

ZIMBABWE

This paper highlights some of the heritage conservation and protection challenges facing Zimbabwe at the moment. Cultural heritage throughout the world is exposed to varying degrees of potential or real damage. Although some of the threats that will be cited in this submission may not warrant that a site or sites are put on the list of endangered sites, remedial intervention can prevent the situation from deteriorating to the extent where endangered listing will be necessary.

The removal of perimeter fencing from cultural heritage properties

Protective fencing of multi-stranded barbed wire has been erected around a number of cultural heritage properties in Zimbabwe. These include Great Zimbabwe and Khami, both of which are sites of World Heritage status. Theft of perimeter fencing from cultural heritage properties is a recent but frightening development. Great Zimbabwe World Heritage site and the premier national shrine have not been spared. At Majiri, a stonewalled *zimbabwe* 50 kilometres east of Great Zimbabwe, the entire perimeter fencing has been destroyed as a result. Driven by prevailing economic hardships, local villagers remove the fencing to resell for petty cash. The barbed wire is used to erect enclosures for homesteads and gardens.

Without perimeter fencing, herds of cattle, sheep, goats and donkeys graze at will on the properties. Local villagers also enter the properties to fell trees for timber and firewood. These activities cause environmental degradation and create a serious dent on the physical integrity of the sites.

A perimeter distance of at least 20 kilometres, in the case of Great Zimbabwe, is difficult to monitor because the thieves operate under the cover of night. About 3 kilometres of the 20 kilometre-long boundary fence has been affected and the replacement costs continue to escalate as a result of prevailing inflation.

Remedial intervention

Great Zimbabwe staff have stepped up patrols and extended their network of investigation into the neighbouring communal lands where the thieves come from and where they also sell their loot. This has resulted in a number of arrests and prosecutions. Nearly a tonne worth of barbed wire fencing has been recovered. A meeting was held on 31 July 2002 to discuss the destruction of the Great Zimbabwe perimeter fencing. Key stakeholders attended: local traditional chiefs and their village heads, senior police officers, and representatives from the Forestry Commission and Natural Resources Board. The meeting resolved that the problem of theft of barbed wire required a collective approach to security with the local traditional leadership involved. The meeting also resolved that the Police must inform traditional leaders about their arrests so that the chiefs can also prescribe remedial solutions within the frame of their customary authority. As replacement costs continue to rise with rising inflation, international assistance may be required to rehabilitate the perimeter fencing.

The impact of Zimbabwe's land reform on heritage management

In 1997 the Zimbabwe Government issued a notice to acquire commercial farmland for the resettlement of peasants as a hallmark of its post-colonial agrarian reform policy. While many commercial farmers were contesting these proposed acquisitions, in February 2000 spontaneous occupation of commercial farms began, culminating in the 'Fast-track resettlement programme'. These events took place so rapidly that the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) did not have ample time to implement its mandate to provide for the preservation of monuments and relics on land under development. Since the inception of the fast-track programme, several thousand farms have been acquired and turned over for peasant or small-scale commercial agriculture. This means that the conditions of preservation for thousands of archaeological and historical sites in these areas have been fundamentally changed. The gravity of the situation has not been systematically documented, as researchers at the regional stations of NMMZ have not been able to go into the field due to resource constraints. However, indications are that many sites are in danger of destruction. The impact on sites is likely to arise from:

- setting-up of new fields and gardens;
- collection of construction materials, e.g. earth and timber;
- introduction of infrastructure: roads, dams irrigation and power lines;
- ignorance of locations of sites;
- lack of knowledge about sacred places.

In Manicaland Province about 100 sites are located on designated and resettled farms. Of these two are national monuments (Zvipadze and Chitekete stonewalled ruins). With the co-operation of the local land committee it was possible to establish buffer zones around the two national monuments. It is another matter as to whether or not the buffer zones will be respected in practice.

In the Midlands Province, buffer zones have been demarcated around three national monuments: the stonewalled *zimbabwe* sites of Naletale, Zvinjanja and Danamombe. In the Mashonaland provinces, 15 national monuments are threatened. These include Mashayamombe's Fortress (19th century), Hartley Hill (Rhodesian fort), Jumbo ancient mine, Tsindi (*zimbabwe* walls), Mhakwe (rock paintings and sacred graves) and Somerby Cave (rock paintings).

Local communities have indicated that they want to reclaim the Matopo National Park, home to more than a thousand ancient rock-painted sites and several proclaimed archaeological and historical monuments.

The onus lies with NMMZ to launch a strategy to at least mitigate the impact of the agrarian reform policy currently under implementation. There are serious time and resource constraints that NMMZ must immediately address, so that it might be necessary at this stage to invite international assistance.