

Heritage Management and Tourism in the Obudu Cattle Ranch and Sukur Kingdom, Nigeria

by Pat Uche Okpoko and Emeka Okonkwo

Heritage management has long been a part of the traditions and practices of cultural groups in Nigeria. Some communities have conserved forests within their settlements for hunting; others have established sacred groves for the worship of traditional deities. Plant and animal species valued for medicine, shade, or food are preserved through taboos. Similarly, effective and elaborate traditional systems exist for the rational exploitation of fish and other natural resources.¹

With the inception of British colonial administration in 1900, traditional practices were supplemented by government conservation policies to create forest reserves to protect land, forests, and water while exploiting the economic benefits of the forest resources. The most comprehensive and far-reaching of the policies was the Forestry Ordinance of 1916 that created a unified Federal Department of Forestry. The ordinance introduced the system of "dual control" in which forest reserves were established by the central government and subsequently handed over to local authorities for management. In 1919, colonial Governor General Lord Lugard adopted a policy of reserving 25 percent of the country's land area for forest reserves.²

Other environmental conservation policies included the Wild Animals Preservation Law of Western Nigeria of 1916, the Wild Animals Preservation Act of 1939, the Northern Nigeria Wild Animals Law of 1963, the Eastern Nigerian Wild Animals Law of 1965, and Decree 46 of 1979 that authorized the establishment of national parks in Nigeria. The 1979 decree coincided with the inception of democratic governance in Nigeria.

Nigeria falls within the tropical rain forest zone in the West African subregion. Nigerian society is heterogeneous with an estimated 250 ethnolinguistic groups and a population of approximately 120 million people. Of these groups, the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba, and the Igbo are predominant. The Hausa-Fulani inhabit a major part of the north while the Yoruba and the Igbo occupy parts of the southwest and southeast respectively. Other smaller but prominent ethnic groups include the Tiv in the middle belt, the Edo in the midwest, the Efik and the Ibibio in the southeast, and the Ijo who inhabit the delta fringes of the midwest and southeast.³

In 1914, British colonial administrators merged these diverse groups to form a single Nigerian nation. With its independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited a British parliamentary system of government. At that time the country was delimited into three main administrative regions, the north, the west, and the east. Following claims of marginalization, the Edo and other minority groups in the west were carved out in 1963 to form the midwestern region. The 4 regions were subsequently divided into 12 states in 1967 and 19 in 1976. By 1979, Nigeria adopted the presidential system of government akin to the American model. There were further state-creation phases in 1987, 1991, and 1995, when the country was further subdivided into 21, 30, and 36 states respectively.⁴

This article discusses two sites: Obudu Cattle Ranch in Cross River State and Sukur Kingdom in Adamwa State. Obudu Cattle Ranch is an important eco-tourism site. Located on the top of the Mambila Hills, it was first explored in 1949 by Scottish expatriate ranchers and originally conceived as a ranch for raising special breeds of cattle. Over the years, the ranch suffered neglect and abandonment. Under the current government, the ranch has been rehabilitated as a tourist destination managed by Protea Hotel, a South African consortium.

Sukur Kingdom is a small polity in the Mandara highlands. The name "Sukur" or "Sugur" refers to the ancient Sukur Kingdom that flourished between the early 16th and late 18th centuries. In 1999, the remains of the Sukur Kingdom were designated a World Heritage site.⁵

This article examines modern conservation methods employed at Obudu Cattle Ranch and traditional methods used at Sukur Kingdom. A goal in Nigerian conservation is to integrate traditional and modern methods to ensure sustainable conservation and tourism development. No explicit national policy or legislative instruments currently support this objective.

Heritage Management, Conservation Areas, and Tourism

A tripartite relationship exists among heritage management, conservation, and tourism. Good heritage management ensures that tourism and conservation complement each other; in turn, conservation and tourism are complementary factors in the management of heritage sites.⁶ Attempts to address heritage management in Africa must seek to satisfy this trinity and encourage the sensitive blending of modern and traditional practices. Emerging trends in sustainable heritage management in Africa demand the integration of local concerns with modern heritage management.

In this article, heritage management refers to public or private initiatives to protect and maintain natural areas and cultural resources, including the protection and preservation of habitats, species, artifacts, monuments, and sites of historical importance. Heritage management is sometimes used interchange-

ably with cultural resources management, but the latter is limited to man-made artifacts, sites, and the built environment.

Heritage sites "make important contributions in sustaining human society especially through conserving the world's natural and cultural heritage."⁷ Apart from maintaining representative samples of ecosystems and preserving biological diversity, protected areas often are centers of environmental stability for their regions. Heritage sites "can provide opportunity for rural development and rational use of marginal lands, for research and monitoring, for conservation, education and for recreation and tourism."⁸ Indeed, heritage sites play an important role in promoting tourism in many developing countries. In Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, India, Costa Rica, Indonesia, and Ecuador, heritage sites are important international tourist attractions.⁹

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The unique and most appealing aspects of Nigeria's cultural heritage continue to provide the public with beautiful and historically significant places that are linked to national identity and the pride of the country and its people.¹⁰ Some advocates for the creation of national parks in Nigeria view them as a means of ensuring the continued survival of heritage sites and as a component in advancing the country's intellectual and material development.¹¹

A sound management plan that incorporates input from the community and concessionaires is invaluable in reaping the benefits of tourism. Community input "encourages an awareness of, and pride in, the natural and cultural heritage of the community and at the same time enables the community to be proactive in promoting what it sees as unique in terms of developing an appropriate tourist strategy for the area."¹² A suitable combination of modern and traditional practices is needed in heritage site management: "the successful management of...a heritage site involves sensitivity to the requirements of both the heritage resources and the community of which they are a part as well as the demands of either short-stay or long-stay visitors."¹³

A combination of strategies is vital for successful heritage management in Nigeria and allows developers to "assess all the knowledge available from every source" and "pick what is best suited to the case at hand."¹⁴ Modern methods are not the only avenue towards sustainable heritage management, particularly in developing nations.

Obudu Cattle Ranch and Sukur Kingdom are good places to study the traditional and modern management methods and develop recommendations on

how to integrate the best of each method. Lessons learned can be applied, with modifications, to other historic sites to ensure their sustainability and enhance their potential for tourism.

Tourist Attractions

While Obudu Cattle Ranch is mainly a natural area and Sukur Kingdom is mainly a cultural site, a mixture of attractions can be found at both sites. Obudu Cattle Ranch is inhabited by a variety of animal and plant species. The site's hosts, the Bechile people, offer cultural events to visitors, such as the *Elumu* festival. Celebrated annually in honor of the *Elumu* deity, *Elumu* is a festival of peace with gifts, dance, and masquerades. On the other hand, the Sukur Kingdom provides cultural features such as the Hidi's Palace, stone walls, gates, paved ways, agricultural terraces, unique vernacular architecture, shrines, tombs, and smelting furnaces. In addition, Sukur Kingdom incorporates sacred natural areas within which the *Mudumum*, *Famaihi*, and *Duvdoi* shrines are located.

At Obudu Cattle Ranch, tourist attractions include the Grotto, Gorilla Viewpoint, Becheve Nature Reserve, Cameroon Viewpoint, and waterfalls. The Grotto is a pleasantly shaded natural swimming pool within a small waterfall. The Gorilla Viewpoint is a place to observe a variety of gorillas in their natural habitat. Becheve Nature Reserve contains a montane forest, scrubland, and regenerating forest, grassland, and formerly cleared farmland. The forest is reserved for watching the extraordinary number of birds that inhabit the forest. Over 2,000 species have been recorded at the reserve, and the Obudu plateau's birds are the greatest attraction to visitors with an interest in natural history. From Cameroon Viewpoint, visitors can view the countryside of Cameroon. Other Obudu ranch sites of note include the honey factory, the veterinary section, the primary and secondary schools, the ranch market, and the ceramics production center.

The main feature of the Sukur cultural landscape is the Hidi's Palace on a hill approximately 3,500 meters above sea level and dominating the villages below, the terraced fields and their sacred symbols, and the extensive remains of a former flourishing iron industry. The cultural landscape is exceptional as "a form of land use that marks a critical stage in human settlement and its relationship with its environment" and an "eloquent testimony to a strong and continuing spiritual and cultural tradition that has endured for many centuries."¹⁵

Hidi is a traditional title given to persons who ascend the Sukur throne. The Hidi has immense powers and controls the political, social, and religious affairs of Sukur society. Once enthroned, the Hidi is expected to relocate to and reside in the palace, a residential as well as a political and cultural com-

plex. The Hidi is considered a priest-king whose religious authority is recognized by ethnic groups in the region and far beyond.¹⁶ An ingenious arrangement of stone seats for the chiefs of various ethnic groups signifies the political authority that the palace once wielded.

Paved ways from the north and east and within the palace complex are made of carefully selected stones, methodically arranged to facilitate climbing and minimize erosion. Considered a construction marvel, the paved ways exhibit the ingenuity of ancient surveyors and laborers who, without modern instruments or tools, tamed the steep terrain and provided access routes in a mountainous region.¹⁷

Festivals are vital components of Sukur cultural heritage. The most prominent of the festivals are *Zoku* and *Mbur sakun*. The *Zoku* festival is celebrated at the end of each September to drive away evil spirits from the community and to appease the gods. The *Mbur sakun* festival is celebrated every two years to mark the initiation of young boys into adulthood.

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Shrines, tombs, and altars are important features in Sukur Kingdom. Shrines are located in dense forests and other awe-inspiring places characterized by solemnity, quiet, and fear, which suggest the presence of something out of the ordinary. The shrines' deities are said to have the power to inflict serious hardship on anybody in Sukur Kingdom who does evil. According to the chief priest of Sukur deities, "for one to know the remedies, it requires consultation with an oracle to find out the causes of the punishment and how to appease the deities responsible for them." There are cases "where communities or persons who suffered some kind of calamities had their misfortunes suddenly arrested after consulting oracles and complying with the wishes of the deity or deities responsible for the misfortune."¹⁸

Two types of burial grounds are found in Sukur Kingdom: *Dazha*, the royal graveyards, and the common burial ground for the villagers. *Dazha* areas are regarded as sacred and can only be entered by chief priests. Tombs are marked by a pyramid.

Altars in Sukur Kingdom are used for sacrificial purposes. Before the planting season in April and May, sacrifices are offered on Mungwalai Mountain to appease the gods and pray for a good harvest. During harvest in October and November, sacrifices are offered on Muzi Mountain by the chief priest to

thank the gods while blessing the fruits of the harvest. The highest sacrificial spot in Sukur in terms of elevation is Muva Mountain, which serves as the sacrificial spot for the Hidi and the entire village. Other sacrificial altars are Mulirih Mountain, Liags-Mbathavai Mountain, and Tangwurah Mountain. Sacrificial animals commonly used among the Sukur are chickens, rams, and sometimes bulls, depending on the financial capability of the person offering the sacrifice.

Iron-smelting sites constitute one of the most attractive tourist destinations in Sukur Kingdom. Smelting is almost moribund in many societies in Nigeria but not in Sukur Kingdom, where tourists interested in traditional smelting have an opportunity to witness smelting processes and techniques first hand. Smelting furnaces are located on agricultural terraces or at the margins of residual forests to ensure easy access to fuel. At Sukur, the fuel supply could have been a more critical factor in the smelting process than the source of ore. Smelting consumes substantial amounts of wood and undue exploitation of timber can lead to wind and rain erosion that can negatively affect plants, domestic livestock production, and wild animal habitats.

Blacksmithing and pottery making are also important, and related, activities in Sukur Kingdom. Metal products and pottery are for local use and sale to neighboring communities. Smiths use bloom produced by local smelters and metal purchased from nearby markets to forge machetes, sickles, scythes, ploughshares, and other agricultural, war, religious, and cultural implements.

Despite the availability of other types of wares, such as enamel, plastic, and glasswares, demand for traditional pottery is high because pottery is affordable and better adapted to local uses. People prefer traditional foods or drinks, such as *riwad* (millet), *thiebur* (maize), *ghan* (beans), and *indanburu* (bambara nut) cooked in ceramics.

Conservation Practices in the Study Areas

Conservation practice at Obudu Cattle Ranch comprises three components: the Forest Management Committee, ranch and tourist guides, and boundary demarcations. The Forest Management Committee tries to improve the quality of life through the enhanced and sustainable management of forest resources. The committee erects gates, seizes illegally cut wood and wood-cutting machines, checks illegal activities in forest reserves and community forests, and develops regulations to guide operations.

The committee is the main conservator of Obudu Cattle Ranch and has developed reserve regulations for the Becheve Nature Reserve. Visitors must enter with an official of the reserve, stay on established trails, minimize noise to avoid scaring away wildlife, and conform with other sound conservation prac-

tices.¹⁹ The committee, in collaboration with village councils, negotiates and monitors concession agreements at Obudu Cattle Ranch. It also undertakes community forest boundary cleaning, clearing, and demarcation with Forestry Commission Technical Assistance, and makes arrests for poaching and other illegal activities. The committee monitors illegal farming and nontimber forest-product extraction activities and enforces measures to curtail these infractions. Over time, increased awareness of conservation laws and value of protected forest has lessened illegal activities.

Ranch and tourist guides receive training in tactics and strategies to protect the area. Trained guides remind tourists of the reserve's regulations and ensure that tourists adhere to the regulations. Guides are alert to poaching and other illegal activities and ensure that farm and nontimber forest products are not extracted.

Law enforcement and survival training help guides to deal with those who hunt wild animals or fell trees in reserved areas. According to Edem A. Eniang, "the hunters are still operating within these areas and they are killing our wildlife."²⁰ He further notes that there is a traditional attachment among the general populace to meat from wild sources known as bush-meat. Ranch and tourist guides have curbed unwholesome activities by local hunters and villagers, resulting in a relative scarcity of bush-meat even in known bush-meat markets.

In Becheve Nature Reserve and the ranch at large, boundaries are clearly marked with barbed wire and warning signs. In less restricted areas outside the ranch, tree lines mark boundaries. Boundary demarcations prevent community members from claiming ignorance of the presence of a conservation area as an excuse for poaching and farming.

In contrast with Obudu Cattle Ranch, conservation in Sukur Kingdom is approached in a more traditional manner where local culture has greatly influenced conservation methods. The Sukur Kingdom conservation strategy rests mainly on community solidarity, customary practices handed down from generation to generation, and taboos.

Age-grades and groups constitute an enduring management system in traditional Nigerian societies, whether in the centralized political systems of Benin and Yorubaland or the relatively segmentary noncentralized systems of the Igbo and the Tiv.²¹ People in this part of the world, particularly men, are often grouped together into age ranges. Those who fall into a particular age range constitute an "age-grade." Each age-grade has special or designated roles. Among the Sukur, people are grouped into four age-grades: palace officials including the Hidi and his chiefs; elders, those 60 years old and above; the middle-age group between 35 and 60 years old that constitutes the workforce

and traditionally supplied warriors; and the youth, from about 25 to 34 years, who assist older age-grades in clearing brush and building communal houses and shrines. Registered members of age-grades form the Sukur Development Association, which is responsible broadly for community development projects, social and cultural activities, and promoting community responsibility. Association members are responsible for erecting stone paved ways, planting trees, providing site security, and repairing shrines and palaces in Sukur Kingdom.²²

Additionally, many areas are conserved through sacred sanctions, taboos, and cultural laws. For example, farming or cutting down trees in a certain forest will attract the wrath of the deity and the invasion of the kingdom by a leopard. Deities oversee other areas that are meant only for grazing cows. Other uses of the land are believed to attract locusts and the destruction of farm crops.

Integrating Modern and Traditional Practices

African scholars increasingly recognize the need in Africa to integrate modern and traditional practices in resource conservation. Some researchers have voiced the need for integrating relevant aspects of indigenous and foreign techniques in solving Africa's social, cultural, and economic challenges. "Since a large percentage of Africans live in the rural areas, indigenous knowledge is very useful in the preservation of their cultural heritage because apart from the fact that most of the historical/archaeological sites, features and monuments are located in those areas, the rural folks are very likely to comply with the preservation ideals which are culturally suitable to them."²³

Having assessed the conservation methods employed at the two sites and their advantages and disadvantages, our goal is to integrate the methods and harness their potential for sustainable conservation and tourism development.

With Sukur Kingdom's worldwide exposure and the expected influx of tourists, traditional practices alone may not provide adequate protection from the negative effects of development, such as deforestation, depletion of wildlife, dilution of culture, and disruption of social life. Such threats make the integration of modern and traditional practices even more important.

We believe that a committee approach should be integrated into Sukur conservation practices. Security groups could be established to work hand-in-hand with the age-grade association to make arrests, erect gates, and seize recovered wood and machines used in the illegal harvesting of trees.

The committee would cooperate with the Hidi and his ministers to develop regulations to guide its operational activities in line with forest law and regula-

tions while being cognizant of local laws, taboos, and sanctions. In addition, the committee should accommodate at least one-half of the local population as members, two-thirds of whom shall constitute the executive committee. This will motivate the community and give it a sense of responsibility and ownership.

The age-grades and volunteer groups should undergo training in law enforcement techniques, tactics, and survival strategies like the ranch and tourist guides at Obudu Cattle Ranch. With this training, the volunteer groups will be better able to educate visitors on the area's regulations and control the activities of tourists and researchers.

The role of age-grades and lineage groups in heritage management is not new in this part of the world. An example is seen in Okoroji's center for slaves in Southeastern Nigeria. "The maintenance of the building and its contents as a mini museum has rested on the lineage group of Okoroji who died in the late 19th century." The possibility of synchronizing guide systems and age-grade and lineage-based systems in the management of heritage sites offers challenging prospects in sustainable heritage management and the development of cultural assets and tourism.²⁴

Integrating modern and traditional methods promises enormous advantages of sustainable conservation practices and methods. The National Commission for Museums and Monuments, the body responsible for museums and monuments in Nigeria, has had to fall back on community support and partnerships in the management of heritage assets at Sukur Kingdom. An intermediary organization of Sukur elites, the Sukur Movement Support Group, acts as a liaison between the national commission and the Sukur Development Association.²⁵

An integrated heritage approach may be difficult, not only on Obudu Cattle Ranch, but throughout Nigeria and Africa at large, because of institutional weaknesses, inadequate resources, and the isolation of many sites, compounded by a general lack of awareness of the value of heritage conservation. The dynamism of local initiatives and community solidarity is an important asset that should be incorporated, enlarged, and enhanced in Obudu Cattle Ranch to preserve and protect a valued heritage.²⁶

Conclusion

The two sites discussed in this article are invaluable to tourism development in Nigeria. Sukur Kingdom exemplifies the role of community participation in heritage management. Its World Heritage listing is based on the customs and traditions of its people, and the contribution of the Sukur Development Association and other support groups highlights the importance of communi-

ty involvement in heritage management. The involvement of the state and local governments and national and international conservation organizations in conserving heritage will definitely place Sukur Kingdom in a proper and viable position in the heritage tourism industry of Nigeria.²⁷ On the other hand, the Obudu Cattle Ranch is already a popular vacation destination for adventurous tourists wishing to explore the natural environment and remote corners of Nigeria. The site is attractive for its clement weather and its easy accessibility by land or air. The ranch's natural and manmade facilities make a tourist's stay worthwhile.

The integration of traditional and modern methods of conservation promises to generate sustainable heritage management practices in Nigeria. While government agencies and private organizations are encouraged to explore and exploit the benefits of this approach, all should understand that sustainable tourism practice at heritage sites requires a significant commitment. Individuals, businesses, and organizations must be aware that the benefits are long-term, and should not expect to reap them as soon as integrated methods are implemented. In practice, only a small portion of benefits will arise quickly. Most will depend upon many years of continued effort.

Understanding the value of culture and nature as embodied in traditional customs and beliefs is a good step towards integrating traditional and modern initiatives. Harnessing the value inherent in this approach requires policy, legislation, long-term planning, training, and capacity-building programs that emphasize the influence of cultural factors and sustainability in Africa and how cultural factors can be integrated into modern initiatives.

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