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UNESCO and its agencies' impact on cultural policy frameworks in Africa: a study of Mapungubwe World Heritage Site in South Africa

Uche-Okeke, Ijeoma

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ABSTRACT

UNESCO's World Heritage Convention of 1972 has set the standard for the evaluation, preservation and conservation of World Heritage Sites (WHS) globally. The role and function of UNESCO in the cultural heritage sector in Africa, in particular cannot be denied. However, the World Heritage Convention (WHC) site management requirements for African States that are parties to the Convention, presents challenges in terms of implementation. This is due in most cases, to lack of infrastructure, deficient national policy structures, poor legislation, bad management and poor implementation. This is particularly the case in developing countries where governments are grappling with socio-economic and political challenges. Questions are raised about who has the right to define heritage, and what kinds of parameters are used to measure World Heritage of ''universal'' value. Is it appropriate for UNESCO to recommend a set of standards that have become a lens through which global cultural heritage policy is viewed and measured? What then are the implications for African sites for being listed as World Heritage, and what are their chances of competing in the global cultural arena based on the challenges mentioned above?

This research report, through a study of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, attempts to grapple with aspects of the questions raised above, and seeks to illustrate the challenges of managing a World Heritage Site. It highlights the gaps between WHC requirements, national cultural policy legislation, infrastructural and human resource incapacity, and implementation by the management at the Mapungubwe World Heritage Site.