

# Building and Heritage Conservation: A Potential Source for Enhancing the Socio-Economic Development of Local Communities in Nigeria

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## To cite this article:

Abdullahi Yusuf, Oluwafemi Kehinde Akande. Building and Heritage Conservation: A Potential Source for Enhancing the Socio-Economic Development of Local Communities in Nigeria. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Management*. Vol. 7, No. 1, 2023, pp. 44-48. doi: 10.11648/j.ijhtm.20230701.16

**Received:** May 1, 2023; **Accepted:** May 19, 2023; **Published:** May 29, 2023

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**Abstract:** A growing need for natural resources to meet basic requirements, a changing environment, and a socioeconomic situation that is changing quickly have all been factors that conservation scientists and professionals around the world have been examining. These factors have led to the economic importance of heritage and the improvement of social progress and cohesiveness. Cultural heritage currently supports the economic foundation of many communities, raises the level of living for the local population, and improves their quality of life. Despite the fact that Nigeria is endowed with a rich cultural heritage and economic resources, the majority of its communities are still among the least developed in the world. This is despite the fact that the natural and cultural heritage is, in large part, the property of the communities where it is situated. This paper examined the socioeconomic circumstances of the local populations living in or close to heritage sites, as well as their arts, music, and dance traditions. It made recommendations for tactics that communities may use to launch innovative initiatives and initiatives that could lead to socioeconomic growth and the eradication of poverty. It suggested implementing educational initiatives for the local populations to raise their awareness and appreciation of their cultural heritage and uncover its potential for contributing to their socioeconomic development. It concluded that the government need to help the communities develop their entrepreneurial skills so they may become self-sufficient.

**Keywords:** Heritage Conservation, Socio-Economic, Development, Local Communities, Nigeria

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increase in awareness of the impact that cultural heritage protection and preservation provide to economic growth. Because of this, many nations struggle to preserve their cultural identities through the preservation, conservation, and interpretation of their cultural legacy. Nigeria, one of the most socially and culturally varied African nations, is a nation rich in a variety of socio-cultural traditions. Over 250 distinct ethnic groups have been identified in Nigeria, which reflects the ethnic diversity of its population. 128 monuments, comprising historical structures and archaeological sites, have been officially recorded in Nigeria [1]. Nigeria is home to a wide variety of historical

sites, cultural landmarks, and stunning natural scenery that are all enhanced by the still-vibrant local cultures and living traditions. Unfortunately, these are under a lot of threat from a variety of sources. This includes the destruction of the environment, the drive for growth and modernization, political and economic pressures, and a lack of understanding of the significance of this heritage [2].

Numerous historic structures, ancient shrines, temples, landscapes, palaces, and open squares are all part of Nigeria's rich cultural heritage. Architecturally, Nigerian heritage includes built heritage such as buildings with cultural, historical, aesthetic, religious, or economic significance that have been passed down through centuries [3]. In addition to the built heritage, Nigerian heritage includes buildings that

were built in various parts of the country with a combination of artistry and craftsmanship and can be classified as vernacular architecture, colonial architecture, Brazilian/Afro-Brazilian architecture, and post-colonial architecture, some of which have been designated as national monuments [4]. There are also numerous fairs and festivals held all year long in addition to a huge number of sculptures, wood carvings, terra-cotta artworks, etc.

## 2. Tangible and Intangible Nigeria Heritage

Nigerian heritage has been divided into two categories: material/tangible heritage and non-material/intangible heritage. Architecture/buildings, defensive walls and ditches, crafts, tools, ivory, cowries, paintings, textiles, pestles, mortars, iron furnaces, knives, food, wooden objects, tombs & grave goods, temples, dresses, pottery and potsherd pavements, monuments, books, works of art, and other artefacts are examples of tangible heritages. "Artefacts, in their broadest sense, are objects and/or features created and/or used by man/humans in an attempt to meet the challenges and problems of social and natural conditions" [5]. This provides a more detailed description of the role of cultural heritage in society.

Non-material or ideological cultural heritages, on the other hand, include all intangible and invisible aspects of a people's way of life, such as ideas, folklore, kinship, norms, values, worldviews, philosophies of life, religious beliefs and practises, music, dance, festivals, traditions, language, and knowledge, among other things [6-7]. The enumerations above demonstrate the complexity of cultural heritages, but they can also be classed as moveable (artefacts) or immovable (monuments) depending on their mobility, which necessitates different specialised skills for preservation. All of this makes it practically impossible to challenge Nigeria's top rank among the world's most rich potential tourism destinations due to the country's huge potential to increase its economy through tourism.

The majority of villages in Nigeria are still underdeveloped despite their rich and diverse cultural and economic legacy. They don't have access to amenities like electricity, running water, good roads, or even basic social services like health care. Adepoju [8] estimated that 70% of Nigerians still live and work in rural areas, even though local communities continue to offer the majority of economic opportunities. Therefore, enhancing the quality of life for Nigerians could be accomplished by improving that of rural residents and local communities, who [9] described as the majority that has been neglected. It is crucial to integrate historical conservation concerns with other issues like tourism growth, local economic regeneration, and local importance into the larger process of local development. The following major questions are addressed in this paper:

- i. "What community heritage-led development can be identified to boost community development and

enhance socioeconomic empowerment of local communities in Nigeria"?

- ii. How would the Nigerian community identify and value its built and cultural heritage resources?

The following sections address the answer to this question.

## 3. Economic and Development Potentials of Built and Cultural Heritages

When cultural heritage resources are appropriately utilised, the presence of these materials inside historic places has been directly linked to the growth of these areas in recent years. As a result, the acknowledgement of a community's historic cultural features as an asset in development planning is growing [10]. While Ahokpe, & Sağ [11] described cultural heritage as an important aspect of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which "seek to humanise cities and communities" as both a functioning sector and a resource; it could be argued that community development is an outcome that results in physical, social, or economic improvements, as well as a process that improves residents' ability to act collectively. Kinahan [12] went on to say that heritage preservation might be a useful instrument for community development.

According to Phillips & Stein [10], the historic environment's potential will not be fully realised unless an active effort is made to guarantee that it serves as a community development resource and improves people' quality of life. Meanwhile, Cerisola [13] stated that heritage-led development would then require the creation of social and economic conditions that allow heritage to perform efficiently and sustainably, within a well-defined strategic plan that takes the local economy and community into account.

Olusanya and Silva [14] viewed the presence of heritage communities to be a typical occurrence in today's cities. Heritage communities are communities made up of individuals who cherish their distinctive cultural heritage and desire to protect it within a framework of public action in order to secure its survival and transfer to future generations [15]. These heritage communities are typically made up of residents, experts, and other important stakeholders who share similar ideals. Alana et al., [16] went on to say that historic villages are uniquely qualified for development because of their distinct character.

Butters et al., [17] highlighted the potentials of heritage-led community development initiatives as a means of enhancing and mobilising diverse forms of community capital. Gould and Burtenshaw [18] went on to say that in recent decades, heritage-led projects, particularly those that benefit the local community, have grown more frequent in policy and practise. Over the last two decades, several towns have connected to their past through historical or cultural tourism, according to [10]. This has grown into a huge movement that is rapidly gaining popularity as a long-term community development approach in Europe, North America, and China.

Recently, the African Union (AU) highlighted history and culture as rich resources for Africa's development. The AU

intends to use culture and heritage as the focal point for Africa's development in its 2063 agenda report. As a result, according to Ndoro [19], Africa is today challenged with problems in achieving sustainable development while retaining its socio-cultural character and ensuring the preservation of its heritage monuments. However, very little to no capital has been channelled into the historic sector since policymakers and the general public have paid little attention to the potential of heritage investment. This highlights the need of evidence in convincing policymakers to take heritage seriously and encouraging heritage specialists to enhance their methods for using heritage for development [20].

The purpose of this study is to arouse interest in exploiting the potential of built and cultural heritage as a legitimate source of promoting socioeconomic development in Nigerian communities. The objectives are to (i) emphasise the social, economic, and cultural resources that can catalyse heritage-led development in Nigeria, and (ii) promote community development in heritage-rich locations.

#### **4. Socio-Economic Conditions of Local Communities in Nigeria**

Communities in or near heritage sites in Nigeria currently experience living conditions that are marked by a high rate of illiteracy, poor health standards, low income, underemployment, and unemployment, food shortages, insufficient water supply, subpar transportation infrastructure, subpar recreational amenities, and a rapid rate of population growth. The majority of social services are elitist in orientation and urban based. Since social services have made such a significant contribution to welfare, it is clear that their current location is discriminatory and unfavourable to rural (local) residents. Advocates of this locational policy contend that it is both challenging and not economically feasible to deliver social services to geographically dispersed local populations [21]. They support their position with the argument of agglomeration economies and economies of scale. The argument, while technically sound, ignores the social justice component of the delivery of social services.

It is thus hoped that when both natural and cultural heritage conservation of such communities is given due attention with a view to developing the local communities where they are found, it will result in more judicious development and the distribution of the benefits generated can be invested in the local area to develop facilities and amenities for the local people.

#### **5. Survey and Evaluation of Cultural Heritage in Nigeria**

Various interesting and economically viable heritage and interesting sites abound in Nigeria's various states and localities. Rich art and cultural traditions are one of the primary areas that, if successfully managed, have the potential to strengthen the Nigerian economy [22]. Each of

the country's major ethnic groups and local communities has one or more cultural attractions that, when properly leveraged, may become a money-spinner. These cultural attractions are activities based on people's ways of living, such as religious beliefs, colourful festivals, dance, songs, and artworks, among others. Nigeria's cultural treasures are among the most fascinating in Africa, including various historic buildings, the Osun Oshogbo celebration in Osun, the Eyo festival in Lagos, the Kano/Katsina Durbar, Argungu in Kebbi state, and the Mmanwu festival in South Eastern Nigeria. Other festivals include New Yam festivals, fishing festivals, masking festivals, wrestling, and many more.

Apart from cultural treasures, Nigeria has excellent collections of Arts and Crafts as well as archaeological remains from its history, such as Terra-Cotta heads from the old Nok culture, famed Benin Bronze art works, and thrilling Yoruba sculptures. Nigerian crafts are deeply ingrained in the Nigerian way of life and are inextricably linked to their spiritual ideologies. They are prized objects for tourism promotion and preservation. Textiles, pottery and ceramics, fibre crafts, bronze, brass and iron works, woodworks, calabash decorations, leather works, ivory, jewellery, and so on are among the crafts. All of these are located in various Nigerian local communities, with the ability to bring about social and economic growth in those communities through revenue generation, employment opportunities, and local economy stimulation.

Other Nigerian cultural heritages included the blacksmithing industry, brass-casting, bronze works, and metal-working industries practised throughout the country, terracotta; wood carvers created magnificent stools and doors, engravings on walls and rocks, and so on. In the pursuit for civilization, all of these talents that acted as good entrepreneurial and income-generating employment have been abandoned in favour of foreign ones [23]. According to Jamieson [24], after mining in traditional metal-working industries, the spongy mass of metallic iron known as the bloom is frequently sold to blacksmiths, who use it to make a variety of objects such as farm implements, hunting and fishing materials, palm wine tapping tools, weaving implements, household utensils, wood carving tools, ceremonial staff, military weapons, political royal swords, seats, and sceptre, among others.

Because the blacksmithing industry infiltrated most sectors of society, its importance and significance to pre-colonial Nigerians was undeniable. It is also clear that this local business provided opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship for miners, blacksmiths, distributors, and even users of blacksmithing items [23]. Given the avalanche of benefits that may be received from Nigerian cultural heritages, there is a need for a clarion cry to consciously maintain Nigerian heritages in the face of challenging obstacles.

#### **6. Heritage Conservation and Economic Development**

Cultural heritage can be effectively conserved and managed because it improves the quality of life for persons

who live in heritage locations. There are numerous other reasons why heritage should be preserved and protected. Community regeneration, revitalization, and development, education, continuity, pleasure/recreation, patriotism, nostalgia/fear of the past, diversity tourism, identity, increased quality of life, profit, and economic development are examples of these. It is vital to highlight that tourism and economic growth are potential sources of increasing the local community's economy. However, there are a number of forces working to preserve cultural heritage. They include decreasing government resources devoted to heritage preservation, pressure to capitalise on heritage resources' tourism potential, and pressure to view heritage as a commodity [25].

The effect of these elements typically determines the success or failure of many preservation endeavours. The level and rate of poverty in local communities where heritage sites are found presents and calls for strategies that communities can use to initiate creative activities, develop projects and entrepreneurial capacity, and management skills that can lead to socioeconomic growth and poverty reduction. Cultural heritage must be viewed not only in terms of conservation, management, and protection, but also in terms of the positive impact it has on communities and regions, such as building community pride, enhancing community identity, broadening community horizons, and maintaining community stability, as well as achieving economic and social benefits, providing financial resources, and supporting the community economy [25].

## 7. Suggested Strategies to Adopt

The following measures can be implemented by communities through local government to promote socioeconomic growth in their communities. They are examined one by one, with an emphasis on their implications for local communities.

### 7.1. Participation and Knowledge Building

Local governments can establish programmes and projects aimed at the redevelopment and regeneration of heritage regions, particularly old buildings and other architecturally significant structures. This not only ensures that the buildings are financially sustainable, but it also adds to the character of the town. NGOs and citizen groups play an important role in preservation activities, idea generation, civic pride, and financial investment. Fairs, festivals, and other events, such as competitions, can help to increase participation and raise awareness.

### 7.2. Preservation and Documentation

Local governments can carry out documentation and preservation activities that are integrated into local organisations and historical conservation plans. This will maintain historical and cultural continuity while also allowing for a more comprehensive approach to conservation.

Books, reports, brochures, guides, maps, and audio-visual goods should all be available in a range of forms aimed at diverse users. Similarly, local governments must support the research and documentation activities of universities and research organisations, as well as trusts and other private commissions active in heritage conservation. Support can also be offered for educational courses, personnel training, and research operations. Long-term museum establishment and exhibition organisation will be beneficial for documentation and preservation efforts.

### 7.3. Establishment of a Department of Local Heritage and Tourism

The preservation of cultural property is inextricably related to the economy of local communities, with tourism being a major industry. The community's local government can form a heritage and tourist department to support social development through job creation, income redistribution, and poverty relief. This will also help to fund the development of community facilities and services that would not have been possible otherwise. It will result in increased living conditions, as well as improved infrastructure, health and transportation, and new sport and recreational facilities, restaurants, and public areas. Tourism development will encourage the preservation and transmission of cultural and historical traditions, which often contributes to the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources, the preservation of local heritage, and a revival of indigenous cultures, cultural arts, and crafts. Tourism will also serve to improve local knowledge of the monetary value of natural and cultural sites, as well as foster pride in local and national heritage and interest in its preservation.

### 7.4. Community Development/Participation Projects

A community project strategy could include specialised initiatives and service provision such as parks, gardens, and public open spaces, roads, recreational areas and arenas, community centres, and exhibitions that benefit the entire community and foster communal heritage.

## 8. Recommendations

To promote local community heritage conservation in Nigeria, this paper recommends that:

- a) The government conduct educational programmes for local communities to increase their awareness and appreciation of their heritage in order to explore its potential for socio-economic development.
- b) In communities with heritage assets, there should be community-based craft development centre.
- c) Community sensitization and awareness campaigns for the misinformed public should be ongoing.
- d) There should be a heritage tour for schoolchildren, as well as radio and television coverage.
- e) The government should promote responsible tourism,

community involvement, public-private partnerships, and provide financial incentives and technical help as needed to carry out development projects in local areas.

- f) The government should also urge local communities to take charge of raising funding to support their own conservation efforts.

## 9. Conclusion

The positive influence of historic conservation on local communities cannot be overstated. The government must act quickly to assist communities in developing entrepreneurial potential so that they can become self-sufficient. Similarly, local communities in Nigeria must be included in the heritage development planning and implementation procedures. Heritage conservation should thus be given more prominence in Nigerian development programmes and plans.

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