

## **Samoa and the World Heritage Convention - is Samoa ready for World Heritage listing?**

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To date Samoa is a state party to over twenty Multilateral Environmental Agreements including the World Heritage Convention (or Convention) of 1972. It is noted in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention World Heritage (or Guidelines) (UNESCO 2005), that when a country ratifies the convention, it automatically and immediately becomes law in that country. So what does this mean for Samoa? Do we fully understand all possible implications, benefits, costs and consequences of Convention to our heritage and resources?

### **What is the World Heritage Convention?**

The Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage developed from the merging of 2 separate movements in the 1960s - the first focusing on dangers to cultural sites, and the other dealing with conservation of nature. However, it was only when the Egyptians took the decision to build the Aswan High dam on the Nile River that the international community came together to address global heritage issues that the movement really came into effect in the 1960s. This project was going to flood the valley containing the Abu Simbel temples under water which are a treasure of ancient Egyptian civilization.

There was an international reaction to save the temple and fortunately, the temples were dismantled, moved to dry ground and reassembled. It costs around USD80 million and half of the money was donated by some 50 countries, showing the importance nations' shared responsibility in conserving outstanding cultural sites. The international campaign led to the protection of other cultural sites around the world and finally lead to a draft convention on the protection of cultural heritage. In 1972 the Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO; named simply the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO 1972).

When countries sign the Convention, each country pledges to conserve not only the World Heritage sites situated on its territory, but also to protect its national heritage. Thus, one of the first steps a country must make after signing the Convention is to prepare a Tentative List of the sites it intends to preserve and to be considered under the World Heritage List (or List). To date there are 788 sites from 134 countries of the world – 611 Cultural sites, 154 Natural sites and 23 Mixed sites – 23, In the Pacific region 11 countries have ratified the Convention namely Fiji in 1990; Kiribati in 2000; Marshall Islands in 2002; Federated States of Micronesia in 2002; Niue in 2001; Palau in 2002; Papua New Guinea in 1997; Samoa in 2001; Solomon Islands in 1992; Tonga in 2004; and Vanuatu in 2002. Only the Solomon Islands' has completed its nomination for the Renell Island for the List (UNESCO 2004a).

It was noted that when the Convention took form at the beginning, countries wanted to inscribe the 'Cadillac sites' - the best of the best and the World Heritage List was almost seen

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as a beauty contest. However, noting from the countries enlisted, it has evolved to represent all cultures of all periods not only the major cultures (UNITAR 2005)

### **What is heritage?**

There are numerous definitions noted from reports such as:

- Places and objects we wish to keep safe and these are natural or cultural places/objects that people value because they came from ancestors.
- Places/objects that are beautiful, scientifically important and irreplaceable.
- They are a source of inspiration.
- Heritage is shaped by nature and history and it becomes an inheritance passed from one generation to the next.
- Heritage helps people to understand and tell stories about their land and people; and
- Legacy from the past to the future.

Under the Convention heritage is regarded as both cultural and natural and the Convention is a reminder of the ways in which people interact with nature, and the fundamental need to preserve the balance between the two. Nature and culture are complementary and cultural identity is strongly related to the natural environment in which it develops (UNESCO 1972).

According to the Guidelines, heritage is defined under natural and cultural heritage.

#### Article 1 - Cultural heritage refers to:

1. Monuments: Architectural works, works of monumental structures and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;
2. Groups of buildings – groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;
3. Sites – works of man or the combined works of man and nature, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, anthological or anthropological point of view.

#### Article 2 - Natural heritage refers to:

1. Natural features consisting of physical and biological formations or groups of such formations which are of outstanding universal value from the aesthetic or scientific point of view.
2. Geological and physiographical formations and precisely delineated areas which constitute the habitat of threatened species of animals and plants of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.
3. Natural sites or precisely delineated natural areas of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science, conservation or natural beauty.

### **How do we understand heritage?**

The concept heritage is used in many different ways in contemporary society to designate a broad spectrum of subjects (viewed from cultural, philosophical and religious aspects). However, as stewards of heritage sites, it is important that everyone develops his or her own personal definition of what the concept heritage encompasses and be able to share it with a broad spectrum of people. So in simple terms it can be defined as: 'whatever each of us individually or collectively wishes to preserve and pass on to the next generation'.

If we want to preserve something (whether it is natural, built, living or intangible) then it is our heritage. This of course varies quite a bit, depending on the person or the group of people expressing their interests and also in relation to its ownership and its type. It is important to note the intricate relation between different values given to the same asset by different parties. This can be demonstrated by exploring a three-dimensional analysis - the dimension of the subject, the characteristics of heritage and its values – where the dimension of the subject includes the people, family, region, community and country; characteristics of heritage includes natural, cultural - living or tangible; and its values are the ways in which a place is important.

This dimensional analysis of heritage can help us better understand the differing values of heritage and why we need to identify and protect a heritage place. Thus the higher the value each of the subjects (e.g. individual, family, country) place on the property whether it be natural, cultural or intangible, the higher the need to preserve it as heritage. (UNITAR 2005). Places that are important for telling natural, historic and traditional stories are considered as having ‘heritage values’. In reality they often have a combination of different natural, historic and traditional heritage values. Understanding this complex heritage place means recognising all these different elements and acknowledging the importance of all its values

### **What is value?**

Heritage value is generally defined as 'The positive characteristics attributed to heritage places and objects by legislations, governing authorities and other stakeholders' (UNESCO 2005). These characteristics are what make a site significant and they are often the reason why society and authorities are interested in a specific cultural site or object. In general, people expect benefits from the value they attribute to the resources (UNESCO 2004b).

Types of values include: social and cultural; commemorative – what it is we intend to commemorate, treasure of the Pacific, natural resources; environmental – river, fauna and flora, unique land form; historical – events and people; symbolic or religious; aesthetic – site and setting – scenery, natural beauty, clean air, silence and solitude; economic – new job opportunities; and scientific and educational – information about our people and visitors

### **Why the heritage place is important**

It is essential to understand the important elements of a place – its heritage values. People need to be clear about what the values of a place are and how important or significant they are so that what makes a place important can be protected (UNESCO 2004c). This is the purpose of the Convention for Samoa, the reason for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (or Ministry) to be actively involved and the aim of our conservation efforts.

### **Significant role of heritage in sustainable development**

The physical, human-made components of the heritage are not only inextricably linked to but also arise from the natural geography and environmental setting of their respective cultures and serve as the setting for more intangible expressions of cultural traditions. Some experts in the area of heritage emphasized the inter-relatedness of practices for the conservation of the physical heritage sites, the intangible heritage and cultural landscapes. It is important to preserve heritage values represented in heritage sites as fundamental to the preservation of cultural identities. And the importance of local cultural resources as basic to sustained and equitable social and economic development (Australian Heritage Commission 2004).

Ideally with heritage conservation the National Heritage Coordinating Committee and the Ministry try to manage three things: 1) Assets (can be forests, traditions, buildings, ruins, wetlands, etc.); 2) People (who work for us or those who visit the sites); and 3) Values (what differentiates us from managers of airports or public transports). Values are at the core of our conservation strategies. That is why we do what we do.

How do we know what sites have heritage value, what is historical truthful, what is significant, and what is worth preserving? That is the question for each and everyone of us to think about.

Samoa can benefit from the Convention through:

- Use of world heritage to help counter problems associated with the exploitation of forest resources by serving as refuge for plants and animals, and source of inspiration of people
- Use of world heritage to demonstrate how we can manage areas to preserve universal biological value of Protected Areas while still meeting the livelihood needs of people
- Recognising that world heritage aims to protect cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value but underscore that the whole range of values (whether local values, intangible spiritual values and traditional management systems) should be understood, respected and taken into account in identification and management of heritage properties.
- Universal and local values are part of a continuum and should not be separated. It is not viable to identify universal values without acknowledging and maintaining the values of a place to the local people.
- Heritage properties are dynamic entities where cultural and social values evolve. They should not be frozen in time for purposes of conservation. Indeed, the continuity between the past and future should be integrated in management systems accommodating possibility for sustainable change and ensuring evolution of the local values of the place is not impaired.
- All stakeholders should be made aware of, consulted and involved in the interpretation and assessment of its heritage sites and values in the tentative list/nomination process and fully understand all possible implications benefits costs and consequences of world heritage to their heritage and resources.
- Efforts be made to maintain social structures and traditional skills that are vital for safeguarding social and economic developments; and
- Preservation of our national heritage need for effective governance, application of principles within appropriate and sustainable capacity and good understanding of heritage values (UNITAR 2005, IUCN 2003).

### **What are some of the challenges to our heritage conservations efforts?**

Our heritage sites are threatened from a variety of forces linked to population growth, environmental degradation, urban redevelopment, industrialization and the globalization of traditional socio-cultural fabric. It can also be recognized that tourism and the process of presentation for tourism purposes can introduce subtle threats. Absence of clear definitions of what constitutes heritage, lack of regulatory controls, inadequate financing and incentives can compromise heritage conservation efforts in Samoa. These issues can be of the greatest danger to longer-term safeguarding of heritage sites in the Samoa, which is inadequate public understanding of the need to conserve the heritage and inadequate localization of stewardship responsibility over heritage resources.

These and others can threaten the survival of heritage and endanger its truthful transmission to future generations. There is a need to establish guidelines to assist our leaders and planners in the protection and management of the heritage and to establish conservation practices to guide the conservation, restoration and adaptive reuse of heritage properties. Conservation of the heritage should and always will be a negotiated solution reconciling the differing values of the various stakeholders, and underscored that this 'negotiated state of mind' is a value inherent in our cultural processes (UNESCO 2004b).

### **Is Samoa ready for the World Heritage List?**

There is a general notion everybody wants to have a world heritage site and at some point around the world there was a mad rush to inscribe. The inscription would mean it will immediately elevate a local or national site to international status and recognition. Thus it brands the site as one of the selected few that compromise exhibit universal value.

Naturally, every country wants to inscribe sites on the List. It is a matter of national pride and international recognition but it should not be seen as a beauty contest there is substance in the purpose of the Convention. Of course the Convention brings benefits in terms of additional funding and tourism but it should also generate reflection and discussions on universal values and on the fundamental reasons for protecting and safeguarding precious heritage for future generations.

Samoa needs to understand those values in order to afford appropriate protection and management carefully. Although inscription increases tourism and improves opportunities for income generation, it also opens the site to exploitation and misuse. Therefore safeguarding the property or sites must be recognized as the underlying purpose of inscription. Despite the attractive benefits and prestige that inscription brings, heritage sites must be carefully protected to ensure that its heritage values will not disappear (UNESCO 2004c).

Preparing for the tentative list should ideally combine efforts among local and national authorities, as well as the communities. It is essential that all stakeholders etc agree upon the same set of heritage values to provide the framework for a unified site management plan that they implement in partnership.

Although it may appear that the Ministry and the communities carry out the major part of conservation efforts and heritage sites, strong national implications exist. The Convention is an international instrument ratified by state parties. Commitment is on a national level. The Convention requires each state party to provide full socio-economic and technical support to heritage sites within its borders. The process begins with an agreement on heritage values followed by site identification commitment to abide by world heritage inscription responsibilities and the assurance of a management plan.

While heritage awareness has improved in recent years most people are unaware of heritage site maybe some do not care Thus the world heritage mechanism works to the advantage of conserving our natural resources when all national, local, and community stakeholders fully understand the responsibility for site preservation in principally in their hands. Whether or not to inscribe a site on the List is indeed a national choice for all of us. Work is currently in process for the preparation of Samoa's tentative list and in order to be inscribed on the List, Samoa must at least satisfy one of the 10 criteria of outstanding universal value (UNESCO 2005):

1. Represent masterpiece of human genius

2. Exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on development in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town planning or landscape design.
3. Bear unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared
4. Be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates significant stages in human history
5. Be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement or land-use which is representative of a culture, especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change
6. Be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance
7. Be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of land forms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features or
8. Be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial , fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals or
9. Contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance
10. Contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation

So how do we know what sites have heritage value, what is historical truthful, what is significant, and what is worth preserving?

Heritage is about People as well as Place

Heritage is Values of people, by the people and for the people

Heritage is about what we wish to preserve and pass on to the next generation

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