

Heritage Resources as vehicles for Africa's Rural Economic Development

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Abstract

A human being is in the main defined in terms of his/her history and heritage. Heritage is generally perceived and conceived as that which human beings inherit from creation and the ancestors and transmitted from generation to generation. It manifests itself in tangible and intangible forms. In contemporary modern economies, it is also considered as an engine of economic development. Hence the increasing debates around the concept of "heritage economy". This is an evolving concept based on heritage assets generating economic growth and development. If it is well managed and resourced it can foster income generation, job creation, export earnings while promoting nation building, social cohesion, reconciliation, cultural diversity and human development. In this paper we will argue that the interface between indigenous knowledge systems, heritage, culture, creativity, innovation and technology has the potential to create jobs, wealth, cultural identity, self-esteem and pecuniary earnings. These are the necessary ingredients for creating a conducive environment for social stability and economic development, especially in forlorn rural areas. This though, will only be achieved if there is a political will, good governance, and most importantly, enabling legislation, clear policies, and well defined and articulated programmes targeting each heritage sector best suited to a specific area, rather than the entire heritage industry. Equally, the realisation of an African Renaissance is only feasible if it is anchored in the revitalisation and appreciation of the African history, indigenous languages, and heritage buttressed by contemporary information and communication technology. In the same vein, we must guard against the exploitation and vulgarisation of African heritage and culture for commercial ends. Appropriate legislation, policies and procedures informed by best practices will be recommended.

Key words: Heritage, Culture, Transformation, ICT, Knowledge, Economy, Development, Innovation, Technology, Gender.

1. Reimagining Cultural Heritage

The paper is in the main concerned with tangible and intangible the real of cultural heritage beliefs, institutions, cultural and symbolic systems in a period of great and multiple economic and social changes. The cultural landscapes we are concerned with also include historic sites, mounds, shrines, rivers and mountains, as mediators of self-knowledge. We conscious want to limit ourselves in this paper to rural to the underdeveloped rural areas because often times new initiatives and interventions tend to bypass them and benefit the already better endowed and developed cities and townships. Similarly, culture and heritage as we will argue, are essential to the realization of the values underpinning our Constitution, namely, reconciliation, social cohesion, and nation building. These are the necessary but not sufficient conditions for social stability and economic growth. Thus, re-imagining cultural heritage in contemporary societies can lead to the establishment of flourishing heritage industries that create jobs and knowledge centres, knowledge villages. These knowledge systems, scientific, modern, or indigenous should be allowed to co-exist and complement each other in the quest for human fulfilment. Importantly, the transformed cultural heritage sectors should be undergird by Ubuntu/Botho values and some of the principles that inform the Bill of Rights and Bathopele principles.

As with many concepts, heritage is not susceptible to one conclusive definition. However, for the purpose of this paper we align ourselves with the one adopted by UNESCO. Heritages are generally known as that which human being inherits and transmit from generation to generation. Heritage manifests itself through tangible (physical/visible objects) and intangible (non-physical/invisible forms) (Cros, 2002, p7). Living heritage is also known as intangible cultural heritage. A definition of heritage adopted by UNESCO in 2001 reads as follows: “people’s learned processes along with the knowledge, skills and creativity, and skills that inform and are developed by them, the products they create, and the resources, spaces and other aspects of social and natural context necessary to their sustainability, these processes provide living communities with a sense of continuity with previous generations and are important to cultural identity, as well as to the safeguarding of cultural diversity and creativity”.

The transformation and strategic re-envisioning of heritage management preservation, development and protection can contribute to the new growth path as envisage in the National Development Plan 2030 (NDP). The Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) recognised in their document entitled: Mzansi’s Golden Economy: Contribution of the Arts, Culture and Heritage Sector to the New Growth Path, “that the arts, culture and heritage practitioners are creative and innovative and that they are involved in a myriad of successful initiatives which contribute immensely to economic and social development”. (2013, p27). Furthermore, the

DAC strategy recognises the role all spheres of government should play in creating an enabling environment and support the sector to perform optimally. For example, eco-tourism is thriving, especially areas where there is a deliberate effort to create the infrastructure, human, physical and financial. (NDP 2010, p26).

As per the Mzansi's Golden Economy strategy some of the strongly recommended interventions to develop the creative and cultural industries focus on:

I. General continuity and introduction of new initiatives, as far as possible recognising, building on, expanding and scaling-up significantly existing initiatives.

II. Identification and development of talent through ensuring appropriate skills development to develop excellence in the arts, culture and heritage sector.

III. Facilitating expansion and growth of existing initiatives in the culture and creative industries to create large scale and high impact programmes, maximizing the growth and employment potential of the sector.

IV. Expansion and co-ordination of supply and demand in the sector.

V. Enhancement of existing production and creation of new business opportunities to match demand.

VI. Monitoring and evaluation to guide investment and co-ordination of current and future resources for the sector. (DAC, 2013, p.7).

2. Indigenous Communities as sites of knowledge

This article is grounded on the idea that indigenous knowledge resources of the rural areas of the former homelands need to be central in the job creation and growth-related activities in the country. No longer should this vital knowledge resource be analysed purely from the philosophical, cultural, historical and other abstract perspectives (Habermas, 1989; New Partnership for Africa's Development, NEPAD, 2001). This resource needs to be linked to practical development issues from both multi-disciplinary and sectoral perspectives. The knowledge systems need to serve simultaneously as tools for social integration, cultural development, poverty alleviation, environmental conservation and long term positive sustainable social transformation as advanced by philosophers and social critics such as Geertz, (1983). This integrated approach has the prospect of reducing the dualistic and unbalanced /skewed nature of the structure of development in South Africa and provide the opportunities and basis for future prosperity (Teffo, 2012).

The rural indigenous knowledge resources of Africa are made up of material, spiritual, cultural and psychological elements (Teffo, 2011). These resources represent local skills and practices which have evolved over centuries to relate to the problems, challenges, philosophies, theories, beliefs and experiences of particular rural communities in relation to their natural environment. They therefore represent the rural communities' own texts or

paradigms, ways of knowing, doing things, and also ways of interpreting their natural and human resources cutting across astronomical, spiritual, economic, peace and security issues, technological, natural environmental systems exploitation, law, medical issues, food production, entertainment and other aspects of life (Mascarenhas, 1999; South African Law Commission, 2003). The chief issue about the knowledge resources is thus about their holism – how things tend to hang together to give meaning, order and the “good life” to the rural communities concerned (Hountondji, 1997).

It needs to be recognized however that the rural African knowledge resources can be distorted and contradictory as a result of people’s obsession with them and therefore their unwillingness or inability to transform them in positive ways to enable the system to better serve their needs. Similarly, there are commercial parasites which take information and skills from the local communities and patent them as their own. Hence, the need for an international Intellectual Property Regime to monitor the activities of such organizations and businesses enterprises. (Yirenkyi-Boateng and Teffo, 2014, p13). In addition, the knowledge resources are not context-free in terms of political influences. The relations between the resources, politics and the development process can take a number of forms. Firstly, knowledge resources which develop under conditions of political and other forms of domination, secondly, those which develop under democratic environments thus allowing for mutual understanding among the various knowledge systems and, thirdly, knowledge resources which can be made to develop as a tool for emancipation to address the existing constraints, problems, manipulations and other forms of contradictions in the development process (Habermas, 1989). This three-fold classification system is an important issue that needs to take a central position on the discourses on the political economy of development and underdevelopment of rural Africa.

The economic potentials in the knowledge resources of South Africa are yet to be realized as has been documented in a number of official South African government documents (ANC, 1996: 70). These knowledge resources have produced intangible and tangible objects which include the cultural industries, historic places, written and oral literature, the visual arts, the monuments and museums, the national and local symbols, the heritage sites created by natural processes such as scenic areas, rare plants and wild life, the wetlands, and the endangered and threatened species. These objects represent heritage resources which tend to be unique and irreplaceable thus placing their preservation in the hands of the current generation. The current generation thus has to safeguard these resources of South Africa to ensure their integration into the economic activities in the country. Failure to open up full economic opportunities of participation to the heritage resources would imply putting a limitation on their full potential contribution to the GDP of South Africa. Creating economic space for the

heritage resources would thus constitute an important element of democratization, economic decentralization, empowerment and sustainable growth. Among the enabling environments which could be created for the economic empowerment of the heritage resources of South Africa, mention can be made of the infrastructure, social services and other facilities such as water and electricity supplies, transport and communication systems, financial institutions such as rural banking systems, heritage-based tourism businesses, marketing facilities for the heritage products, heritage-based entrepreneurship training programmes, advertising campaigns, and heritage education programmes among others.

Opening up the heritage resources in the rural communities in particular to advance their full economic potential could begin to usher in a process of economic renaissance in South Africa. The employment, incomes and skills to be generated from the heritage investments could set up economic chain reactions and multiplier effects to help to bridge the existing gap between the modern, western largely urban-based economic activities and the largely indigenous, rural-based subsistence economies.

3. Heritage Sites as Catalysts for Development

The National Development Plan 2030 provides South African with developmental trajectory for the next twenty years. It offers various interventions, social, economic and political that could help realise a better life for all. Of relevance in this paper is the section of Arts, Culture, Economy and Society “Arts and Culture open powerful spaces for debate about where a society finds itself and where it is going”. Promoted effectively, the creative and cultural industries can contribute substantially to small business development, job creation, urban development and renewal. (NDP-2030, p.26). Emphasis is in the main on the role heritage couple with indigenous knowledge systems can play in economic growth social development and forging a national identity. In this connection Pugliese and Da Sacco (2007), argue that cultural heritage indeed ‘constitutes an essential engine for economic development’, social transformation and cohesion. The challenge though lies in changing people’s mindset and perceptions. Educative programmes and initiatives are imperative if heritage appreciation and patronization are not to be perceived as purviews for white people and foreigners in particular, especially of European descent. The economic values of such sites, regardless of where they are located should be articulated and accentuated. Comparative studies and cultural exchange programmes would help, especially collaboration with established tourist attractions like the Great Wall of China, Victoria Falls in Zambia, Taj Mahal Temple in India and Table Mountain in South Africa.

It took great intellectual deployment and capital investment to turn some of these hitherto unknown sites into some of the evergreen wonders of the world. Fact is that when the Dutch expeditions arrived in the Cape Province in 1652 Table Mountain was an ordinary

mountain at the confluence of the Indian the Atlantic Oceans. But with its majestic beauty, entrepreneurs turned into a must see tourist spot in Africa, and most importantly, a great money spinner in terms of ecotourism. What is urgently required therefore is paradigm shift that would lead to the recognition and appreciation of what heritage and cultural industries can contribute to the gross domestic product. A detour into the following documents could lead to greater appreciation of the issues being canvassed in this paper: The Cultural Industries Growth Strategy, produced by the development of Arts and Culture (DAC) in 1998, and the Nation Heritage Cultural Tourism Strategy, produced by the Department of Tourism in 2012.

In post-apartheid South Africa new heritage sites connected to the liberation struggle have been declared. It is invaluable that this has happened, as it captures and symbolises part of our history. In this regard we can mention Freedom Park in Pretoria, Robben Island Museum in Cape Town, Steve Biko Museum in King Williams Town, Nelson Mandela Museum in Mthata and Makapan's Caves in Mokopane, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site, memorialising the role the Northern Ndebele's played during the liberation wars under Kgosi Kekana. Many people, especially women and children who took refuge in these Caves were killed and some suffocated as a result of smoke inhalation.

Makapan's Caves heritage site was developed through the generous financial assistance of the National Lottery, the National Department of Arts and Culture, and the Limpopo provincial government. This took place around 2000, and as a result a newly built settlement of about 50 low income houses was established; an old and dilapidated mud school was demolished, and a new one with modern facilities and amenities was built, a crèche and a pre-school were erected. Drawing water for livestock and people from pits and wells was replaced by running water and ablution facilities. These opportunities and facilities became accessible to and in all households. A skills training center was established to train locals in order to enable them to work in their newly revamped locality, with all the promises and new ventures it presented. Road infrastructure was improved, and the main one leading to the caves was semi-tarred, and a kiosk was also built. Several people got permanent and temporary occasional jobs. The volume of visitors/patrons has increased over the years. In general the people of ga-Washa (local name) are better off since the heritage site was declared about 14 years ago.

Evidence attests to the fact that people located in the vicinity of the new declared heritage sites post 1994 have witnessed their fortunes swirl. They experienced increased benefits through domestic tourism, including new economic initiatives with attendant job opportunities. Generally, these developments led to improved social conditions, enhanced self-esteem, distinct sense of purpose, social cohesion, and an appreciation of one's history

buttressed by local, regional and national identities. Most importantly, people in these areas became less prone to moving to the cities looking for job opportunities as they could earn and lead a meaningful existence in their own environments. Effectively, migration to the cities became less of an option as malls and other facilities were in the past a preserve of the cities became available to them at reduced costs in terms of money and travelling time. In fact in some instances people began to migrate homeward in search of greener pastures. This trend became more evident post 1994, or after the advent of democracy.

Heritage sites have inherent cultural value, and their sustainability is reliant on the protection, preservation, promotion, and indeed the memories of the elders; leaders and healers who are the custodians, reservoirs and mediators of cultures and indigenous knowledge systems. These are the living treasures whose contributions should be acknowledged, and their intellectual property protected. Similarly, therefore, the problem of intellectual property in relation to indigenous knowledge systems must be explored, and serious consideration be given to compensate owners of such knowledge and sites. (Moran, 1999). With trust and rapport established between researchers, investors and local IKS knowledge holders, it could be argued that any initiative or project is very likely to succeed. Key to this success is mutual trust, respect and co-ownership of the projects. The intellectual property regime can help regulate relations between parties, but what is paramount and above all a necessary condition to success is mutual trust and respect. History is replete with sad stories of leaders and healers whose knowledge systems were appropriated by those they trusted without reward and acknowledgement. The world has changed a lot since then and beneficence, knowledge exchange, and equitable profit sharing should be some of the values and principles informing any initiative in rural communities.

4. Gender and Heritage

One of the popular slogans at the height of the struggle for liberation in South Africa was: you educate a woman, you educate a nation. It takes a village to raise a child, so said the sage. Through various schemes such as self-help, communitarianism, voluntarism, social clubs (stokvels), Ujamaa, as espoused by Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, and cooperatives, women sought always to improve and or contend with their lot, by themselves and for themselves. Accordingly, therefore women should be empowered to meaningfully, and as equal partners, participate and contribute towards the heritage industries development resources should be developed help them develop their capacities and to increase their productivity. This could be achieved through tailor made or targeted training programmes, mentoring, and resources provisioning.

The Commission for Gender Equality (section 187 of the constitution of South Africa) is mandated to promote respect for gender equality and the protection, development and

attainment of gender equality. Tradition and culture often times are invoked at the expense of less privileged groups like women, children and people living with disabilities. It is therefore imperative that alternative way and means are developed to challenge existing customary laws of inheritance, primogeniture, and land tenure. Some of these archaic practices might not pass the constitutional muster. There are though, commendable programmes that focus on building strong female leaders and people living with disabilities by involving them in innovative development initiatives across the economic and social strata of the communities. Once more, these interventions and initiatives should be conceptualised and implemented together with prospective beneficiaries. This is consistent with the motto of the people living with disabilities that: nothing about us without us.

The argument being canvassed here is that, women empowered with appropriate knowledge, skills and technologies can immensely contribute to the flourishing of the heritage sectors' economy, and also participate in heritage protection, preservation, development and promotion. All that is required is an enabling environment for them to realise their potentials and actualise themselves, especially in areas of cultural heritage and fine arts. Mcuba wrote in this regards that, "specifically handmade artefacts by skilled Ndebele women is an unstoppable business that has improved tourism industry and great source of income sustaining many households". (2014, p.79). Current reality attests to the fact many women are joining the hospitality industry and become small and medium entrepreneurs in the heritage and tourism sectors. An added advantage is that since these entrepreneurs are located in the communities, they in turn have vested interests in protecting and preserving the heritage assets in their localities. They become the immediate custodians of these amenities. In the same vein, the sites begin to be perceived in certain ways rather than mere sources of income. They tell a people's history and help influence and shape the present and the future.

5. Technology and Innovation

Rural communities often times are the least developed and empowered. Thus, any initiative aimed at revitalizing them should take cognizance of the dynamics, benefits, and challenges of the information age and the knowledge economy. A case is made that heritage industries and institutions, if they were to be successful and competitive, will have to embrace information and communication technology.

Rural communities operate in the main on the basis of consensus and collective memories. Indeed this methodology of knowledge acquisition, transmission, preservation and application sustained and still do, but with less effect in contemporary societies. The world has evolved a lot and is subject to a knowledge overflow. Hence the need to manage knowledge in all its manifestations, and this goes beyond the capturing of data on computers and other modern gadgets. Some scholars refer to knowledge management as the art and

science of managing a process, to transform and enhance, preserve and develop, collectively and individually into rational knowledge needed for logically defensible decisions and actions.(Velthuisen:2007:p5).

Management of knowledge enables society to seek solutions enabled by data stored in the aforesaid gadgets, tools and equipment and legislation. Similarly, with data hand, people are able to integrate the known with the unknown in the quest for innovation and transformation. In this context therefore, rural communities are compelled to be learning communities, lifelong learning communities nurtured by ICT, learning institutions and networks operating in the heritage sectors and committed to rural development. Velthuisen argues. “the management of knowledge is about the activation of intervention, meaning that the normative foundations of African societies(including values, beliefs, axioms and ideologies) could be renewed by interventions that can promote the revival of African Societies”.(214,p64).

With the help of ICT new knowledge can be developed, shared, and expanded through interconnected and interdependent, disciplinary and trans-disciplinary networks. Through these networks trans-borders collaborations that allow for the sharing of experience, knowledge and still become naturally beneficial and often times accelerate productivity and innovation. The crosspollination ideas can also lead to “knowledge villages”, or learning centres where various skills and technologies are harnessed and deployed for the benefit, in the main, the rural poor. Emphasis here is on indigenous knowledge systems and technologies.

As all spheres of life are profoundly impacted by the information and communication technologies, so is the heritage sector. ICT is an integral part as well as a driving force of major contemporary discoveries, innovations and productivity. We observe with appreciation heritage workers as heritage knowledge technologists ready to offer easily accessible museum and library specific solutions. With the use of technologies we also noticed that the workers can expand their presence through virtual knowledge centres for information sharing. Through these centres, they could educate people about intellectual property rights. They could also offset the skills deficit through training and mentoring.

Most heritage institutions, especially in the rural areas lack basic technology infrastructure and the attendant operational management and technical skills. If properly used, technology can enhance access to collections of artefacts, museums, heritage landscapes, and database. Our argument in this regard is that technologies can enhance productivity and access while at the same time it bridges the gap in service provision in the heritage sector, especially in rural communities. Therefore, investment in ICT is a necessary condition for rural document, economic vibrancy and cultural renaissance. (Mancotywa. 2014:p64).

ICT will come in handy if properly deployed at tribal offices for it would help traditional leaders and administrators in record keeping, management and dissemination of data, and the coding of indigenous knowledge, values, customs and practices, flora and fauna. It can be used to create a repository for where administrative precepts, rules and procedures, customs and practices informed by African administrative law and jurisprudence. (Ashtok, 2011).

6. Recommendations

The cost of access to heritage sites can be out of reach for the indigent local people. It is therefore recommended that a differentiated model should be considered. Often times heritage sites are positioned and marketed as if they are solely for foreigners or non-South Africans. Enhance access to all heritage resources by community based heritage institutions. Limited access to funding for heritage projects tend to stifle their development. Make funding available even to all groups including the vulnerable groups. Motivate and encourage local schools to visit occasionally at no cost, especially when it is not peak period.

Promote the use of indigenous languages in heritage and knowledge institutions. There is limited interest and uneven access to information owing to language barriers. Enforce language policy as per section 185 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa which provides: Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities. In particular this Commission seeks to promote respect for the rights of cultural and linguistic communities. Therefore, regional local indigenous languages should be privileged as media of communication, print and electronic.

Transform popular attitudes, prejudices, and stereotypes towards heritage institutions such as geographical names, national symbols and heraldry. Inculcate appreciation of the importance of heritage. Encourage cultural exchange programmes among different cultural groups and races. This helps broaden horizons through interfaces, life performances, and sharing of experiences. Expose people to the various cultures and diverse heritage existing within their reach.

Commit to building and resource mobilisation for digital projects in the heritage sector. There is need for a framework on capacity building and local resource mobilisation for national heritage digital projects. Develop mechanisms to ensure long-term sustainability of digitized resources as well as the master digital materials.

Complementarity and coexistence between cultures and various language groups should be nurtured. The government, private sector, civil society and knowledge institutions should promote creative ways of interfacing the modern with the traditional. Facilitate partnerships between knowledge institutions, public, private and civil society in the heritage sector. Play advocacy role by raising public awareness strategies to promote the quadruple helix partnership between knowledge institutions, public, private and civil society. (DAC, 2014).

Promote practical means towards nation building and building a society that upholds and embodies the principles and values of an inclusive, non-racial, socially cohesive and just society. Promote nation building at the level of daily programmes for the citizens and not only at national holiday and events. Deploy an inclusive language that would foster nationhood. Emphasise what would make people bond rather than negatives of yester-years. The reason why in my considered opinion certain national events are not patronised by all the racial groups in South Africa is because the politicians at these rallies are often triumphalist, condemnatory and condescending to other groups and or political parties. Develop mechanisms for nation building and social cohesion that make the mechanisms as part of the daily routines of the citizens.

Promote the use of information communication technologies to provide an increasingly more effective and worthwhile use and access to our cultural heritage knowledge resources. All traditional leaders and office administrators be given ICT training and attendant infrastructure and skills support. Information technology has been used to divide and privilege those who can afford them and leads to limited access and use of the heritage resources by the under-privileged. Provide mechanisms to provide access to information technology to under-privileged and poor rural communities. Provide the people in the heritage sector with the necessary software to manage their enterprises and routine activities. (This section has drawn some of its recommendations from the Heritage Transformation Charter of South Africa, 2014).

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