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Cultural heritage management and the effect of corruption in Nigeria: hampering sustainable development via cultural heritage destruction

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this research is to discuss the effect of corruption on conventional management of cultural heritage (CH) resources in Nigeria. It identifies the means by which the effect can be curtailed to bring about proper management system in the CH sector and pave the way for economic/sustainable development through cultural tourism in the country.

Design/methodology/approach – The research draws from both exploratory and comparative approaches. It took a study of selected locations and museums in the six geopolitical zones of the country, with a review of literatures on cultural heritage management (CHM). It also gives summarized information on the present overall effect of corruption in the CH sector of Nigeria.

Findings – The research reveals that there are some levels of mismanagement and destruction of CH resources in the country. This is manifested in acts of museum theft, illicit trafficking, unlawful possession and general mishandling of CH, as well as the deterioration of facilities in the sector. The research gathered that the problem came as a result of wrongful appointment of none heritage experts as heads of heritage-related institutions and agencies. It also results from lack of required attention by the government and other relevant stakeholders (such as community leaders/members, academics and law enforcement agencies, *inter alia*) toward CH preservation, protection, management and promotion for sustainable development. The research recommends that the government and other CH stakeholders (mentioned above) should make efforts to address the issues discussed, so as to improve the management of CH in the country for sustainable development.

Originality/value – Prior to this research, there has been no publication addressing the effect of corruption on CHM in this context and location. The article makes recommendations that call for action and also set grounds for future discourse.

Keywords Corruption, Cultural heritage, Heritage destruction, Heritage management, Heritage institutions, Sustainable development

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Nigeria is home to about 250–300 ethnic groups, and there are over 500 languages spoken by different groups of people in the country. As Nigeria is dynamic in terms of ethnicity, population (over 210 million based on 2021 [worldometer](#) elaboration of the latest United Nations data) and even area coverage (about 923,768 km²), so is the dynamism in the cultural heritage (CH) of her citizens ([ICCROM, 2020](#)). This is seen as either monuments manifested in objects of art, archaeological sites, cultural landscapes and historic towns or as customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values, among others.



Over time, the meaning of CH has expanded from single monuments identified as objects of art to cultural landscapes, archaeological sites, historic cities and serial properties. The concept of cultural heritage as used here “relates to material structures, institutional complexes and practices, and at the same time carries a powerful emotional charge and a value structure emanating from the idea of belonging and of shared cultural meanings” (Falser, 2015, p. 2). CH is, therefore, seen as an expression of the ways of living, developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values (ICOMOS, 2002).

Furthermore, contemporary practice (ratified by ICOMOS at its Madrid General Assembly about two decade ago) extends the concept of heritage beyond tangible heritage to include intangible dimensions of heritage. This encompasses the entirety of the capital of knowledge derived from the development and experience of human practices. It also involves the spatial, social and cultural constructions that may be encapsulated in the word memory (ICOMOS, 2015).

Thus, we can simply see CH as the legacy of the product of human selection by a group of people or society. Including all the aspects of a community’s past and present that are considered valuable and desired to pass on to future generations. As noted earlier, CH included only monuments and great works of arts in the past. Thus, aesthetic and historic values were the main criteria that determined the significance of CH. For instance, if a CH is deemed to have had high aesthetic value or had association with an important person or historic event, it would be considered as having high cultural importance. Today, in addition to aesthetic and historic values, social values such as traditional practices or beliefs are considered among the main criteria for determining the cultural significance of CH places (Ruoss and Alfarè, 2013).

Based on the position of Feather (2006), CH can be distinguished as follows:

- (1) Built Environment (Buildings, Townscapes, Archaeological remains).
- (2) Natural Environment (Rural landscapes, Coasts and shorelines, Agricultural heritage).
- (3) Artifacts (Books and Documents, Objects, Pictures).

Today, countries employ different methods to determine their CH, and the type and significance of a culture may vary from country to country. Therefore, the heritage law of a country defines what constitutes CH for that country. In general context, CH has been grouped into the following two broad categories by UNECAP (2008);

- (1) Tangible heritage: Tangible CH is the physical manifestation or symbol of cultural expressions or traditions of the societies that are living or lived in the area. Monuments, traditional buildings, archaeological sites, temples, historic cities and so on are examples of tangible heritage (Ruoss and Alfarè, 2013; Sullivan, 2016).
- (2) Intangible heritage: Intangible CH is the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their CH. This intangible CH, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history. This provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity (UNESCO, 2018, p. 5).

Based on the establishment of UNESCO (2018), intangible CH is manifested *inter alia* in the following domains:

- (1) Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible CH

- (2) Performing arts
- (3) Social practices, rituals and festive events
- (4) Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
- (5) Traditional craftsmanship, etc.

Therefore, CH speaks about the traditions, beliefs and achievements of a country and its people and also about the history, art, spiritual beliefs and social values of a group of people or society. By enlightening us about the past and demonstrating the achievements and excellence of past generations, CH represents our identity. It can help us appreciate the cultural diversity of humankind and so, worth to be managed properly (Ruoss and Alfarè, 2013).

Cultural heritage management (CHM)

Cultural heritage management (CHM) has been explained as “the process of protection and management of abundant and individual CH elements, related to the enlargement of the society and its changing needs” (Jureniene and Radzevicius, 2014, p. 237). CHM is, therefore, considered as an inseparable part of most research studies bordering on conservation, preservation and protection of heritage objects.

The concept of CHM was first used in the 1970s by The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) International Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management (ICAHM). “In 1972, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Convention established the World Heritage Committee. The committee aims to preserve cultural and natural heritage worldwide, with the responsibility of determining the World Heritage” (Yilmaz and El-Gamil, 2018, p. 71).

Over time, the practice in CHM has continued to develop greatly. Global efforts such as the Agenda 2030 are seeking a better future for people and the planet, and this shift is also reflected within the heritage sector, where the dominant trend is a focus on people (ICCRUM, 2015). This is supported by the guidelines issued by ICOMOS and UNESCO for the Management of World Cultural Heritage Sites. The guidelines were later modified in 1993 and 1998, respectively. Further, in the 2000s, the concept of sustainability became a significant principle for conserving the heritage sites. This means that all heritage sites are assets that should be jealously protected and properly management for sustainable development.

Yilmaz and El-Gamil (2018, p. 71) noted that “CHM approaches have changed” recently. “They have been transformed from the conventional approach which gives more attention to the resource itself, to the human approach, which gives attention to the resource and the visitor. This is done in order to achieve the required balance regarding the quality of the visitor’s experience.” In doing this, attention is largely given to the preservation practices and principles at the heritage properties. The host community participation and benefit in CHM are thus put as a top priority.

Management of CH has become a complex and ever-changing phenomenon that ought to be given close attention by all the stakeholders (government, heritage agencies, experts, the host communities and indeed the general public). This is because its approaches are largely dynamic and constantly being modified to be in line with the changing political, economic and physical settings (Vacharopoulou, 2005). Therefore, when this is handled inappropriately, it results in mismanagement and subsequent destruction of the CH resources of a people, and this is exactly the situation of CH resources in Nigeria.

Comparatively, “countries such as Israel, Malaysia, Singapore, UAE, China, USA, Britain, France, South Africa, Uganda, and Kenya” where CH resources are greatly preserved and properly managed, they provide essential socioeconomic opportunities to the host

communities. The host communities benefit from this because it attracts investments (internal and external), provides jobs through increased cultural tourism, brings better/improved infrastructure and promotes patriotism among the community members (Nomishan *et al.*, 2020, p. 3).

However, despite the enormous benefits of proper management of CH to the host communities, posterity and the socioeconomic well-being of the general public, it has been faced with diverse human-induced threats all over the world. In Nigeria, these threats are many, but for the purpose of this study, attention shall be given to corruption and how it has affected the preservation and protection of CH, thereby preventing it from striving to attain sustainable development through proper CHM.

Cultural heritage of Nigeria

The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) rightly posits that Nigeria is blessed with outstanding cultural, natural and significant heritage sites (ICCROM, 2020). Nigeria's CH encompasses phenomena such as monuments and seen as objects of art, archaeological sites, cultural landscapes and historic towns. It also includes customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values among others (see Plates 1–9).

Some of the CH resources in Nigeria *inter alia* include archaeological sites such as the Nok Valley, Turunku, Kabitu Hills, Katsina-Ala Basin, Ibinda and Tse-Dura Complexes, Wo-Mondo, Da'ama, Birnin-Kudu Rock Painting, Iwo-Eleru Rockshelter, Erijiyan Postsherd pavements, Ancient Ile-Ife, Old-Oyo Kingdom, Olumo Rock, Idanre Hills, Ancient Benin Empire, Igbo-Ukwu and Akwanshi Stone Figurines, *inter alia* (see Tubosun, 1995; Folorunso, 1981; Tubosun and Andah, 1983; Andah, 1983; Shaw and Daniels, 1984; Okpoko, 1984;



Note(s): The Sukur landscape was declared UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999. Its traditional village structures and architectural style have remained unchanged for centuries. The iron smelting furnaces, the ceramics making centre, the ruins of the Hidi's Palace, the traditional cemeteries in the hills, and the unusual placement of the settlement are a beauty to behold

Source(s): Adeboyejo (2018)

Plate 1.
A section of the Sukur
Cultural Landscape,
Mandara Mountains,
Adamawa State



Note(s): The sacred groves of Osun are located at the outskirts of Osogbo, about 230 kilometres from Lagos. This was regarded as the goddess of fertility and one of the most popular deities in Yorubaland. The groves are dotted by shrines, sculptures, and artworks. They are known to be areas dedicated to deities and regarded as sacred places in the past

Source(s): Adeboyejo (2018)

Plate 2.
Osun-Osogbo sacred
groves



Note(s): Sungbo's Eredo walls are a series of defensive walls located in the south-western part of Nigeria, particularly in Ogun and Edo states. These are defensive walls that were said to have been built in honour of a female chief, Bilikisu Sungbo

Source(s): Adeboyejo (2018)

Plate 3.
Sungbo's Eredo and
Iya of Benin



Note(s): The site of Lejja is located about 15 kilometres south of the university town of Nsukka in south-eastern Nigeria. The site is home to hundreds of smelting debris such as slag, slag blocks, furnaces and tuyeres. Recent archaeological research in the area indicates that iron smelting at the site is as old as 4005± 40 BP. (Eze-Uzomaka, 2009, p. 41)

Source(s): Things Nigeria (2018)

Plate 4.
The cylindrical iron
blocks at Otobo Ugwu
Dunoka, Lejja iron
smelting site

Igirgi, 1984; Mangut, 1986; 1990; Okafor, 1989; Ogundele, 1990; Jemkur, 1992; Gundu, 1999; Ibeanu, 2000; Aremu and Odofin, 2002; Ndera, 2009; Chikwendu, 2002; Babalola and Ajekigbe, 2007). A pictorial presentation of some of these sites is as follows;

The above pictorial presentation is a selected sample representing the rich CH sites found in Nigeria. There are many of these sites in all the six geopolitical zones of the country. Some of them are still well preserved, while some are gradually or completely destroyed as a result of agricultural activities, conflict or communal crises, cattle grazing, farming, timber works and mining activities, among others. This is in many cases due to lack of attention from heritage stakeholder toward the sites.

Further, the above listed archaeological complexes have many historic sites within and around them. Thus, for easy grasp, these sites are further outlined in this article based on their various subregions (see the endnote).

There are notable CH objects in Nigeria. Research has shown an advanced technology of bronze casting among the ancient Benin people. Other metal objects have also been found in the Igbo-Ukwu, Da'ama and Taruga sites, among others. At the Nok cultural landscape, researchers have discovered dozens of terracotta figurines that are unique to the area. Objects carved from wood are also found among the Tiv and other cultures in the Middle Belt Region. The *kwagh-hir* mask of the Tiv is very unique and stands as evidence for an advanced ancient technology. To substantiate this, a selected sample of some of these CH objects is provided as follows.

Other known CH resources in Nigeria include National parks such as Yankari National park, Kainji Lake National Park, Old Oyo National Park and cultural festivals such as Annual Argungu Festival, Annual Christmas and Sallah, Durbar, Gidan Hausa, Farri Bacchama and Eyo Festival. Others include Katsina-Ala Fishing Festival, Tiv Kyegh Sha Shwa Cultural



Plate 5.
The stone wall at the
Kpe hills, South-
eastern Tivland

Note(s): Research indicates that the early Tiv people built these defensive stone walls on several hills in the Middle Benue Valley to avert constant attacks from their enemies known as the Bushmen (Atoatie)” (Nomishan, 2020, p. 83, 2021). This kind of stone arrangement is also found in Ungwailand. “These walls are located on the granite hills that dot the landscape” (Ogundele, 2005, p. 81)
Source(s): Nomishan (2020)

Festival, Ojude Oba Festival, Osun Osogbo Annual Festival, Oke Ibadan Festival, Oranmiyan Festival, Canoe Regatta, Yam Festival, among others (Gubam and Nomishan, 2020).

As noted by Gubam and Nomishan (2020), there are ethnographic materials that are valuable CH resources with continued attraction for cultural tourism in Nigeria. Some of these ethnographic materials include wardresses, traditional and royal crafts, leather works, calabash decoration, woven cloths, ornaments, pottery making, wood carving and blacksmithing, among others. This category of CH still exists in contemporary Nigeria. However, because of lack of support and promotion, the number of craftsmen and women is largely diminishing.

Another important CH resource category in Nigeria that is valuable for cultural tourism is traditional dances and drama. These include *Nkpikiti* dance of Umunze, *Ijele* masquerade of Awka North, *Kwagh-hir* and cat dance of the Tiv, *Agaba* masquerade of the Anambra, Pus-kat and *Nzem* Berom of the Jos Plateau, among others (Gubam and Nomishan, 2020). In addition to the above, the colorful and beautiful traditional attires of the various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria also stand as a significant CH resource in the country. In their diversity, these traditional attires help in promoting love, unity, commitment and patriotism among members of the various ethnic groups in particular and citizens of Nigeria in general.

Seemingly, these numerous CH resources aside from promoting national integration and intercultural dialog can also be harnessed for tourism purposes to foster sustainable development in Nigeria. However, these fascinating benefits of Nigeria’s rich CH are being threatened by the continued problem of corruption in the country. They are thus aggressively



Note(s): The Nok culture is one of the ancient West Africa's most advanced civilizations. It is known for its unique terracotta sculptures and its early iron working. Nok sculptures have been found across an area of over 78,000 square kilometers (30,116 square miles). The Nok culture was first identified by a British archaeologist Bernard Fagg in 1944. Fagg was “working for the British colonial administration, when he discovered similarities between a newly found terracotta head from Jemaa and one found near the village of Nok in 1928. Both were recovered in tin mines west of the Jos Plateau in Central Nigeria” (Franke, 2016, p. 258). Archaeologists have analyzed the clay used by the Nok people and discovered that all the clay likely came from the same source. This made researchers to suggest that a central authority controlled the supply and making of terracotta in Nok

Source(s): Banjoko (2019)

Plate 6.
A sample of the Nok
terracotta figures

being destroyed, while others going into extinction because of lack of preservation and total negligence amounting from corrupt practices.

Corruption in the management of cultural heritage resources in Nigeria. The most concerning situation brought about by corruption in Nigeria’s CHM sector is the engagement of none heritage experts into its institutions. This problem is actually seen as a general condition in many public sectors of the country (Ewetan and Urhie, 2014; Odo, 2015; Adagbabiri, 2018). To this end, the destruction of public institutions in the country becomes inevitable, as most of them are administratively mishandled. A lot of funds are allocated for the creation, development, running and maintenance of “selected” institutions in Nigeria but few or nothing is done in that respect. Selected in this case means, not every public sector in Nigeria enjoys sufficient funding. However, those that enjoy it turn to experience the worst kind of corrupt practices. Thus, the funds gets squandered or looted and/or diverted into individual pockets, thereby slowing down progress and development in such institutions.

Other public institutions or sectors suffer corruption in the form of lack of funds. The government deliberately refuses to allocate enough funds for the smooth operation of such institutions (which is what becomes the worst kind of neglect). This is particularly manifested



Note(s): Benin bronze casting is said to stand amongst the “highest heights of European casting” (Gunsch, 2013, p. 31). The Benin figures such as the Horn player, placed on court altars in memory of kings and historical events that occurred over centuries were seized from the royal court of Benin by the British soldiers in 1897

Source(s): Howe (2020)

Plate 7.
Pair of busts: King
(Oba) and queen

in institutions that are responsible for the conservation, preservation, protection and management of the CH of Nigerian people. Institutions such as the Federal and States Ministries of Culture, National and States Councils for Arts and Culture, the Nigerian Commission for Museums and Monument (NCMM), among others, largely suffer from lack of sufficient funding by the government. Apart from funding, they also suffer from wrongful staffing. This is because, the government has continued to employ much staff or persons without the skills and expertise to conserve, preserve, protect and manage the CH resources entrusted in their hands.

For the purpose of clarity and easy grasp, this article will explain in brief the roles the NCMM being the closest supervisor of all activities leading to the conservation, preservation, protection and management of CH resources in Nigeria were created to undertake. This will also include an investigation into how the Commission has been able to carry out these roles in order to mitigate corrupt practices and bring about sustainable development in the CH sector of the country.

The National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM). Specifically, Nigeria and many other African countries did not promulgate laws for the protection of CH in their territories as early as other nations of the world such as Australia, Czechoslovakia, Denmark and New Zealand (Eze-Uzomaka, 2014). However, in the year 1953, the Antiquities Ordinance No. 17 established the National Department of Antiquities in Nigeria. “The Ordinance also provided for the establishment of museums, archaeological excavations, protection of monuments and handling of antiques” in the country (Eze-Uzomaka, 2014, p. 140).

Shortly after this development, there was a growing campaign for the control of incessant looting and (official or unofficial) transfer of cultural antiquities of Nigeria into foreign museums. This was also the same case in other African countries and therefore, came a



Note(s): Igbo-Ukwu was discovered in 1938 by workmen who were digging a cistern and professionally excavated by Thurston Shaw in 1959, 1960 and 1974. Eventually, three localities were identified: Igbo-Isaiah, an underground storage chamber; Igbo-Richard, a burial chamber once lined with wooden planks and floor matting and containing the remains of six individuals; and Igbo-Jonah, an underground cache of ritual and ceremonial objects thought to have been collected during the dismantling of a shrine (Hirst, 2018)

Source(s): Hirst (2018)

Plate 8.
Cast bronze vessel with
animal motif from
Igbo Ukwu

growing cultural awareness to increasingly curtail the act. This led to the passage of the Decree No. 9 of 1974 to Prohibit Transfer of Antiquities by the military administration of Nigeria. This Decree was saddled with the responsibilities of locating and/or returning antiquities already taken out of the country.

The Decree brought stringent rules that must be followed by any agent, in the sale of antiquities, and it also provided for harsh penalties on defaulters. The police were authorized to search or seize antiquities in possession of such people without a warrant. [Eze-Uzomaka \(2014, p. 141\)](#) maintains that “after the Festival of Arts and Culture in 1977, it became clear that a review of legislation protecting the CH of the country was imperative” this development brought about the promulgation of Decree No. 77 of 1979 as follows:

... The Decree provides for the dissolution of both the Antiquities Commission and the Federal Department of Antiquities and their merger to form the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM). While repealing various enactments relating to Antiquities, the Decree consolidates most of the provisions thereof and makes fresh provisions in connection with the declaration of National monuments. The penalties for the destruction or unauthorised alteration or removal of monuments have been considerably stiffened up (An Extra-ordinary Gazette of September, 1979, Lagos Nigeria, p. A522).

By the promulgation of Decree 77 of 1979, only the Director General of the NCMM and any other person commission by the Director were made eligible to buy antiquities in Nigeria. The decree also created an Executive Administrative Secretary responsible for Research in antiquities and training of professionals and also handling of same in areas of Natural History and Technology.



Note(s): The kwagh-hiris an ancient and multipart culturally edifying art of the Tiv of Central Nigeria. It is a dramatic public performance that tells moral stories of past and present events, and incorporates puppetry, masquerading, poetry, music, dance and animated narratives to portray its moral themes. It is used to reinforce traditional beliefs and convey other worldly tales to educate, socialize, provide secular entertainment and address societal issues (Imodara, 2018)

Source(s): Wikipedia (2020)

Plate 9.
The Tiv *Kwagh-*
Hir mask

Further, Sec. 25 (4) provides for an express approval without export permit for any antiquity, lawfully imported into the country, to be taken back. The export control system requires that the person or persons involved must be able to produce on request, evidence of lawful importation of such antiquity(s).

However, the provisions of Decree 77 of 1979, which established the NCMM, are now considered lacking in some areas. In the view of [Shyllon \(1996, p. 1\)](#) “the consolidating legislation of 1979 was hurriedly enacted and has many defects”, pointing out that “the sanctions and protective measures enshrined in the Act are now hopelessly inadequate and need urgent revision and re-enactment.”

Inasmuch as the point made by [Shyllon \(1996\)](#) is valid, there is still convincing fact that the 1979 legislation contains some important laws that carry strict penalties and fines on defaulters. Giving a general impression that NCMM came to render some degree of remedy to the antics of antiquities looting, mismanagement and destruction in Nigeria. The international community also stepped into many nations, including Nigeria and made legislations in collaboration with the local people, to protect many CH sites, by declaring them as world heritage sites. The “NCMM on the other hand has so far declared more than sixty-three historical sites as heritage sites in Nigeria. They *inter alia* include buildings of historical and architectural significance, ancient city walls, cemeteries, Ilojo Bar (in Lagos), Omo-Ukwu temple (in Abia State), Osun Oshogbo shrine (in Osun State), Keffi Madaki house and compound (in Bauchi State) and burial places of important personalities in locations such as Zaria, Kano, Gumel and Lokoja” ([Gubam and Nomishan, 2020, p. 97](#)).

However, since the creation of the NCMM, there have been several questions concerning its activities. The most prevalent among these are put thus, how well equipped is the NCMM

toward the roles of conserving, preserving, protecting, managing and promoting the CH of Nigeria? What are the contributions of the Commission to research studies bothering on the CH of Nigerian people handled by Archaeologists and other heritage disciplines in Nigerian Universities? How is the Commission supporting Nigerian students who are researching in the areas of Archaeology, Museum and Heritage Studies in the country? How is the Commission carrying along CH experts in Nigerian Universities and other relevant institutions in their operations and/or collaborations with researchers and experts in foreign organizations or countries? And above all, the most significant of all the concerns is how the Commission has repositioned or is repositioning the CH sector for sustainable development. This is particularly bordering on the status of its museums – whether the museums have attained global standards needed in the conservation, preservation, protection, management and promotion of the CH of Nigerian people.

These questions among others are considered highly controversial by certain stakeholders. This is because, “the NCMM remains a marginal institution without adequate resources” and professional expertise to “manage and protect the country’s cultural heritage” (Shyllon, 1996, p. 1).

The effect of corruption on cultural heritage management in Nigeria. As mentioned above, one of the most problematic situations corruption has brought about in Nigeria is the act of nepotism (Urien, 2012; Kwasau, 2013; Ewetan and Urhie, 2014; Odo, 2015; Adagbabiri, 2018). This exists at all levels of the public sector. Nepotism has exerted much negative influence on the country’s public sector from the lowest offices to the highest. Public institutions in the country are often given persons with no relevant skills and expertise to manage or administer them. This is particularly seen in the CH sector. CH-related institutions in Nigeria have often been headed by individuals without any kind of relevant training to be effective in their assignment. Some of these institutions *inter alia* include the Federal and States Ministries of Culture, National and States Councils for Arts and Culture, the NCMM, as well as National and institutional museums in the country. These none heritage experts often exhibit unprofessionalism in decision-making, thereby giving room for general undermining of the importance of CH resources in Nigeria.

Apart from nepotism, laws mandating both public and private organizations operating in the country to employ heritage experts such as archaeologists, anthropologists, historians and sociologists, among others, are not strengthened and enforced. This in effect provides an avenue for negligence and keeps CH in the country in a bad condition. CH experts are supposed to be working for the preservation and protection of CH resources in such organizations. This process should be accompanied by thorough check for practices such as giving and collecting bribes, misappropriation and diversion of funds meant for the purpose of repositioning CH in the country.

All these problems account for the various facets of heritage undermining, mismanagement and neglect among other impending threats with the capacity to aid the further destruction of the heritage of Nigeria (whether natural or cultural). For example, on October 27, 2020, the United States Customs announced that they intercepted at the Miami International Airport ancient carved stones, known as the “Ikom Monolith” (dated between 200 A.D. and 1000 A.D.). These artifacts were smuggled illegally from Cross River State to Cameroon and then to the USA (JournalduCameroun, 2020). This incidence needed not to have been detected in such a far land. Nigerian Customs and Immigration Service could have detected it right in Nigeria, if they had skilled archaeologists strategically positioned to check such anticipated incidences in the country.

As noted elsewhere by Herzfeld (2016, p. 534), “historic conservation and gentrification are fertile grounds for bribery and other forms of corruption.” This has some level of manifestation in Nigeria. This is because some of the people involved in certain corrupt practices in parts of the country are either Nigerians or foreign professionals, who connive

with the NCMM to carry out unethical archaeological practices in Nigeria under the guise of scientific research (Gundu, 2012). Many of these people rather than working for the well-being of Nigeria's CH turn to pursue their goals for altruistic reasons. All these are common threats to the sustainable development of the country's CH sector.

In a general perspective, Ruoss and Alfarè (2013) reported that The United Nations published some major human-induced threats to CH, listed in the Training Manual for Trainers. These threats are synonymous with the situation corruption has brought on the CH sector of Nigeria. They include:

- (1) *Ignorance*: Not knowing the importance of CH sites or their values and ignorance about appropriate protection measures can have a devastating impact on CH of a nation. For example, there are no professionally prepared inventories of heritage sites in Nigeria. As a result, the public or even the site managers do not have any clear knowledge about these CH sites.
- (2) *Neglect*: is often tied to ignorance. Neglect can slowly but irreversibly damage a site. For example, there are many CH sites in Nigeria that are not listed as protected sites. Consequently, people or the government does not pay any attention to their protection. Constant exposure to different kinds of threats and lack of care are gradually damaging these sites.
- (3) *Illegal Trade*: Illegal trade in heritage objects, such as paintings, statues or other artifacts, is a major problem resulting in loss of CH materials in some countries. Archaeological sites are raided, temples are robbed and artifacts are stolen and taken out of a country to feed the illegal trade of heritage objects. This has also been going on in Nigeria (Lasisi, 2021). According to the ICCROM (2020), the illicit trafficking of antiquities is helping to sustain conflicts in different parts of the world. This point becomes more interesting following continued communal conflict among some ethnic groups in Nigeria, which may also be part of what is sustaining the present social destabilization in the country.
- (4) *Theft*: Thefts are often encouraged by the illegal trade in antiquities. It can occur for reasons such as the existence of an unregulated antique market.
- (5) *Fire Outbreak*: While ignorance and neglect inflict damage gradually, accidents, such as fire outbreak, can cause damage to a site or heritage facility within a very short time. Timber structures, archival and museum collections and so on are highly vulnerable to fire outbreak.
- (6) *Development Projects*: Construction of a new road or bridge can have a number of negative impacts on a site. Some of these impacts are purely visual and aesthetic, such as blocking the view of a heritage building or site. But, in many cases, public works may lead to demolition of historic buildings or separation between various parts of a site. A good example of this is the demolition of part of the Kano ancient city wall, and the destruction of CH materials via construction projects in Abuja (Nomishan *et al.*, 2021) and other cities in the country.
- (7) *War and Crisis*: A war and/or crisis can bring anarchy to a country; both of them bring damage to heritage sites. Some examples of damage caused by war and crisis include the looting of Syria's historical heritage and antiquities. In 2020, Aljazeera reported that a joint report by German and Syrian organizations has documented severe damage to Syria's historical heritage and antiquities. About 29 museums suffered various degrees of damages, while thousands of artifacts were looted into foreign museums (<https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/features/2020/6/8/report->

[documents-severe-damage-to-syrian-heritage-and-museums](#)). The destruction of part of Timbuktu and other CH sites during the armed rebel crisis of 2012 in Mali, the destruction of many CH sites in the Lake Chad Area and the North-Eastern part of Nigeria by Boko haram insurgents and the destruction of local settlements of Rim, Shonong and Ropp in Plateau State by land grabbers (Gubam and Nomishan, 2021), among others. In this case, the intentional destruction of CH has become a weapon of war (ICCROM, 2020).

Persistence in the above threats can result to total destruction of CH, and this has already been witness in Nigeria. The most worrisome among them is negligence. The manner in which the Nigerian government has neglected the CH sector can be considered as major factor responsible for the increase in the level of public ignorance, illegal trade and theft activities that increasingly affect museums and heritage sites in the country. Also, the manner in which development projects are done, if not corrected immediately, is causing the destruction of CH resources in the country.

Unfortunately, these prevailing problems avail fraudulent people the opportunity to loot the nation's antiques. This has over time subjected CH materials in the country to systematic looting, trafficking and destruction at different levels (Adekola, 2015). Several allegations have been levied against the leadership of the NCMM and its museums in the federation. One of which is an argument by Gundu, a Professor of Archaeology at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria-Nigeria, who in 2014, during a presentation at the 14th Congress of Pan African Archaeologists stated that there is corruption and competence gaps in the commission and its museums.

The commission and its museums along with other institutional museums in the country were alleged to have been involved in looting and illegal sale of cultural objects (Gundu, 2014, 2020). For instance, the presenter cited an example on the incessant subsistence digging of terracotta figurines in Nigeria. Noting that the incidence has been going on in locations such as the "Nok Valley (Kachia, Kawu, Kubacha, Angwan Mailafiya, Kagorko and Suleja); Zaria Area (Madugu in Giwa LGA); Katsina Area (Sabuwa, Funtua, Faskari, Dandume and Kankara); Kano Area (Gwarzo); and Zamfara Area (Kwatakwash)" amongst others (Gundu, 2014; Lasisi, 2021).

In 2020, Gundu articulated in his publication featured in the Contemporary Journal of African Studies, of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, that about 50 Nigerian terracotta figurines were housed in the private collections of Gert Chesi in Schwaz, Austria, before being donated to city of Schwaz. In Gundu's words:

Chesi, an ethnologist who researches voodoo, has been active on the Nigerian scene as an illicit antiquities collector. His "House of the People", a private museum built in 1995, boasted at the time that it housed the "most splendid collection of Nok terracotta anywhere in the world" (Schulz, 2009) in addition to other collections from other parts of Africa and Asia. In 2013, Chesi's "House of the People" was renovated in preparation for "donating" its collections to the city of Schwaz. Today, Chesi's impressive Nok collections are the "property" of the city of Schwaz alongside the Schell and the Lindner collections all housed in the Museum der Voelker, Schwaz. Even though Chesi claims that he had export papers for his Nok statues and that he took them outside Nigeria legally, it is widely known that at the time of acquisition and export these statues were on the ICOM Red List (ICOM, 2016) which means they were protected by Nigerian law and could not have been sold nor exported legally. Moreover, all of them were uncovered through subsistence digging and bought through illicit contact with unscrupulous dealers and middlemen in the Nok valley in defiance of the ICOM plea to museums, auction houses, art dealers and collectors to stop buying Nok statues. Chesi's "donation" of these Nok figurines to the city of Schwaz, his claim that their export was approved by the NCMM and his publication of "The Nok Culture: Art in Nigeria 25,000 years ago" are obvious attempts to launder these statues, "cleanse" them and possibly complicate the demand for their return to Nigeria where they rightly belong.

Illicit antique dealers and treasure hunters operate in the country without fear (see [Ajekigbe, 1997](#); [Eluyemi, 2002](#); [Bowman, 2008](#); [Shyllon, 2011](#); [Gundu, 2014](#)). Further, “several important Nigerian cultural properties, such as masks, bronze sculptures, ivory pieces, ancestral drums, Esie soap-stones, Oron monoliths, Igbo Ukwu artefacts, and Benin bronze. The Nok terracotta figurines, Awka traditional door posts, Ife sculptures, and some antiquity collection from Jos Museum amongst others have been stolen and smuggled out of Nigeria” ([Agbedeh, 2011](#); [Ojedokun, 2012](#), p. 163; [Gundu, 2014, 2020](#); [Lasisi, 2021](#)).

[Gundu \(2020, p. 7\)](#) noted that, “Nigerian museums are insecure repositories that have sadly continued to suffer losses.” The Nigerian terracotta (and other collections) have continue to vanish from the storerooms of National and institutional museums ([Gundu, 2014](#)). For example, in 1987, the Jos museum lost nine objects to burglars. “Estimates indicate that in the 1990s alone, about 429 antiquities were stolen from about 33 museums and institutions across the country ([Gundu, 2012](#)). In 1993, the main door of the Esie Museum was forced open and 13 statues were stolen, with a further 21 statues stolen from the museum in 1995, bringing the number of stolen statues to 34. Similarly, the Ife Museum lost 40 objects between 1993 and 1994 (see [ICOM Red List, 2016](#) and [Brodie et al., 2000](#)). Museum staff were implicated in most of these thefts ([Jegade, 1996](#); [Willet, 2000](#); [Adesari, 1999](#)). The Akwanshi stone monolith of the upper cross-river region in the open-air museum sites of Alok, Emangabe and Edamkono also form part of museum objects stolen and trafficked abroad in contravention of national and international legislation” ([Gundu, 2020, p. 7](#)).

Thus, this led [Gundu \(2014\)](#) to outline some of the reasons that account for the theft of museum collections in Nigeria to include but not limited to:

- (1) Low wages of museum staff including guides
- (2) Poor physical security (none provision of alarms)
- (3) No inventory and proper identification system that can enable tracking in-case of theft
- (4) Corruption and competence gaps in the museums and so on.

It has been argued by [Gundu \(2014\)](#) that the Nigerian middlemen who are the backbone of subsistence digging in Northern Nigeria operate under the umbrella of Artifact Rescuers Association of Nigeria (ARAN). Therefore, many members of ARAN have literally hundreds of terracotta and other antiquities in their collections, courtesy of sponsor digs. These terracotta figurines are sold to foreigners from countries such as Togo, Benin, Lebanon and other European countries who have continued to enjoy the coverage of the NCM (Gundu, 2014).

Thus, this has led to the trafficking of thousands of Nok terracotta to countries such as France, Belgium, Britain, USA, Switzerland, Germany, Spain, Australia and Italy. Notable public museums with looted Nok and other Nigerian terracotta include the British Museum (London), Musee Dapper (Paris), Barbier Muller (Geneva), Minneapolis Institute of Art, Cleveland Museum of Art, North Carolina Museum of Art, The Goethe University of Frankfurt, University of Florida and the Qui Branly Museum in Paris, among others ([Gundu, 2014, 2020](#); [Adekola, 2015](#)).

This situation has created much concern regarding how unsecured the Nigerian museums are. However, if the government and other stakeholders expedite actions toward repositioning the sector, focus will be shifted to identification, preservation, protection, promotion and proper management of CH resources in the country. Once the shortcomings mentioned above along with other minor challenges are curtailed, the CH resources in Nigeria would be put on the gallery of world standard heritage centers. Thus, availing the country of a robust cultural tourism, just the way it is in countries such as Kenya, Egypt, South Africa, Turkey, Britain, USA, and China, among others ([Nomishan et al., 2020](#); [Gubam and Nomishan, 2020](#)).

The impact of conventional cultural heritage management on the sustainable development of Nigeria. In this time of global change in terms of economic paradigms, geopolitical stability and international security, culture is considered the fourth pillar of sustainability and intercultural dialog. Therefore, understanding culture is an increasingly important issue (Carbone, 2016). This is so because, it is believed that culture nourishes development, just as development also fosters culture.

Bandarin *et al.* (2011) articulated that UNESCO's Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity in 2001 reiterated that cultural diversity is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means of achieving a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence. Deeming it as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature, and proclaiming it is part of the common heritage of humanity. Cultural diversity is further conceived as an asset, so that its protection, promotion and maintenance become essential requirements for sustainable development.

It has been established that every field of culture, be it profit or nonprofit, public or private, based on heritage or creative industry, is known to produce employment and revenues. A museum such as the Tate in London, for instance, can bring revenues of over £100 million per year (Bandarin *et al.*, 2011). This can also be achieved in Nigeria, through a proper repositioning of museums and other heritage resources in the country. They all have the potential to provide huge employment opportunities and generate significant revenue to the nation.

Further, Bandarin *et al.* (2011) insisted that cultural tourism accounts for an estimated 40% of total tourism revenue in the world. On the general perspective, tourism industry has become one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world, with economic growth in 2017 of 4.6% and GDP growth of 50%. "In 2017, there were 1.322 billion international tourist arrivals; an increase of 7% compared to the previous year, and the strongest growth rate for seven years. By 2030, it is estimated that there will be 1.8 billion international tourist arrivals, which means an average of 5 million people crossing international borders every single day" (Sofronov, 2018, p. 125, cited from Nomishan *et al.*, 2020, p. 9).

Within this context, the preservation, management and enhancement of CH form the center of administrative debates, as well as its alliance with tourism to foster sustainable development in the country (Carbone, 2016). CH is one of the cardinal pillars of the sustainable development of local economies and thus, needs to become one of the key elements of the present change (pursued by the present administration of President Muhammadu Buhari).

Therefore, Nigeria stands the chance to reposition her CH sector and empower it to contribute to the promotion of patriotism among her citizens, which is a key factor in national integration and intercultural dialog. This has recently become the most important tool in fostering sustainable development in multicultural societies such as Nigeria.

Thus, a summary of the general impacts of CH on economic development, outlined by ICOMOS (2015) and applicable to Nigeria, is given as follows:

- (1) CH and Creativity as a Driver for Inclusive Economic Development: CH and creativity can foster inclusive economic development by preserving and properly managing the identity, uniqueness and sense of place of historic towns and sites. This can be done through museum display, art galleries, performance theater and different variety of cultural festivals.
- (2) CH and Historic quarters of cities can improve liveability and sustainability of urban areas: With the presence of some historic building in urban areas, contemporary people can tap into their technologies to come up with more innovative architectural edifices. Their materials may still be available, relevant and easily accessible. Indigenous science and local traditional knowledge and practices for ecosystem management, including those for disaster risk reduction and response, can also contribute to environmental sustainability and be important well springs of modern resilience.

- (3) CH as an Enabler for Social Cohesion, Inclusion and Equity: Giving appropriate attention to CH promotes social cohesion, inclusion and equity. This is because heritage has the ability to strengthen communities where citizens associate historic environment with a shared identity, attachment to place and everyday life, including people who are minorities, disadvantaged or socially excluded. Traditional settlements, with their lasting cultural identity and socioeconomic traditions, raise the awareness and pride of citizens toward local history and culture, nor matter where they originate or how they may be adapted. Also, the people are at the heart of heritage conservation policies and projects. Emphasis that ownership of heritage strengthens the social fabric and enhances social well-being becomes valid.

Thus, the Nigerian government has to stand up and begin an aggressive campaign toward a proper means of protecting and managing her common heritage for socioeconomic gains and posterity. This must not be conceived as exclusive deposits of heritage relics as seen in Nigerian museums, but as living and changing models of adaptability. Like other nations of the world, Nigeria needs to recognize and celebrate places whose identity is the unique result of its characteristics, geography, climate, materials and habits. "This is the bedrock of sustainability" and development (ICOMOS, 2015, p. 10).

Conclusion

CH, with its social and economic impacts, is considered as an important asset to the host communities (Scheffler, 2011). This is guaranteed by its role of attracting investments, creating jobs and increasing tourism revenues (Bandarin and Van Oers, 2012). Destinations also employ diverse ways to differentiate themselves and create unique identities to take advantage of tensed competitions. Preserving the CH of Nigeria can protect her national and cultural identity, strengthen the economic and political sectors and enrich the urban context of the nation.

With the seeming immense economic impact of CH on the sustainable development of Nigeria, there is urgent demand for it repositioning. Effort should be expedited toward curtailing the administrative shortcoming and anticipated threats discussed above, so as to utilize these potentials of proper CHM. This can be achieved by dealing decisively with the existing corruption in the CH sector to curtail its effects via the following ways:

- (1) The government and other hitherto mentioned CH stakeholders should make attempt to ensure that only CH experts are appointed to head CH agencies and institutions in Nigeria. This will enhance professionalism and bring sustainable development to the sector.
- (2) The public and private organizations carrying out any activity relating to CH in Nigeria should be made to prioritize employment of heritage experts such as archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, sociologists and ethnographers in relevant sections of such organizations. This point is necessary for the fact that several institutions, agencies, departments and parastatals in Nigeria with certain roles to play in the preservation and protection of cultural properties neglect the employment of these experts, thereby giving room for gross unprofessionalism and misconduct in such sections of the government. Unarguably, employment of archaeologists in the Nigerian Military, Customs and Immigration Services, the Police and Airports should not be negotiable. This is because, the illicit trafficking and smuggling of ancient cultural properties and other heritage objects from the country to foreign lands and vis-à-vis cannot be put to proper checks without the employment of archaeologists. This should be extended to other organizations carrying out development projects in the country, particularly those into construction, mining, exploration and building *inter alia*. These companies should be made to as a matter of

necessity, employ CH experts whose responsibility is to carry out impact assessment and rescue works in project locations. This exercise is meant to safeguard and protect heritage resources in project locations.

- (3) Regular training of officials working in the customs and immigration services, the military and the police, among others, in combating illegal exportation/importation of CH objects should be given priority by the government and related agencies.
- (4) The laws prohibiting illicit digging, possession, selling and trafficking of CH materials from Nigeria into other countries should be reformed and enforced.
- (5) CH institutions in the country should begin to work in cohesion and/or collaboration with their counterparts in Nigerian universities and other relevant institutions for a holistic impact.
- (6) The NCMM and other CH organizations and stakeholders should begin to sponsor robust research studies that will unravel more information about past achievements of Nigerian ancestors. This should be through the provision of grants and scholarship to students of heritage-related programs in Nigerian institutions.
- (7) The NCMM should also develop a professional inventory for museums to ensure easy identification of all the CH sites and other related resources in Nigeria.
- (8) The Federal Government should give serious attention to the development of a comprehensive national database of CH and related resources to ensure proper management and easy access to heritage resources in the country.

Thus, if the above is properly carried out, there will be improved conservation, preservation, protection, management and promotion of CH resources in the country. This will recreate a better image for CH agencies, institutions and department and also rebuild the confidence of several CH stakeholders in Nigeria as a nation. It will promote willingness among Nigerian citizens to seek knowledge about the significance of their CH and thereby, contribute to its protection. Issues of theft and illicit digging, illegal possession, selling/buying, trafficking/smuggling and exportation of the country's heritage objects will largely be curtailed. More so, the general problem of corruption and its attendant effect on proper CHM will no longer be a threat. This will consequently give room for the sustainable development of Nigeria in general and the CH sector in particular.

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Further reading

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Appendix

Cultural Heritage Sites in Nigeria based on their locations

Northern axis – Turunku, Surame, Birnin Kudu Rock Painting, Geji Rock Painting, Birnin Kogo, Dutsenwai, Bama, Kursakata, Shilma, Da’ama, Kariya Wuro, Zungeru, Kufena and Kwatarkwashi, etc.

Middle Belt axis – Nok cultural landscape, Taruga, Katsina-Ala Basin, Ibinda, Bako, Kpe, Ushongo and Gboko hills, Ron Rock, Samun Dukiya, Mai Idon Toro and Dustsen Kongba, *inter alia*.

Middle Niger Valley – Yelwa, Kasabo, Sawuni, Old Warra, Monai, Old Bussa and Ulaira, etc.

South-south and/or Niger delta – Ugwuagu rockshelter and habitation site, Okochiri, Agadagbabou, Onyoma, Ogoloma Koroama, Saikiripoga, among others.

South-west and South-east – Ife, Benin, Egbejoda, Orile Owu, Ilesha, Orile Ijaye, Umunda, Okpe Igara, Nsukka area, Lejja, Ugwuele, Afikpo, Umukete and Isiugwu Obukpa, etc.

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