

MAEASaM

Mapping Africa's Endangered Archaeological Sites and Monuments

NEWSLETTER 4 | AUGUST 2022

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🕒 Africa's Cultural Heritage: current challenges and future possibilities

On 5th May 2022 the world celebrated African World Heritage Day (proclaimed in 2015 by UNESCO), marking a milestone in the recognition of the continent and its heritage. Towards the end of 2022 there will be further critical reflection points. On 16th November, it will be the official 50th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention, which was born out of the call to cooperate internationally to protect the world's natural and cultural landscapes and sites for 'the present and the future of the entire world citizenry'. The Convention has been ratified by 193 member states including almost every African State Party. This November will also see the 27th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 27), taking place in Sharm El-Sheikh in Egypt.

All of those milestones have informed this newsletter's contributions on the future of African heritage sites, which are well known to be underrepresented on the World Heritage List (currently around 139 sites inscribed out of 1154 (AWHF)). Moreover, almost 40 percent have been placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger, and more sites will face increas-

ing threats, many of which are the unprecedented and often unmonitored impacts of climate change.

Contributions to this Issue

In this issue, Dr Albino Jopela, Head of Programmes at the African World Heritage Fund (AWHF), provides a personal reflection (page 2) on the current representation of World Heritage sites in Africa and more significantly where Africa stands today in terms of 50 years of the World Heritage Convention. The theme of climate and heritage is further explored (page 3) by Professor Joanne Clarke and MAEASaM's Dr Nadia Khalaf, both of whom are contributors to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 6th Assessment Report. Finally, Mr Kundishora Tungamirai Chipunza, Director of Research and Development for the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ), is interviewed by MAEASaM's Dr Ezekia Mtetwa in consideration of the challenges of Zimbabwe's archaeological sites and the role of digitisation in future conservation efforts (page 5).

Dr Faye Lander
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🕒 SNEAK PEEK

- (p.2) African World Heritage in focus with Dr Albino Jopela, Head of Programmes, African World Heritage Fund
- (p.3) Climate Change and Coastal African Heritage Sites with Prof. Joanne Clarke and Dr Nadia Khalaf
- (p.5) Zimbabwe's archaeological heritage with Mr Kundishora Tungamirai Chipunza, Director of Research and Development for the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) interviewed by Dr Ezekia Mtetwa
- (p.7) Notes from the Field: a look at the current in-country activities of MAEASaM's members
- (p.8) Upcoming event, 4th October: Remote Sensing Workshop

○ African World Heritage in Focus

Dr Albino Jopela, Head of Programmes, [African World Heritage Fund \(AWHF\)](#)

“...the increased number of African sites on the List is not on its own a solution and not for the benefit of Africans. A more relevant focus would be, what would we want to gain as Africans from each site that is inscribed?”

It is undisputed that the 1972 World Heritage Convention was born out of the concerns for development, mostly in Europe, and this shaped how heritage was to be defined and how it was to be protected. Nevertheless, the Convention provided an international instrument with global appeal. In 1978, the first three African inscriptions were made: the Island of Gorée of Senegal and the Rock-Hewn Churches and Simien National Park of Ethiopia. That said, decades of disproportionate representation have ensued.

Since 1994, when the World Heritage Committee adopted the [Global Strategy](#) for a better representation of sites across previously underrepresented regions, there have been several recommendations. Decades later, one might argue that the Global Strategy did not succeed. Today, Africa is represented by less than 12 percent of the List, with Sub-Saharan Africa currently making up eight percent: a position that has even decreased slightly since 1994. In practical terms, how would one begin to reverse this? Certainly, there are historic imbalances that are symptomatic of how the system has functioned, but what to address and how is far more complex. I think that increasing the numbers of African sites on the List is not on its own a solution and not for the benefit of Africans. A more relevant focus would be: what do we want to gain as Africans from each site that is inscribed?

“If we ask the question ‘whose history and whose heritage is represented in the glorification of such spaces?’, there is much to be debated.”

Several debates exist around the issue of representation within the World

Heritage system. For example, the so-called Colonial Cities (the Island of Mozambique among others) are perceived as such by parts of the African population. While such sites have gained global significance and the international community agrees that they are important to safeguard, other groups might perceive different sites as more representative, as more African. The debate on what constitutes World Heritage also encompasses sites that are more related to traditional systems of interaction with the environment or the safeguarding of specific cultures. The power of narrative is important, particularly as to whose narrative is being projected. Few would disagree that slavery was one of the shaping events in Africa and the diasporas but how many sites of outstanding universal value in Africa are truly speaking to slavery? Often the narrative that is presented is shaped by the dynamics and processes of how such sites are evaluated and the messaging that has been projected during nomination processes. Tensions arise at grassroots level where such communities are still grappling with the aftermath of colonialism and slavery.

50 years of the Convention: where are we?

As we celebrate [50 years of the World Heritage Convention](#) with a theme of Resilience, Humanity and Innovation, I remember when we celebrated the [40th Anniversary](#) of the same convention in 2012, under the theme Sustainable Development and the Role of Local Communities. One of the key reflection points to emerge from the discussions was about how far we have come in terms of the engagement with the convention. I agree that there have been some considerable achievements when it comes to raising the profile of heritage at the political level. After all, it is the most popular convention and one that outnumbers any other. It has also been used as a platform to raise discussions about heritage at higher international levels. Yet pressing challenges remain. One of these is the role of communities, which for many State Parties has remained an

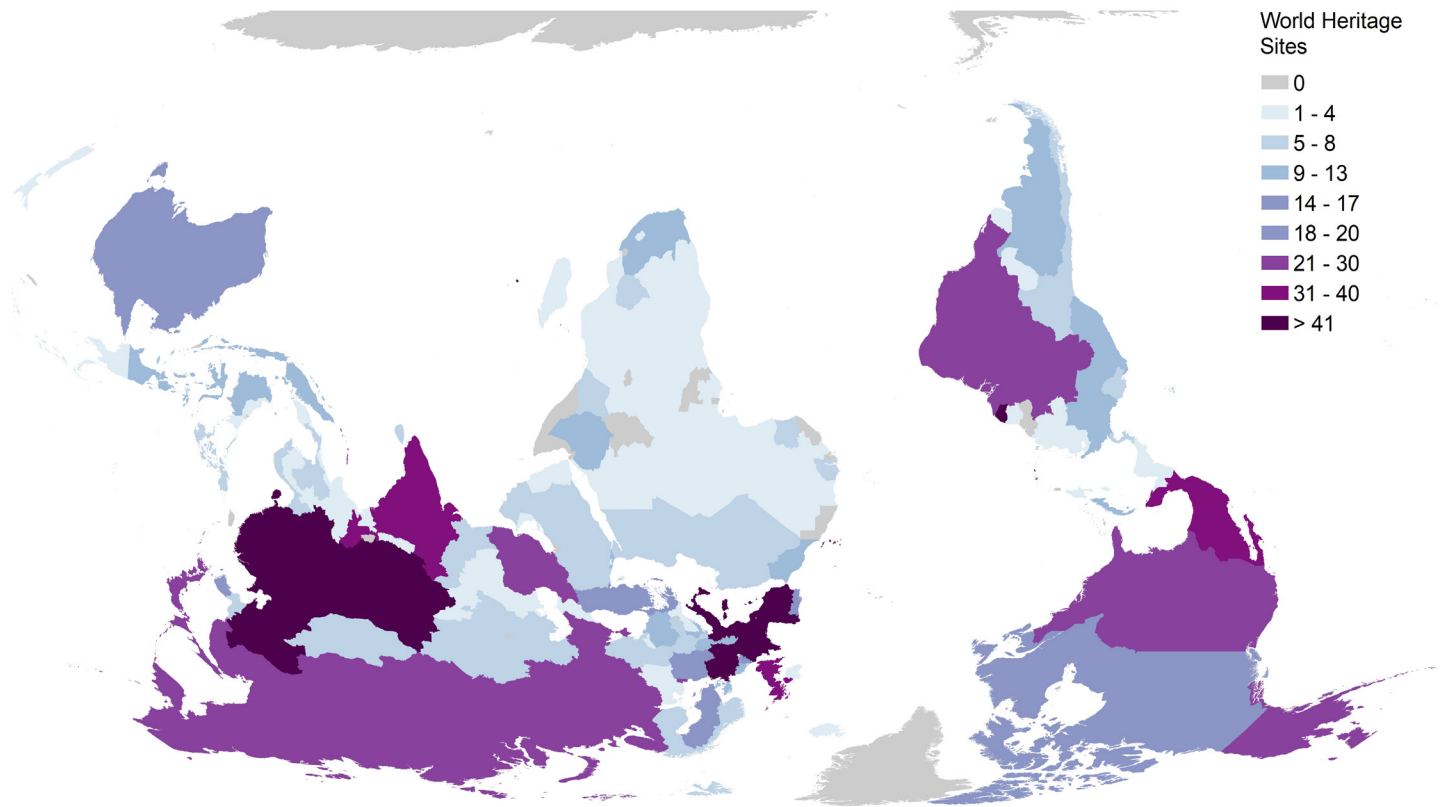


issue of rhetoric. Local communities are in many cases not devolved with the power to be key decision makers about their own heritage and such tensions become more complex when a site becomes inscribed as World Heritage. I think that it is one of the areas where we have lagged far behind in terms of where we would like to be.

Prioritising climate and culture

There cannot be any meaningful discussion about heritage conservation when the primary concern is about whether this generation and the next will be able to survive the predicaments of climate. Certain global commitments such as the [2015 Paris Agreement](#) will need to speak to culture and perhaps learn from the pitfalls of other pledges. For example, the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) are premised on economic, social, and environmental pillars, yet there is no pillar of culture. In terms of climate commitments, the issue is not only how climate affects heritage but how heritage and culture contribute to climate action and our attitudes towards it. There are currently several commendable initiatives such as the application of the [Climate Vulnerability Index](#) in which the [AWHF](#) partner with [ICOMOS](#) and members of the [Climate Heritage Network](#) on pilot projects. There is still much to be done however, not only in terms of advocacy and how we position ourselves for the immediate future, but also in shifting the discourse on heritage conservation.

This contribution was transcribed based on a discussion with [Dr Albino Jopela](#) by [Dr Faye Lander](#), MAEASaM Regional Project Manager, Origins Centre, Wits University.



Above: Global distribution of UNESCO World Heritage Sites per country shows concentrations of inscribed heritage in Higher Income Countries, while former colonies have fewer UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Map from Nature Climate Change, ‘Decolonizing climate change–heritage research’. Figure courtesy of Dr Nadia Khalaf.

Climate Change and Coastal African Heritage Sites

The latest report of the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#) indicates that greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, and current plans to address climate change are not ambitious enough to limit warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. The final synthesis of the IPCC’s report is expected to be released in September 2022. Perhaps one of the most important additions is the first-ever inclusion of heritage within the assessment. Contributing IPCC Africa chapter authors, Prof Joanne Clarke, climate change and heritage researcher based at the University of East Anglia, and Dr Nadia Khalaf, MAEASaM’s Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Exeter, tells MAEASaM about this important inclusion.

“This was an absolute coup. It was a unilateral decision that Co-ordinating Lead Author, Chris Trisos made at the very first Lead Authors’ meeting. He just told the Co-Chairs of the IPCC’s Working Group II that the Africa Chapter would have a heritage section, and nobody objected. The Africa chapter has set the precedent

for other Lead Author groups to follow, and we are very proud of what we have achieved. The next step will be to have heritage fully embedded in future IPCC special reports and Assessment Report 7.”

Clarke and Khalaf were part of the research project on coastal African heritage sites published in Nature Climate Change ([African heritage sites threatened as sea-level rise accelerates](#) | Nature Climate Change) earlier this year. This provided the first study of its kind to examine the potential impacts of sea level rise on 284 African heritage sites as recognised by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance.

The study indicates that 56 of the 284 identified sites are currently exposed to 1-in-100-year coastal extreme events including coastal erosion and flooding. The research further projects that by 2050 the number of sites threatened by coastal extreme events are expected to more than triple, reaching approximately 191 African heritage sites. According to Clarke and Khalaf:

“Each site is expected to be impacted differently. For example, at the site of Meninx on the Island of Djerba in Tunisia, the hazard is flooding caused by extreme seas. For natural heritage sites, such as

the Saloum Delta in Senegal, salination could become a major issue, while Sabratha in Libya is facing erosion, again due to more frequent extreme seas. Going forward, hazards to heritage caused by climate change will become more frequent. Many of these hazards are not yet an issue because they are infrequent and heritage sites have the ability to recover, but the more frequent the hazard event, the less time there is for the heritage site to fully recover, this leading to greater exposure to the same hazards and to increased vulnerability. Heritage managers need to be aware that what might now be periodic overtopping of a sea wall could become permanent inundation if the floods do not have the time to subside.”

Asked how such climate driven hazards on heritage sites can be managed or mitigated, the authors make the following observations:

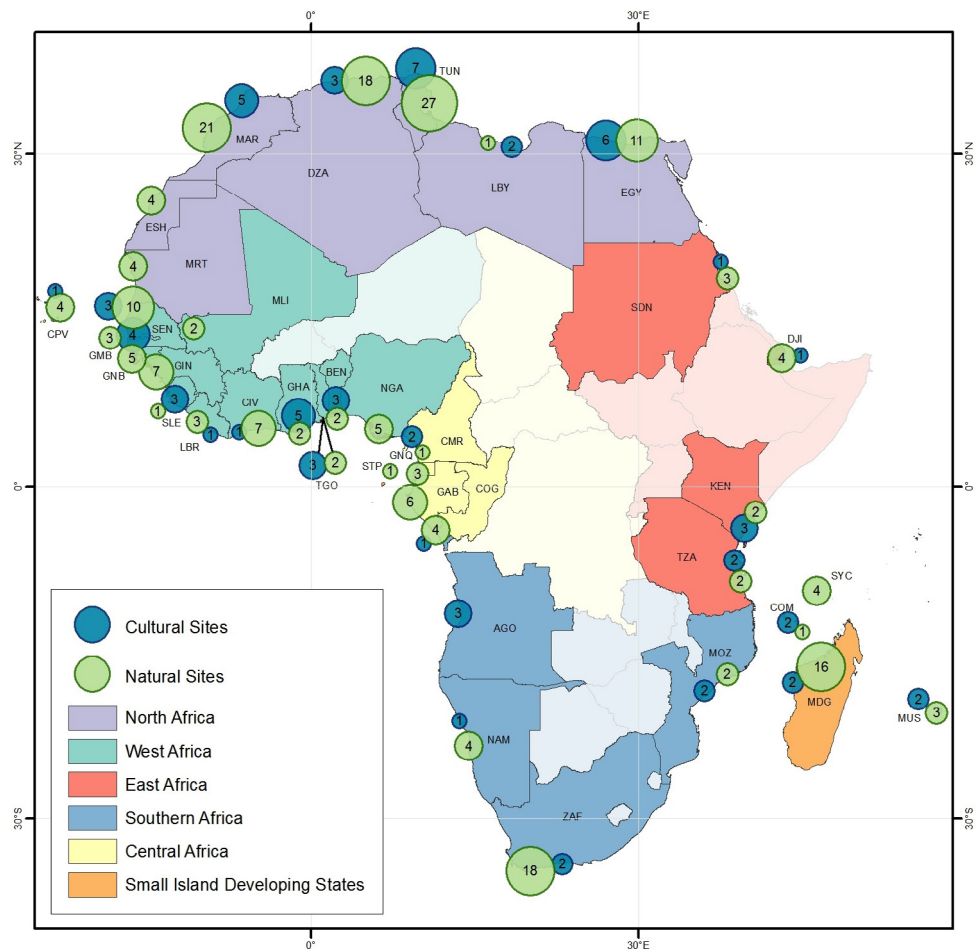
“It is complex and requires joint thinking across a range of disciplines and expertise, including the presence and willingness of governments to engage at a national level. Some countries do not have the adaptive capacity to do anything to save their coastal heritage.

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Returning to Meninx on the island of Djerba, the site has not even been restored: that would have to be the first measure before worrying about sea defences. In West Africa where more frequent extreme seas are battering the coasts of Benin, Togo and Ghana, simple sea walls have been built. This will postpone damage to coastal heritage, but it is not a permanent solution. Other sites will probably be lost because the cost of saving heritage is often greater than its cultural and economic value.”

Increasingly, intergovernmental bodies concerned with heritage and practice are recognising the unprecedented pace and scale of the climate crisis, not only in terms of its impacts on cultural and natural sites but also on the collective responses within the heritage sector as cultural institutions for climate action. For Clarke and Khalaf:

“Climate action requires inter-disciplinary engagement. It is not enough for heritage experts or archaeologists to take up the climate action banner, they need to be working closely with climate scientists, engineers and modellers, and they need to be equal partners in those collaborations. Slowly, we think that climate scientists are seeing the importance of working with humanities disciplines in order to solve some of the bigger questions, such as how we communicate the impacts to heritage from climate driven hazards. A key issue is that we need to be speaking the same language; currently we are not doing that. Within the humanities, language is often nuanced and speculative. This is not the case within climate science, where, even when there is no certainty



Above: Coastal African Heritage Sites (AHS) per country. Extended Data Figure 1 from Nature Climate Change, ‘African heritage sites threatened as sea-level rise accelerates’. Figure courtesy of authors, Prof. Joanne Clarke and Dr Nadia Khalaf.

there will be a confidence statement alongside, for example, ‘sea-levels will rise by an average of 1m across the globe by 2100 even without any cut in greenhouse gas emissions’ (high confidence). In the humanities we would say, ‘it is likely that sea-levels could be 1m higher by 2100, but you

cannot say that within the climate change world as it is too speculative. The question is, who should change their language, if anyone. How do we communicate climate change in a way that works for all?”

📍 African World Heritage Sites Story Map

The MAEASaM team is in the process of developing an interactive ESRI Story Map to be viewed by the public. The aim is to raise awareness about Africa’s World Heritage Sites and spotlight those that are currently on the endangered list. The interactive map will be hosted on www.maeasam.org soon.

● Zimbabwe's archaeological heritage

An interview with Mr Kundishora Tungamirai Chipunza, Director of Research and Development for the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ)

Over the past two months, Dr Ezekia Mtetwa has been working with museum staff at the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) in Harare on the digitisation of archaeological sites and monuments paper-based records. During this time, Dr Mtetwa met with Mr Chipunza, Director of Research and Development for NMMZ and collaborator of the MAEASaM project, to seek his thoughts on current challenges and future possibilities of digital heritage management in a southern African context.

Q. What are the current challenges and needs in the preservation of heritage sites in Zimbabwe?

We have a diverse range of heritage in Zimbabwe that ranges from rock art, stonewalled buildings, historical monuments, liberation heritage, as well as natural history monuments, among many others. The current challenge is that the preservation techniques for these monuments and the methods that are used for their recording are all so different. For an institution like ours at the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe the capacity to match such diversity is a big challenge. It calls for diversity in expertise and in the technologies deployed for this type of work.

The current categorisation of monuments is an inherited system, the foundations of which have been largely rooted in colonial legacies. The colonial frameworks are challenging to overhaul, and this is something we confront on an ongoing basis. Apart from the fact that we are not the originators of these past conservation frameworks, we are also not responsible for their significance rating. We also do not have a system where we declassify monuments. Of course, every monument is important because it forms part of our heritage. It means we must ensure that we carry everything with us and make it sustainable for future generations. It is also a legal challenge particularly on how the law applies to the status of heritage sites. As I mentioned, there is no room for declassifying monuments.

Most importantly, the people who had initiated the preservation of monuments and sites in Zimbabwe did not properly record the traditional protocols that were once used for the preservation of heritage prior to the coming of colonisation. In many instances these traditional protocols have been lost and there is a need to re-engineer such protocols by going back to the people who were once the keepers of such sites. This is something that I think will remain a challenge for future conservators.

Q. What are the current threats facing archaeological sites in Zimbabwe?

There are environmental threats induced by climate change, particularly in terms of natural heritage. It is changing the landscape and protocols for its future conservation. For example, owing to climatic shifts, wildlife such as elephant populations are moving longer distances in search of water sources, changing their pathways and corridors as they move. In some instances, these corridors are passing through cultural heritage sites where they once were avoided, causing quite a lot of destruction.

There are other challenges. For example, the land reform [which officially began in the 1980s in Zimbabwe] ushered in a new era in the population of the country. People were moved from areas, consequently severing physical connections to heritage landmarks. This led to the serious neglect of cultural and religious sites. There were also cases of sites which were previously being used for consumptive tourism. This was historically connected to the shift to agrarian

(continued on page 6)



Above: Dry stone-walling of Great Zimbabwe.



Above: Building of the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, Harare. Photograph by Dr Ezekia Mtetwa.

reform where newly resettled farmers in many cases did not have the same view of heritage and for example, blocks from stonewalled sites were used for the construction of domestic architecture. Unfortunately, NMMZ could not keep pace with the land reform programme in order to protect monuments and sites ahead of these resettlements. This led to a loss of heritage, attrition, disturbances, and removal of parts of monuments. We are presently trying to look at this challenge in retrospect, but I think a lot of information and the physical aspects of monuments have been lost in the process.

The issue of staff is perhaps one of the largest challenges. NMMZ works with a skeletal staff complement. We are heavily centralised in urban areas, and we are not devolved to the district level, not to mention the ward level. We currently have a staff complement of 34 curators covering 62 districts in the country. We are pushing to get a curator per district so that we will be able to monitor and even generate archaeological surveys at district level. That has not been possible yet.

Q. How do you see digital archaeological databases in Africa contributing towards the global heritage arena?

I wish the use of digital archaeological databases had come much earlier. We continue to record sites in the hope to ensure their physical presence even when such sites are no longer there. Digital conservation is one of the ways of preserving such records. For example, Fort Makaha, a National Monument of

Zimbabwe, had been recorded before it was obliterated by illegal mining in 2020, as was the ancient gold working site, Old Mazoe Jumbo, which had been destroyed by similar practices five years earlier. Because we have records of both sites and can digitise them, we are aiming to ensure that these once well-known sites are preserved for posterity. An advantage of digitisation is that sites do not need to be physically accessed in order to be analysed. In addition, digital heritage information can be shared with the global community. We have paper-based maps and site records at the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences (ZMHS) Archaeological Survey for these destroyed sites, and once these are digitised, the global community can

continue enjoying Zimbabwe's heritage.

However, data theft and the purposeful targeting of sites at international levels are a fear. Policies, such as the prohibited taking of photographs in our museum, is perhaps one way of mitigating the impacts of targeted looting of objects housed here. Sites may be at similar risk once digitised. For example, locational information may make a site more vulnerable to illegal excavations. There are certain levels where sensitive information should be secured so that safety is ensured. There is always risk when information is out there. However, you cannot organise a party and then not invite people to partake; heritage

(continued on page 7)

● The site of Bumbuzi Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe



One site where NMMZ sent a stress call across the world is Bumbuzi, a dry stone walled settlement in the Hwange National Park, Matabeleland. Bumbuzi was declared a National Monument in Zimbabwe in 1946 because of its importance as a rare surviving monument of pre-colonial civilisation and presently serves as a spiritual centre for the living descendents of the builders. In 2008, it was placed on the [World Monuments Watch list \(Bumbuzi National Monument | World Monuments Fund \(wmf.org\)\)](#) but currently does not have the requisite assistance for rehabilitation.

is about sharing. Other mechanics of security are something we should work on.

Q. In your opinion, can digital heritage help facilitate the decolonisation of history in southern Africa?

In Zimbabwe we have always battled with the issue of the burden of proof. The claims about the authorship of Great Zimbabwe are perhaps the most well-known example. Someone can ask for proof that your ancestors were the creators of such monuments in the past. Unfortunately for many of us, history starts only when colonialism sets in. Beyond 1506 and earlier, there is the assumption that there is no history. By digitising our records and sharing the information about deep history, it enables us to move beyond the heavily constructed conception of history in the country. That is a powerful tool for decolonisation. It also helps in the decolonisation process by instilling a good sense of pride and self-esteem in Zimbabweans.

Q. How do you envision sustainable digital heritage in southern Africa?

The question of North and South comes back around. We are little players in the digital information exchange and process. If we narrow down to practical terms, sustainable digital heritage means the access to equipment for the continued digitisation of records – and ideally this should be simple equipment. We need capacitation to ensure that those who undertake digital heritage preservation will be able to train others so that the process continues. Networks are important too, to have digital platforms that ensure information is regenerated. Storage spaces also come to mind here, for example e-cloud and other digital spaces that ensure sustainable longer lasting use. However, being small players in the digital league means that the security of our information is always at risk. We need to safeguard heritage information. Once we lose our information, we are recolonised.

This interview was conducted and transcribed by **Dr Ezekia Mtetwa**, MAEASaM Postdoctoral Researcher for Zimbabwe, University of Uppsala, Sweden.

Notes from the Field

MAEASaM researchers have been conducting in-country activities including field-based verification of archaeological sites using our tailor-made [Open Data Kit \(ODK\)](#) digital form for site recording. Teams have also been carrying out in-person training and workshoping, including topics on free and open-source geographic information system applications such as [QGIS](#) and ways of 'going digital'.

Swahili Settlements, southern Kenya (July 2022)

Below: MAEASaM Researcher Angela Kabiru in the field with John Kanyingi, both of the [British Institute in Eastern Africa \(BIEA\)](#), and John Munyiri and intern Nicole, from the [National Museums of Kenya \(NMK\)](#). They are photographed recording the location and attributes of a Swahili settlement in the Kwale Region on the southern part of the Kenyan coast.

Photograph by Angela Kabiru.





Stone Cairns, Northern Kenya (July 2022)

Left: The team at the British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA) in Northern Kenya carried out ground truthing of stone cairns that were identified via remote sensing methods in Google Earth Pro, led by MAEASaM's Principal Investigator Professor Paul Lane. BIEA researchers Cecilia and Mwalimu are pictured here measuring a stone cairn.

Photograph by Professor Paul Lane.



Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences, Harare (May 2022)

Left: MAEASaM Project co-investigator Dr Daniel Löwenborg and postdoctoral researcher Dr Ezekia Mtetwa held a 'Going Digital' workshop at the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences in Harare.

Photograph by Dr Ezekia Mtetwa.



Workshop on the use of Google Earth Pro for archaeological sites and monuments detection and monitoring, Zanzibar, Tanzania (August 2022)

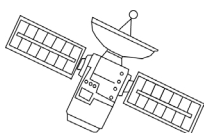
Left: Project Manager, Dr Stefania Merlo, and MAEASaM Postdoctoral Researcher, Dr Akinbowale Akintayo, held a two-hour hands on practical on the use of Google Earth Pro to identify and record archaeological sites to stakeholders and delegates at the 16th Congress of the Pan African Archaeological Association held in Zanzibar, Tanzania on 7th August 2022.

Photograph by Dr Akinbowale Akintayo.

UPCOMING EVENT

MAEASaM will be holding a joint workshop on Remote Sensing in Archaeology with the Mapping Archaeological Heritage in South Asia (MAHSA) project on 4th October 2022. The event will be held online and is free for anyone to attend.

For more information about this event and how to register contact us at MAEASaM-info@arch.cam.ac.uk



Generously supported by Arcadia - a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin.



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