



The 15th International Conference of National Trusts

“Our heritage, our future”

30 September – 4 October 2013, Entebbe, Uganda

Summary Report, October 2013



The Cross-Cultural
Foundation of Uganda

The 15th International Conference of National Trusts

Almost 150 representatives from National Trusts and similar organisations representing 28 nationalities and several international institutions from across the globe, came together to participate in the 15th International Conference of National Trusts (15th ICNT). It was especially gratifying to receive guests from very distant lands (including Fiji, Australia, Taiwan, Indonesia, St. Lucia and many others) and from new INTO members (Trinidad and Tobago, and, hopefully soon, South Africa and the Seychelles).

Held in Entebbe, Uganda from 30th September to 4th October, this was the first time that the National Trusts of the world met in Africa to deliberate on a conference theme that reflected a desire to further open the heritage movement to the global south, to the importance of protecting and promoting our intangible heritage and to examining the role of heritage in our collective development agenda.

What focus?

Under the overall theme, ‘Heritage, Sustainable Development and Rights’, delegates explored three sub-themes and a range of key questions from both ‘Southern’ and ‘Northern’ perspectives:

- Heritage and Sustainable Development: How can one conciliate conservation and development needs, as well as cultural values? How can cultural tourism, indigenous knowledge and sustainable development go hand-in-hand?
- Safeguarding our heritage: If heritage is under increasing man-made and natural threat, what is the role for youth and for heritage education? What legislation exists and how effective is it? How can various forms of cultural expression be better protected, including for indigenous communities and minority groups?
- Unlocking our diverse potential: What can we learn from the experience of National Trusts in protecting heritage in different contexts? What about alternative organisational forms? How could international networking for heritage development be more effective? What new experiences and ideas exist for financing, managing and promoting heritage development?

A different conference format

In addition to carefully selected plenary speakers and 42 parallel workshop sessions presenters, the format of the week’s programme had been designed to help delegates further reflect on the conference theme and appreciate various efforts made in Uganda to promote

local heritage. It was also meant to be an invitation by Africa as a whole, hence the sample of performing arts from more than one country....

Four 'learning journeys' (rather than tourism trips) were thus on offer (practically all delegates took part) to reflect different local experiences. For 1 ½ days, delegates either:

- Spent time at a forest site where herbalists and spiritual healers undergo training and visited barkcloth makers
- Or learnt about the ancestral role of grandmothers to care for children in the Jinja region; about the art of the *bigwala* - a traditional trumpet - and toured historical Jinja town
- Or visited a community museum on the way to a National Park where the cultural values of neighbouring communities are being integrated in its management
- Or acquainted themselves with different aspects of the Buganda Kingdom, its ancestral tombs and their on-going reconstruction; the Parliament and the King's Palace Grounds and visited the Entebbe botanical gardens.

Hopefully, delegates took a piece of Uganda home! Sessions with the youth, launching the first annual Uganda Heritage Prizes and holding a cultural exhibition were all also meant to reinforce the message that heritage promotion, even in a country such as Uganda, can take many rewarding – even inspiring – forms.

This made the conference a little longer than previous editions (4 full days), but many delegates remarked on the positive aspects of such a process and, indeed, their attendance was consistent right up to the closing sessions. But did the conference meet its objectives?

Making new connections between people and organisations

ICNTs aim at creating spaces where the members of INTO can exchange experiences, forge partnerships and establish bodies that preserve and promote cultural heritage.

Sharing and learning was helped by the diverse background of the delegates, coming from various cultural and socio-economic contexts, but also from varied professional backgrounds (experts in heritage, history, literature, conservation and archaeology, and in other fields related to cultural and natural heritage). They not only shared formal and informal spaces, but also delivered the 42 workshop papers and made several plenary presentations to tell about their achievements, experiences and lessons in response to the conference theme.

Papers were presented on such diverse topics as indigenous knowledge for development; urbanisation and heritage preservation; social identity, legislation and heritage appreciation; the role of the youth in heritage promotion; protecting heritage under threat; promoting cultural expression; and cultural diversity and rights.

This was therefore an opportunity to strengthen the ties between National Trusts and 'heritage activists' across the world - North, South, East and West; to explore creative initiatives for heritage development, to realise that all of us have something to learn and something to share.

Making new conceptual connections

The conference had also set out to make new conceptual connections between heritage promotion and conservation, and concerns of sustainable development. This was a central issue for Ugandans, and many Africans and Asians especially.

New perspectives were explored in the course of the week. Ways were sought to think in terms of heritage *for* development, to share a vision where heritage *drives* development and a proposal to add a Millennium Development Goal, that of heritage promotion and protection.

Throughout the week too, the indissoluble linkages between tangible and intangible heritage were highlighted and the artificiality of intangible vs. tangible; built vs. natural, were challenged. Our discussions and experiences, including the Learning Journeys, helped demystify intangible heritage and debunked the myth that the Northern hemisphere is somehow devoid of intangible cultural heritage.

Strengthening the heritage movement

The National Trust movement is undoubtedly rooted in the North and West, particularly the Commonwealth, but there is a growing and powerful conservation movement in the South and East that thinks about heritage differently and the Entebbe Conference helped redress that imbalance and INTO broaden its understanding of global heritage priorities. A feeling of togetherness and solidarity indeed marked the week, almost from the start.

It was an opportunity for INTO members in the North to understand the aspirations and challenges in promoting heritage in the South. The strong presence of heritage experts from all corners of the globe marked a recognition of the wealth, diversity of heritage in the South and of collective efforts to promote it. This presence however also challenged the less well-endowed heritage organisations, especially in Africa, to explore the creative ways through which other countries have promoted and preserved their cultural heritage. Reflection was triggered on the role and value of National Trusts and similar institutions to complement state efforts to promote and preserve cultural and natural heritage. In Uganda, civil society actors started considering the establishment of a National Trust to complement state efforts to preserve heritage.

But these efforts need to be sustained and ICNT15 also provided an opportunity for Ugandan youth to share their positive perception on the value of cultural heritage, and their efforts to take an active role as custodians and authors of this heritage.

Unity in diversity – the ‘INTO opportunity’

Although the organisations that INTO brings together are very different, common threads running through their thinking, set-ups and priorities also emerged, as well as in what inspires them and the challenges they face. This makes INTO and the National Trust movement special with its different organisational models, languages, understandings of the notion of 'heritage' or indeed 'National Trust' - all have an important role to play within the INTO family and can contribute to the debate about culture and development.

The ICNT thus enriched our appreciation of the value of cultural and natural heritage not only as a national resource but a resource of global concern; and of cultural diversity as a source of wealth, creativity, innovation but most importantly, the basis of respect and tolerance. This important engagement amongst diverse cultures fostered a greater understanding across civilizations and enhanced the recognition of our collective responsibility towards creating an environment which enables the promotion and protection of cultural rights for all.

Charting a common purpose

Many new perspectives were thus brought to the table and there was a very strong sense of common cause and purpose around capacity building for heritage conservation in parts of the world where support is less forthcoming, for whatever reason.

Delegates sought to voice their concerns about the disparity between how heritage dialogues are played out in the global North compared to the South and to integrate their hopes and ideals as National Trusts into the international policy debate through the Entebbe Declaration.

It was also a way to inspire commitment from nation states (particularly the Government of Uganda) and international institutions to invest in heritage preservation, promotion and protection for its aesthetic, cultural, historical, spiritual, natural, archaeological value through financing and legislation.

Legislation, initiative and a common voice can all make a difference

Finally, as ICNT 15 provided an opportunity to reflect on issues of people's rights to access and enjoy their culture, especially in less endowed countries, the importance of enabling legislation and underlying legal protection - both national and international – was underscored. Case studies showed the added value of international frameworks and the power of collective global action, which bodes well for INTO's future. Legislation in itself is however unlikely to make a difference unless it is accompanied by strong evidence and viable alternative courses of action to accommodate development needs.

Spirited and courageous efforts are also vital: many presentations highlighted efforts to ensure that the cultural rights of all are respected, including in conflict zones and ICNT 15 presented an opportunity to recognise and encourage six Ugandans and their families who were awarded the first Uganda Heritage Prizes and to inspire others to do likewise. The Entebbe Declaration, with its emphasis on protection and access to cultural heritage was very relevant in this respect and all signed up to it, including the Uganda Government Minister in charge of culture.

To conclude...

The ICNT15 organisers had wished to provide an opportunity for experiential learning and to enrich our collective appreciation of our global heritage, from a multiplicity of perspectives. This was evidenced throughout the week.

What also emerged was how arduous the road head will be to ensure that our cultural wealth is securely protected for future generations. In spite of many efforts, for instance, the presence of high profile Ugandan political figures was poor and additional representation from other heritage organisations – UNESCO, ICOMOS, etc. would have been welcome to further consolidate a truly global agenda.

In times like these, we need good networks more than ever. INTO, where all can come as equals, to learn, to share and to begin to understand how we might all move forward together, as was done in Entebbe, amply demonstrated how such a need can, at least in part, be addressed.