development should focus on contextual relevance, incorporating local challenges and opportunities into professional training, thereby enhancing the applicability of skills acquired through capacity-building efforts.

– **Strengthen community and stakeholder engagement.**

The findings suggest a gap in the implementation of strategies that integrate community knowledge and promote sustainable livelihoods in and around World Heritage sites. Therefore, expand training for site managers in community engagement strategies, focusing on mutual benefits and the empowerment of local communities. This approach will help in transforming the perception of heritage sites from barriers to opportunities for local and sustainable development. Additionally, promote sub-regional cooperation for skill development and the execution of heritage projects, ensuring the sharing of good practices and resources across borders, including, *inter alia*, creating a consultative forum that meets annually with communities and utilising various media, preferably in local languages, to broaden reach and deepen impact in heritage promotion and education.

II. DRAFT DECISION

***Draft Decision*: 46 COM 10B.1**

The World Heritage Committee,

1. *Having examined Document WHC/24/46.COM/10B,*

2. *Recalling Decisions **44 COM 10A** and **45 COM 10B.1**, adopted at its extended 44th (Fuzhou/Online, 2021) and extended 45th (Riyadh, 2023) sessions, respectively;*

3. *Commends the authorities of South Africa for their financial support in hosting the Regional Mid-Cycle Review Workshop for National Focal Points and also commends all relevant stakeholders for their support in the implementing of the Action Plan since its adoption in 2021;*

4. *Thanks the States Parties for their active participation in the mid-cycle assessment of the Regional Action Plan for Africa (2021-2027) and encourages them to widely disseminate the outcomes of the survey evaluation among all relevant stakeholders;*

5. *Encourages the States Parties to continue adopting the Action Plan and to integrate relevant actions into their national or site-specific action plans, as well as to collaborate in ensuring the implementation of joint actions to achieve the targets set by 2027;*

6. *Requests the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Advisory Bodies, the African World Heritage Fund (AWHF), and other relevant partners, to continue providing support to States Parties, where feasible, in implementing the Action Plan, taking into account the recommendations outlined for the way forward;*

7. *Also requests the Secretariat to continue monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan in collaboration with the AWHF, the Advisory Bodies and relevant stakeholders in the region, with the aim of preparing a final assessment report reflecting its overall implementation, to be presented to World Heritage Committee at its session in 2028.*

III. MID-CYCLE ASSESSMENT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REGIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR THE ARAB STATES (2021-2027)

A. Background

1. The Third Cycle of Periodic Reporting in the Arab States was launched following Decision **41 COM 10A** (Krakow, 2017), and was carried out between September 2018 and July 2019. The report on the results of this exercise (please see Document WHC/21/44COM/10A) was presented to the World Heritage Committee at its extended 44th session (Fuzhou/online, 2021). By Decision **44 COM 10A**, the Committee endorsed the framework Regional Action Plan for the Arab States (2021-2027) (hereafter also referred to as "Action Plan").

2. The Action Plan, which focuses on the priority areas identified by the States Parties during the Third Cycle of Periodic Reporting, has an overarching goal of ensuring that tangible heritage is identified, protected, monitored and sustainably managed in the Arab States through the effective implementation of the World Heritage Convention. It comprises a set of 35 actions, linked to the identified priorities and outlined under three strategic objectives, as follows:

• Strategic Objective 1:	Contribute to a representative and balanced World Heritage List in the Arab States, reflecting the cultural and natural diversity of the region.
• Strategic Objective 2:	Enhance the protection, conservation and management of World Heritage, particularly for sites inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger, including through emergency preparedness, disaster risk response, and planning for recovery.
• Strategic Objective 3:	Improve the integration of sustainable development policies in the management of World Heritage sites.

3. In addition, two transversal thematic priorities were identified in the course of establishing the Action Plan, and hence, these have been mainstreamed under all three strategic objectives. The two thematic priorities are:

• Thematic Priority 1:	Strengthening capacities for the protection, conservation and management of World Heritage.
• Thematic Priority 2:	Enhancing participation and engagement of all stakeholders, particularly local communities, fostering education and awareness building.

4. In its Decision, the Committee encouraged States Parties to appropriate the Action Plan and integrate relevant actions in country or site-specific action plans, as well as collaborate to ensure the implementation of joint actions. Additionally, the Committee requested the World Heritage Centre, the Advisory Bodies, and the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage (ARC-WH), and other relevant partners, to provide technical support to States Parties in implementing the Action Plan, when feasible.

5. The follow-up of the activities carried out in the implementation of the Action Plan between July 2021 and May 2023 was presented to the World Heritage Committee at its extended 45th session (Riyadh, 2023) (see Document WHC/23/45.COM/10C). This report outlined the relevant activities and support provided by the World Heritage Centre to States Parties in the implementation of the Action Plan, in collaboration with ARC-WH and the Advisory Bodies, particularly in implementing capacity-building activities. The report also highlighted that the Strategy for World Heritage in Africa was informed by an inclusive consultation process, which included the seven Arab States located in the African Continent and is aligned with the regional Action Plans for Africa and the Arab States.

6. Furthermore, following the Declaration adopted at the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022 (28-30 September 2022, Mexico City), and the reflections undertaken at the international conference "The Next 50 - The future of World Heritage in challenging times enhancing resilience and sustainability" (17-18 November 2022, Delphi), the activities carried out thereafter have consistently been implemented in line with the outcomes of the above-mentioned conferences.

7. By Decision **44 COM 10A** (Fuzhou/Online, 2021) and further reiterated in Decision **45 COM 10C.2** (Riyadh, 2023), the Committee requested the World Heritage Centre to monitor the implementation of the Action Plan in view of preparing a mid-cycle assessment report to be presented to the World Heritage Committee at its 46th session.

8. In order to carry out monitoring of the implementation of the Action Plan and the subsequent preparation of a mid-cycle assessment report, the World Heritage Centre, in collaboration with ARC-WH, organized a regional meeting on 5-6 December 2023 in Manama, Bahrain. With the participation of World Heritage focal points in the Arab States and the Advisory Bodies, the meeting was a good opportunity to review and discuss progress in the implementation of the Action Plan, and introduce the plan to launch a mid-cycle assessment survey in 2024.

B. Mid-Cycle Assessment Survey

9. In order to monitor the progress achieved in the implementation of the Action Plan across the region and present a mid-cycle assessment report to the World Heritage Committee at its 46th session, a survey form was developed with questions aligned with the Action Plan and covering the three strategic objectives with their 35 actions.

10. The mix of quantitative and qualitative questions mirrored the Action Plan, with the aim of providing updated information on each action. Questions included closed, multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Respondents were invited to report on progress made in implementing each action. When relevant, quantifiable and/or qualitative follow-up questions were posed to further assess this progress. An opportunity was also given to respondents to provide further insights on challenges, good practices, and lessons learnt. The online survey was conducted through the UNESCO LimeSurvey platform.

11. The survey was launched online on 29 February 2024, with a submission deadline set for 31 March 2024. On 20 March 2024, the World Heritage Centre held an online Question-and-Answer session for World Heritage national focal points, in order to provide an opportunity to clarify any specific queries.

12. At the time of launching the survey, the total number of inscribed properties in the Arab States region was 93, located in 18 States Parties, with 84 cultural, 6 natural and 3 mixed sites. Of the 93 properties, 23 (24.7%) are inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

13. Responses to the survey were received from all 19 States Parties, and subsequently the results of the various questions were compiled and aggregated at the level of the region as a whole.

14. Below is a synopsis of the survey findings by strategic objective and priority area of the Action Plan, presenting progress achieved in the implementation of the Action Plan by the States Parties at the regional level.

C. Progress towards the implementation of the Regional Action Plan for Arab States (2021-2027) by strategic objective and priority area

Strategic Objective 1: Contribute to a representative and balanced World Heritage List in the Arab States, reflecting the cultural and natural diversity of the region

Enhancing the representation of the cultural and natural heritage in Tentative Lists

15. Based on the survey responses, it appears that there has been active engagement by States Parties in the preparation and updating of Tentative Lists, with the majority (13) reporting on either being involved in preparing Tentative Lists or that work is currently in progress. Seven respondents mentioned that they had used the Guidance on Developing and Revising World Heritage Tentative Lists (see https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/). In particular, efforts have been made in terms of identifying potential sites, resolving duplicate listings, proposing new sites on Tentative Lists, and coordinating with relevant stakeholders and international organizations for technical assistance in this regard.

16. With regard to the appraisal of Tentative Lists, four respondents reported that it has been conducted in terms of potential for a representative World Heritage List, at the national and regional levels. Eight reported that it is progressing in doing so, while five reported that there are plans to undertake such an appraisal before the end of 2027, and only two reported that there are no such plans yet. Nine respondents indicated that the appraisal of Tentative Lists has been at the national level, while five indicated that it is at both the national and regional levels. One of the respondents mentioned that appraisal was carried out to include underrepresented categories, such as natural heritage, modern heritage, and transboundary sites, while another noted that the primary objective is to review and prioritise sites that have the most potential to demonstrate Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).

17. Moreover, 12 respondents reported that at least one relevant thematic and/or needs assessment study has been completed, or is in the process, while three respondents reported that they have not yet begun the process but are actively making plans and aim to complete them before the end of 2025. For some respondents, workshops related to thematic assessments are being conducted.

18. In addition, 13 respondents reported on either completing the revision of their Tentative List or in being in progress, and one reported on planning to start the process. As regards stakeholder participation, this varied among States Parties, with only three reporting high participation. Most of the engagement has been with national and regional government stakeholders and research institutions.

19. Challenges that have been cited are related to COVID-19, limited resources and expertise, conflict, documentation issues, and fostering community participation and stakeholder engagement.

20. The support of, and collaboration with UNESCO, the Advisory Bodies, ARC-WH, and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), has been noted, in addition to that of universities and research institutions, and national and regional government stakeholders. Liaising with governmental stakeholders seems to be an important factor for many States Parties.

Enhancing awareness and use of the Upstream processes

21. Eight respondents reported that they have either requested support from the World Heritage Centre or benefited from Upstream process expertise from other relevant stakeholders, while five reported to be in progress in such activities. Among those who have received support, several respondents reported on support provided, in particular from ICOMOS, ARC-WH, and the UNESCO field offices in the region. Both technical and financial forms of support were mentioned.

Enhancing heritage inventories, particularly for natural heritage and conflict-affected areas

22. With regard to the appraisal and updating of national inventories, especially in relation to natural heritage, and/or in conflict-affected areas, with stakeholder participation, only two respondents reported to have completed this action, one of which reported expert support through the UNESCO field office in the region. For 11 other respondents, there is progress in this regard. The difference in the institutional and technical approaches in establishing inventories of cultural and natural heritage has been pointed out by the respondents.

Strategic Objective 2: Enhance the protection, conservation and management of World Heritage, particularly for sites inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger, including through emergency preparedness, disaster risk response, and planning for recovery.

Enhancing synergies with other conventions and programmes, particularly with regard to sites under threat, and those experiencing loss of intangible cultural heritage practices

23. In terms of synergies with other conventions and programmes, the Action Plan primarily focuses on the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, through its Second Protocol and Enhanced Protection list, as well as the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

24. At the time of adopting the Action Plan in July 2021, 16 out of the 19 States Parties were also Party to the 1954 Hague Convention, though only 10 had ratified the 1999 Second Protocol, with none benefiting from Enhanced Protection under this protocol. Since then, two States Parties have adhered to the Second Protocol making the total number of 12 States Parties. In addition, it was reported that five States Parties have taken measures to ensure communication and/or collaboration between the World Heritage focal points and the focal points of the 1954 Hague Convention and/or the Second Protocol, while, for four States Parties, progress has been reported in this regard.

25. In this context, various types of communication and activities were reported, such as cooperation with UNESCO and Blue Shield, collaboration between focal points and communication on a regular basis amongst relevant national stakeholders. Other activities included the organization of awareness raising activities about the conventions, participation in meetings, conferences and workshops, organization of capacity-building activities as well as planning for risk preparedness.

26. As for the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, since July 2021, one State Party has ratified this Convention, bringing its total number of States Parties to 19, which represents all States Parties to the World Heritage Convention of the region.

27. During the Third Cycle of Periodic Reporting, it was noted that 13 World Heritage properties have associated intangible practices/traditions, which are inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Two respondents have reported implementation of comprehensive strategies for integration and achieving multiple designations, seven have taken some measures towards this end, while six others are in the early stages of exploring and planning for better integration between tangible and intangible heritage at sites.

28. Measures to ensure communication and/or collaboration between focal points of the two conventions have been undertaken by eight States Parties, and five respondents have reported that this is in progress.

29. Eleven respondents have informed that there was communication on a regular basis to exchange information at the national level, while three reported communicating on a regular basis to exchange information at specific site level, five reported developing joint activities to address specific issues, and four highlighted integrated management combining both World Heritage and intangible cultural heritage practices.

30. To illustrate synergies fostered between the 1972 and 2003 Conventions, respondents have provided information on specific activities, such as the promotion of intangible heritage elements in World Heritage properties, the organization of workshops, and carrying out activities to protect, safeguard, and revive crafts and practices. Some reported on inventorying tangible and intangible heritage, mapping, and integrating practices in site management plans. One respondent referred to the adoption of a new law on the protection, conservation and promotion of cultural heritage that takes into account the universally accepted evolution of the notion of tangible, intangible and natural cultural heritage, their profound interdependence and the importance of their transmission. Another respondent requested UNESCO to assist with guidelines to have better synergies between the 1972 and 2003 Conventions at the national level.

Ensuring the definition of Outstanding Universal Value, attributes and boundary clarifications for effective protection and management

31. With reference to enhancing capacities in the elaboration and understanding of OUV and attributes, overall, 18 respondents informed that they have been engaged in such activities or that there is progress towards this end, while only one reported that there are no activities undertaken in this regard.

32. It is to be noted that since the adoption of the Action Plan, retrospective Statements of OUV (rSOUVs) for nine properties have been finalised, making up the great majority of pending rSOUVs at the time. On the other hand, for only one property, boundaries have been clarified and adopted. Eight respondents have stated that they are in the process of finalising some of the pending boundary clarifications/minor boundary modifications by 2025.

Ensuring the conservation of sites inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger

33. Regarding the properties inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger, the preparation of proposals for the Desired state of conservation for the removal of properties from the List of World Heritage in Danger (DSOCR) and corrective measures has been pursued. While noting that the pending DSCOR for two properties in the region were finalised and adopted by the World Heritage Committee in July 2021 (Fuzhou/online), and in September 2023 (Riyadh) the DSCOR was adopted for two other properties, progress has been made for the DSCOR for four other properties.

34. In their replies, respondents provided information on the implementation of corrective measures, while two respondents reported on progress made in establishing strategies and actions for post-conflict recovery.

Enhancing legal frameworks for effective conservation and management of heritage

35. Most respondents (10) have reported on having adequate legal framework and effective cooperation mechanisms, while two reported on ineffective cooperation mechanisms and two others reported on inadequate legal frameworks, while one considered that the legal framework is inadequate and cooperation mechanisms ineffective.

36. Although only five respondents have reported on having fully integrated impact assessments into regulatory frameworks for heritage conservation and/or management plans/systems, five have reported on partial integration and five other respondents reported on limited integration. Respondents provided examples of Heritage Impact Assessments (HIAs) carried out and referred to participation in capacity-building workshops. Overall, there appears to be improvement in this regard.

Enhancing resilience to natural hazards and management of risks

37. Twelve respondents reported benefitting from capacity-building activities in emergency preparedness, risk management and disaster risk reduction, provided by UNESCO World Heritage Centre, ARC-WH, or the Advisory Bodies, while two respondents

reported that this has progressed. Respondents highlighted the importance of enhancing capacities and the need for emergency preparedness.

38. On the other hand, only five respondents have reported having established strategies for emergency preparedness, risk management, and Disaster Risk Response at selected World Heritage properties prior to the adoption of the Action Plan, and six reported on being in the process of establishing such strategies. Eight respondents reported on minimal, or no implementation of strategies related to emergency preparedness, risk management, and Disaster Risk Response.

39. Most of the established strategies have focused on emergency preparedness plans as reported by 11 respondents, while eight respondents reported on integrating risk management measures into national policies, seven mentioned the implementation of disaster response initiatives, and one focused on assessing damage during risks.

40. On the other hand, on the question related to the utilisation of the Strategy for Risk Reduction at World Heritage properties to set national policies or strategies for the protection of cultural or natural heritage, only two responded positively, while five others mentioned that some aspects of the Strategy have been considered. A majority of 11 respondents mentioned that either the Strategy has not been utilised for setting national policies or strategies, or that the question does not apply. Respondents mentioned difficulties in the current context, but others also highlighted the existence of strategies at the national level, or referred to site-specific strategies.

Effective implementation of Environmental and Heritage Impact Assessments (EIAs, HIAs)

41. Fourteen respondents highlighted active participation in training workshops provided by relevant institutions such as UNESCO, the Advisory Bodies, and ARC-WH, that specifically address impact assessments, while four mentioned that they had not participated in any.

42. In terms of efforts to prepare and submit Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs or HIAs for development projects, six respondents mentioned developing and submitting at least one EIA or HIA for development projects, and five others responded on this activity being in progress.

Enhancing implementation of the 2011 Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) in the management of World Heritage, particularly World Heritage cities and historic urban centres

43. Only three respondents confirmed they are fully making use of the provisions of the 2011 HUL Recommendation to set policies or strategies, notably in city master planning or site management planning. Four responded that they are partially making use of it. However, the majority is yet to use provisions of this recommendation, with five responding about their intention to make full use by 2025.

Strengthening management systems at World Heritage sites

44. With regard to developing and implementing funding strategies and mobilising resources for World Heritage conservation and management, four respondents mentioned that they had established multiple new funding streams, and five others have secured new funding from one or more sources, while others have either developed proposals, exploring funding sources, or have not identified new sources.

45. Moreover, according to the survey, 12 States Parties have been engaged in forming and strengthening partnerships to support the conservation and management of World Heritage, with either having established multi-stakeholder partnerships or formalised partnerships with local or national organizations, while four others are in the initial discussions.

46. With regard to efforts made to develop human resources and build capacities for effective conservation, protection, and presentation of cultural and/or natural heritage, two respondents mentioned that a centre of excellence for heritage conservation training has been established, two others have implemented a comprehensive human resources development strategy, while a majority of 12 respondents have referred to regular training programmes or occasional workshops or training sessions for staff.

47. In terms of effort towards improving coordination among all stakeholders involved in the management of World Heritage properties, advanced coordination mechanisms are reported by five respondents, while one reported on the implementation of integrated management systems, and four on the establishment of a coordination committee or similar body, and seven reported on occasional meetings or communications among management entities.

48. Seven respondents mentioned undertaking at least one study/research programme since July 2021, focused on the attributes of properties that convey OUV and understanding management needs, and four other respondents mentioned that this has progressed.

Effective monitoring of World Heritage sites, including tourism monitoring

49. Since July 2021, five States Parties have established monitoring programmes and key indicators for specific World Heritage properties, with the engagement of local communities, NGOs, and other groups, while for five others, there is progress. According to the survey, such indicators have been defined for 14 properties.

Integrated implementation of capacity-building programmes

50. As regards capacity-building strategies or programmes focusing on the Operational Guidelines and associated processes, and/or property conservation and management, 13 respondents mentioned either having achieved this or that there is progress towards this end. Several respondents reported on having developed at least one site-specific capacity-building plan or programme since July 2021. Some of the respondents listed more than one property, and several capacity-building activities.

Strengthening communication, international and regional cooperation for ensuring best practices in conservation and management

51. Five respondents have confirmed being engaged in the establishment of regional and/or subregional expert networks for sharing expertise and best practices, as well as fostering collaboration, while seven highlighted that this is in progress, and six stated that they have not been engaged. From the responses, it appears that some States Parties are very actively engaged in fostering such collaboration, which presents an opportunity for improvement at the level of the region.

Strategic Objective 3: Improve the integration of sustainable development policies in the management of World Heritage sites.

Mainstreaming various dimensions of sustainable development in the conservation and management of World Heritage

52. Respondents to the survey have reported that a management plan/system has been developed or updated for around 24% of the properties in the region, through participatory processes and by integrating, where appropriate, policies relating to the 2011 HUL Recommendation, Climate Change, Disaster Risk Reduction, and inclusive social and economic development.

53. Moreover, it was reported that, at 20 properties, the management system is considered fully implemented and monitored; two States Parties clarified that the management system is implemented and monitored in a limited way for a total of seven properties,

notably due to the impact of the prevailing security and economic situation. Some of the respondents also confirmed the adequacy of the management system/plan to maintain OUV (around 40% of properties). One State Party clarified that for some properties with several components, a global management plan is being developed to further improve efficiency.

54. With regard to enhancing awareness and knowledge about the 2015 'Policy for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective Into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention' among stakeholders, including in relation to fostering peace and security, only two respondents reported that awareness and knowledge has been significantly enhanced, two others reported that there was no enhancement of the awareness and knowledge about this Policy Document, and four reported on the absence of awareness of the document. Of four respondents reporting on slightly enhanced awareness and knowledge about the Policy Document, one highlighted that there is a need to integrate biodiversity and sustainable development into the management of World Heritage. In addition, of the six respondents reporting on moderately enhanced awareness and knowledge about the document, one considered that there is a need for awareness programmes, and another respondent highlighted that although awareness was enhanced, sustainable development is very difficult to achieve in an unstable country situation.

55. As regards the integration of the updated Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage, adopted by the General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention in November 2023, it appears that there is already some progress, though this Policy Document was relatively recent at the time of launching the survey questionnaire.

56. Five respondents reported that this Policy Document will be comprehensively utilised in setting national policies or strategies for both cultural and natural heritage. One State Party reported that it is in the process of developing a toolkit, informed by this Policy Document, for climate risk assessment and the development of climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies at World Heritage and Tentative List sites. Additionally, for six respondents, this Policy Document will be used to some extent, either supplementing or partially replacing the previous Document, in setting national policies or strategies for either cultural or natural heritage. One respondent reported that the Policy Document will be dispatched and integrated into strategies for crises and disasters.

57. On the other hand, for three respondents, the updated Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage will be minimally integrated in setting national policies or strategies for heritage, and two other respondents highlighted that it will not be integrated in national policies or strategies, with the previous Policy Document on the Impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage properties (2007) still being utilised. One State Party specified that a policy advisory group on environment and climate change has been established, and that the authorities responsible for cultural heritage have assigned an officer who needs time to be familiarised with the document, while mentioning that implementation is very difficult in an unstable country situation.

58. In terms of strengthening resilience to natural hazards and climate change, four respondents reported on the existence of climate adaptation and mitigation plans for their properties (12 properties in total), and three respondents reported that some World Heritage properties have climate adaptation and mitigation plans and for others, this is in progress. However, for seven respondents (32 properties), climate adaptation and mitigation plans do not exist yet and none are currently being developed, while for four respondents, such plans are currently being actively developed. One respondent mentioned that a project for an early warning system is being developed at two properties, in collaboration with UNESCO. Another respondent clarified that a training

workshop for teachers on climate change impacts was provided by the UNESCO Associated Schools Network in 2019.

59. Among the factors being monitored are the impact of sea-level rise, climatic variations, sustainable and resilient construction practices such as climate adaptation and passive climate design, and groundwater monitoring for adaptation measures for historical houses.

60. In relation to the integration of the conservation and protection of cultural and natural heritage, along with World Heritage policies and strategies, into the national sustainable development policies and strategies, only three respondents reported full integration, while seven others reported partial integration with some efforts made, but with room for improvement. For two respondents, conservation and protection are part of the national 2030 vision, with one of them mentioning that the protection and conservation of natural heritage is better integrated than that for cultural heritage. For three respondents, such an integration is limited, and for three others there is no integration, with no significant effort made towards this end.

Ensuring sustainable management of World Heritage sites

61. In responding to questions concerning the use of the UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Toolkit as a guide for best practice approaches, one respondent mentioned that the Toolkit and guidance are followed, citing a case study that reflects its use for best practice through urban revitalisation and community activities. In addition, four State Parties reported that significant efforts have been made to incorporate the Toolkit into their tourism practices, and two respondents reported that the Toolkit has been used in certain aspects of tourism development, but there is room for improvement in terms of its comprehensive application, with one highlighting that it is currently being used to guide the revision of the management plans for five properties. Five respondents reported that limited steps have been taken to incorporate the UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Toolkit, and six reported that the UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Toolkit has not been used as a guide. The need for further knowledge about this Toolkit has been highlighted by some.

62. Moreover, 17 respondents provided information on whether they have set strategies and/or action plans since 2021 to manage visitors, tourism activity, and its derived economic, socio-cultural, and environmental impacts, ensuring that benefits are shared with the local communities. Such a strategy and/or action plan is reported for 17 properties (eight States Parties). For several other properties, site visitation/tourism plans and strategies, including for interpretation and presentation are being established with the integration of communities. At some properties, ensuring that tourism revenues benefit community development has been highlighted. Four States Parties, facing conflict/post-conflict situations, reported that there are no such strategies or action plans.

63. In relation to stakeholder engagement at World Heritage processes, respondents highlighted that consideration is given to the engagement of communities, and seven referred to the engagement of Indigenous Peoples. In addition, 13 respondents highlighted that consideration for stakeholder engagement is given to women, and 12 highlighted the engagement of youth.

64. Some respondents provided further details, clarifying that in the nomination process, consideration of stakeholder engagement includes local communities (women, youth and/or Indigenous Peoples), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) or the relevant municipalities. Some respondents further added that this engagement is essential, with one highlighting the contribution of stakeholders in relation to intangible heritage values. According to some respondents, local communities have also been involved in workshops on Tentative Lists, on-site workshops, events and activities for the integration of women, youth and Indigenous Peoples, participation in decision-making processes, as well as site management and monitoring.

65. In terms of fostering awareness raising strategies among communities and various stakeholders about the protection, conservation, and presentation of World Heritage properties, only one respondent reported the lack of implementation of awareness raising programmes and another reported on the full implementation of such programmes. Sixteen respondents reported on either substantial implementation, partial or minimal implementation.

<u>Expanding heritage educational programmes for children and youth to contribute to improving understanding of heritage, promoting diversity and fostering intercultural dialogue</u>

66. A majority of ten respondents reported that heritage-related education programmes or initiatives directed towards children and youth have been implemented since 2021. This has been achieved through presentations on World Heritage in schools, collaboration with the Ministries of Education, updating of national curricula, on-site activities, the use of the World Heritage in Young Hands Kit, volunteering programmes, craft and arts workshops, and the production of supporting materials. In addition, four respondents reported that such activities are progressing, with one State Party clarifying that World Heritage properties in the country are visited by school and university students, while another specifying that several heritage-related initiatives and capacity-building programmes have been initiated for children and youth. On the other hand, four respondents reported that no heritage-related education programmes or initiatives directed towards children and youth have been implemented since 2021.

B. Conclusions

67. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that overall, actions outlined in the regional Action Plan have been mostly relevant to the States Parties in the region. The level of engagement in the implementation of the various activities may vary from one State Party to the other, on the basis of their relevancy and the presence of constraints, such as instability and conflict, limited resources, or other challenges. Several States Parties have been engaged in activities organised by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the Advisory Bodies and ARC-WH.

68. Therefore, it is recommended that implementation of the Action Plan is further pursued, focusing on the identified priorities. In addition, a number of observations can be made, as follows:

- Due consideration has been given to Tentative Lists by several States Parties, whether in terms of preparation, updating, or appraisal. This may imply the existence of a current momentum towards achieving an enhanced representation on Tentative Lists, in view of potential future World Heritage nominations;
- There is particular active engagement by States Parties in fostering synergies between the 1972 World Heritage Convention and the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. However, limited synergies could be noted with the 1999 Second Protocol of the 1954 Hague Convention;
- Enhanced capacities in the definition of OUV could be noted. This is also implied by the finalisation of several pending retrospective SOUVs. On the other hand, several issues related to boundary clarifications and minor boundary modifications - including for the designation of buffer zones - remain pending, and require further attention;
- For properties inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger, the establishment of DSOCRs through innovative approaches has been steadily increasing, and the implementation of corrective measures has proceeded. However, planning for recovery may require additional efforts;

- The need to enhance resilience to natural hazards and the management of risks remains a priority that has been highlighted by States Parties. Participation in relevant capacity-building activities has been reported. Further action may be needed, including in Disaster Risk Management planning;
- A relatively high number of participation has also been noted in the context of training in impact assessments. On the other hand, with regard to the 2011 HUL Recommendation, the majority of States Parties are yet to make use of this recommendation, and hence technical support in this area may be beneficial;
- There are ongoing efforts to strengthen management systems, particularly in terms of developing human resources and partnerships. When it comes to the integration of the dimensions of sustainable development in the conservation and management of World Heritage, there appears to be consideration for the updated Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage, as well as climate adaptation and mitigation plans;
- Attention has been given to issues related to tourism management at World Heritage properties by a majority of States Parties, with information provided on the existence of strategies and/or action plans to manage tourism and its derived economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts;
- Stakeholder participation in World Heritage processes has been highlighted, particularly with regard to community engagement. Fostering awareness raising strategies also came out as a priority that has been pursued actively. Several States Parties have also reported on implementing heritage related education programmes directed towards children and youth.

IV. DRAFT DECISION

***Draft Decision*: 46 COM 10B.2**

The World Heritage Committee,

1. *Having examined Document WHC/24/46.COM/10B,*

2. *Recalling Decisions* ***44 COM 10A*** *and* ***45 COM 10C.2,*** *adopted at its extended 44th (Fuzhou/online, 2021) and extended 45th (Riyadh, 2023) sessions, respectively,*

3. *Expresses its sincere appreciation to the States Parties in the Arab States region for submitting the mid-cycle assessment forms;*

4. *Welcomes the mid-cycle assessment report on the implementation of the Third Cycle Action Plan in the Arab States;*

5. *Commends the efforts of the States Parties in pursuing the implementation of the Action Plan, focusing on relevant actions, and encourages them to continue with their efforts in appropriating the Action Plan and integrating relevant actions in country or site-specific action plans;*

6. *Takes note with appreciation of the efforts of the Secretariat, the Advisory Bodies and the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage in providing technical support to States Parties in implementing activities of the Action Plan, and requests that they continue to do so, whenever feasible;*

7. *Reminds the States Parties that have not already done so to submit to the World Heritage Centre their retrospective Statements of Outstanding Universal Value by **1 February 2025**, as well as clarifications of boundaries by **1 December 2024**;*

8. *Also requests the Secretariat to continue monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan in collaboration with the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage, the Advisory Bodies and relevant stakeholders in the region, with the aim of preparing a final assessment report reflecting its overall implementation, to be presented to World Heritage Committee at its session in 2028.*