



an agency of the
Department of Arts and Culture

SOUTH AFRICA'S LIVING HERITAGE: CELEBRATING SA'S TREASURES



Living cultural heritage includes oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts



Vision

A nation united through heritage

Mission

SAHRA's mission in fulfilling its mandate is to promote social cohesion in South Africa by:

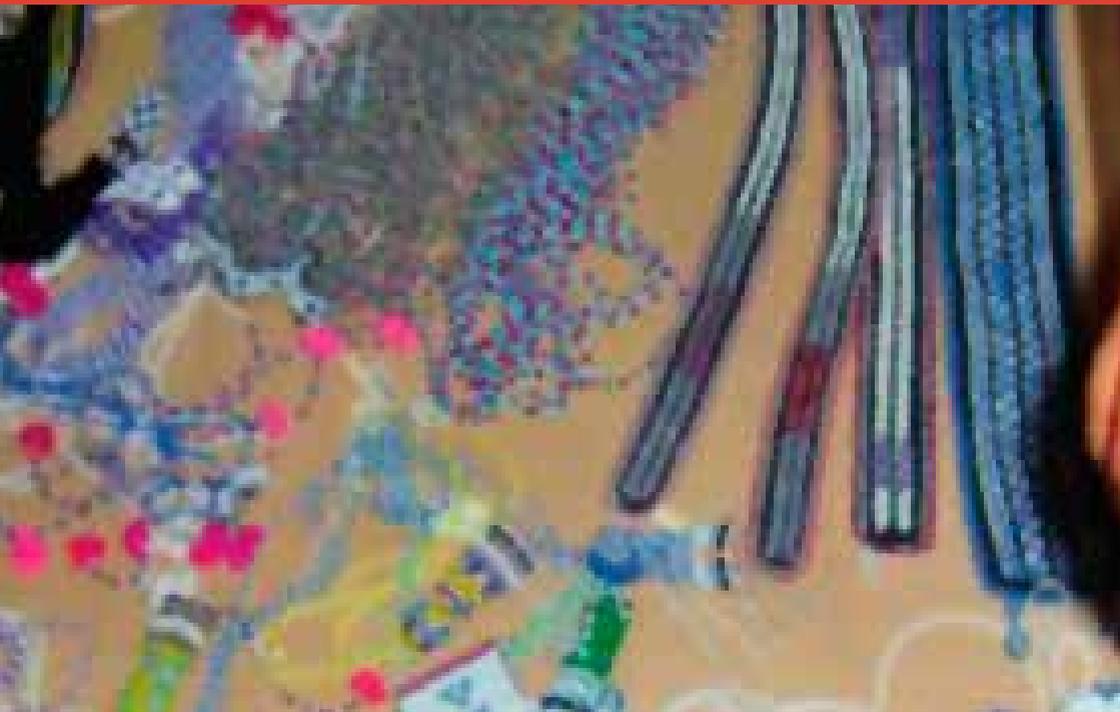
Identifying, conserving and managing heritage resources in South Africa so that they can contribute to socio-economic development and nation building;

Developing norms, standards and charters for the management of heritage resources in South Africa and codes of international best practices; and

Contributing to skills and knowledge production and transformation in heritage resources management in South Africa and beyond.

The South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) has a mandate in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act No. 25, 1999 (NHRA), to conserve, manage and protect heritage resources on behalf of the present and future generations of South Africans. According to the Act it is also the responsibility of SAHRA to conserve and manage heritage resources (both sites and objects) associated with oral tradition or living heritage.

Preserving the past, future and present for the South African Nation



*The Broster Beadwork Collection at
Walter Sisulu University,
declared collection which
dates back to 1932–1966*

What is Living Heritage?

Living Heritage are those intangible aspects of inherited culture, such as cultural tradition, oral history, performance and rituals, popular memory, skills and techniques, indigenous knowledge systems and holistic approaches to nature, society and social relations.

We all share cultural expressions that are passed from one generation to another, have evolved in response to their environments and which contribute to giving us a sense of personal, group and national identity and continuity. This is living heritage.

Being rooted in the history and identity of groups or communities makes living heritage both irreplaceable and extremely fragile. At the same time, one of the strengths of living heritage is that it is constantly being reproduced, developed, and renewed by the groups or communities who are its custodians.

Safeguarding living heritage and ensuring that it survives and thrives, therefore, does not mean preventing change or “freezing” it. Instead it means encouraging continued identification with and practice by its bearer communities or groups. It also means protecting and enabling the conditions under which the living heritage is practiced by, for example, negotiating continued access to sites that are commonly used for its practice or ensuring sustainable supplies of the natural resources required for its practice.

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African drums



Why should we protect our Living Heritage?

Living heritage adds value, meaning and context to heritage resources. As such, it enriches people's lives, often providing a deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and heritage resources, to the past and lived experiences.

Most importantly living heritage represents knowledge and information sustained through memory and transmitted orally or by practice from one generation to the next.

This means that by its nature it is a fragile, non-renewable resource and one which is vulnerable and susceptible to dissipation and loss if not adequately managed in a way consistent with its cultural value, essence and conservation needs. There is thus an urgent need to conserve our collective living heritage, as heritage is irreplaceable, non-renewable and the need to conserve it for posterity is extremely important.

Living heritage plays an important role in promoting cultural diversity, social cohesion, reconciliation, peace and economic development. In every community there are living human treasures who possess a high degree of knowledge, skills and history pertaining to different aspects of diverse living heritage. It is therefore important for South Africans to reclaim, restore and preserve these various aspects of living heritage to accelerate the use of living heritage to address challenges communities are facing today.

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Living cultural heritage depends on those whose knowledge of traditions, skills and customs are passed on to the rest of the community, from generation to generation, or to other communities



What is the international standard and practice for the protection of Living Heritage?

In October 2003, the member states of UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Living Cultural Heritage (visit <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/convention>). The Convention provides protection for living cultural heritage such as the practice, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural space associated therewith that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognised as part of their cultural heritage. Safeguarding living heritage depends on people continuing to enjoy and practise their living heritage.

Some South African sites associated with Living Heritage

Lake Fundudzi (Sacred Waters) and Mapungubwe - Hill of Jackals (Ancient Kingdom) are South African national heritage sites which are associated with living heritage. Lake Fundudzi, which was declared a National Heritage Site in February 2014 is the first sacred site to be given that national honour. Three rivers, the Mutale (or Mavhidzele), Godoni (or Tshidumbi or Govha) and Muiladi flow into the lake.

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*The Sacred Site, Lake Fundudzi,
Limpopo Province*



The lake is geologically unique in that it is one of few lakes to be formed due to a landslide. Scientifically, the sediments of the lake are important as they may hold a wealth of information about the geological history of the area.

Lake Fundudzi is a revered sacred site for the Vha Venda people, especially the Vhatavhatsindi (“People of the Pool”) and is the focus point of folklore, myths and ceremonial rituals. The Lake is home to the Vhatavhatsindi ancestors, the python God of Fertility and the White Crocodile, who all watch over the Vhatavhatsindi. It is the White Crocodile that protects the ancestral spirits of the Lake. It is also scientifically significant and its natural environment relatively unaltered due to its sacredness.

Mapungubwe was declared a National Heritage Site in June 2002 and inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2003. The Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape National Heritage Site, is situated at the fertile confluence of the Limpopo and Shashe Rivers on the border of South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe, and provides evidence of the rise and fall of one of the early indigenous kingdoms in the sub-continent.

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*Mapungubwe Hill and Cultural Landscape,
Limpopo Province*



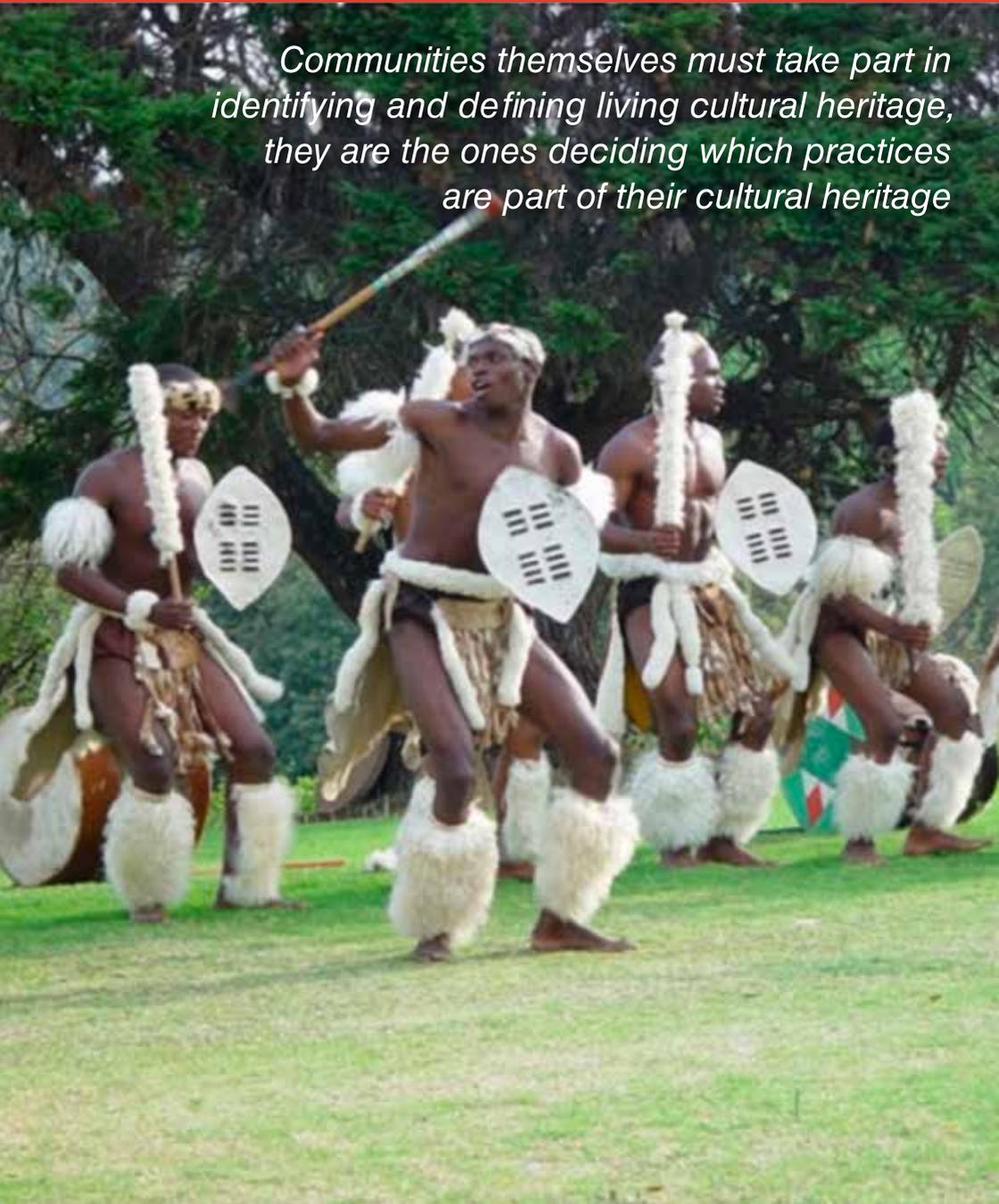
Social, economic and political changes took place here between AD900 and AD1300 due to extensive and sophisticated trade networks and successful farming. The wealth this created led to the evolution of class distinction and the establishment of elusive, sacred leadership. These ideological and architectural shifts led to changes in settlement patterns with the Paramount Chief / King secluded in a palace on top of the hill, separated from commoners on the plains below.

Due to Mapungubwe's location astride North/South and East/West trade routes, it was able to control trade with Arabia, India and China through the East African ports, as well as trade throughout Southern Africa. Gold and ivory were traded for salt, glass beads, cloth and Chinese porcelain.

The decline of Mapungubwe is thought to have been caused by climatic changes. Around AD1300, a dry cooler period began and with the decrease in rainfall, the land was unable to support the large population and people began to disperse. An alternative theory associates the decline with a change in trade routes. Whatever the cause, the power base of Mapungubwe shifted to Great Zimbabwe.

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Communities themselves must take part in identifying and defining living cultural heritage, they are the ones deciding which practices are part of their cultural heritage



Some of the basic steps taken towards protecting our Living Heritage

Community participation

Community participation is an important principle in the safeguarding of living heritage. The 2003 Convention recognises community participation as an integral part of the management of this heritage. The living heritage is inalienable from the communities in which it is living.

Promotion and awareness

Promotion is about advancing living heritage in communities, between social groups and individuals, and through generations, while letting its dynamic evolution continue. While agencies are important (governmental and non-governmental), the purpose is to enhance communication on living heritage across generations of ordinary citizens by the citizens themselves.

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ENQUIRIES

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