

Harnessing The Cultural Heritage of Pan Chieftdom for Sustainable Development in Plateau State

Chrysanthus Dakogol

Department Of Tourism Management Technology Plateau State Polytechnic, Barkin Ladi

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ABSTRACT

Most governments worldwide recognise that preserving cultural heritage is essential for sustainable development, as it is vital to human life. Cultural heritage appears in various forms, both tangible and intangible. This study focused on leveraging the material aspects of the Pan Chieftdom's cultural heritage to promote sustainable development in Plateau State. The literature indicates that Nigeria, particularly Plateau State, possesses a rich and diverse cultural heritage; however, challenges such as protection and conservation, as well as the lack of collaboration among public and stakeholder groups, have hindered sustainable heritage efforts. The research employed a qualitative approach, collecting primary data through semi-structured interviews in seven districts of the Pan Chieftdom, and analysed the data thematically. Findings indicated that the practice of Christianity and Islam influences the preservation of cultural traditions among current generations. Additionally, limited collaboration between traditional rulers and the government, along with the absence of a cultural museum, restricts sustainable heritage development in the area. It is therefore advised that the state government and traditional rulers in these districts launch awareness and advocacy campaigns highlighting the importance of safeguarding the Pan-cultural heritage. Such efforts can strengthen social cohesion, foster unity, and empower local communities by producing artefacts for display at Long Pan Palace's museum.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, sustainability, community, tourism development, Pan Chieftdom

INTRODUCTION

The preservation of cultural heritage is widely seen as a key factor influencing a society's development. UNESCO (2018) emphasises that it reflects a community's life, history, and identity. Preserving it helps mend fractured communities, restore their identities, and connect their past with the present and future. Traditionally, cultural heritage encompasses artefacts such as paintings, drawings, prints, mosaics, sculptures, historic monuments, buildings, and archaeological sites. However, its scope now extends to all forms of human creativity and expression, such as photographs, documents, books, manuscripts, and instruments, whether as individual items or collections (Franchi, 2019). Importantly, cultural heritage encompasses not only tangible objects but also intangible elements, such as traditions, oral histories, performing arts, social practices, traditional crafts, rituals, and the knowledge and skills passed down through generations within a community.

Various definitions of sustainable development exist, but the most widely cited is from the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report (Schaefer & Crane, 2005). It defines SD as development that fulfils current needs without jeopardising future generations' ability to meet theirs. Key aspects include preserving biodiversity and ecosystems, managing population growth, maintaining production systems, conserving evolving cultures, and encouraging people's participation (Ben-Eli, 2015; Molinoari et al., 2019). This suggests that protecting and integrating heritage into development strategies can contribute to building more resilient, cohesive, and sustainable communities. Many scholars agree that leveraging cultural heritage can enhance community identity and social cohesion, while also empowering marginalised groups by providing opportunities to recognise and celebrate their cultural practices (Horne & Duxbury, 2015; Zhou, 2019).

Nigeria boasts a rich and diverse cultural heritage shared across various ethnic groups. This includes languages, marriage customs, burial and birth rituals, traditional clothing, greetings, music, folklore, religion, as well as tangible cultural monuments, natural sites, and landscapes. Some traditions have declined due to Western cultural influence, making revitalisation and digital preservation online essential, especially while practitioners are still alive. Preserving cultural heritage can drive significant growth in the arts and tourism, attracting foreign investors and visitors, and benefiting local communities and countries. Many heritage sites attract thousands of tourists each year.

Statement of Problem

Cultural heritage embodies a society's civic pride, emphasising its vital importance. It forms the core of community identity and historical continuity, providing both tangible and intangible assets that support socio-economic growth. In pre-colonial Nigeria, religious ceremonies and rituals significantly inspired creative works, typically classified as “arts,” while objects created for functional use are considered “crafts.” These arts and crafts thrived because of their roles in both secular and religious life. A study by Nomishan, Tubi, and Gubam (2023) identified challenges in Nigeria’s cultural heritage management, including illicit artefact trafficking, the wrongful appointment of non-experts as leaders of heritage institutions, and insufficient attention from the government and stakeholders, such as community members, academics, and law enforcement, in preserving, protecting, and promoting cultural heritage for sustainable development.

Furthermore, the arrival of Christianity and Islam has changed most societies’ views of their daily activities. Cultural heritage passed down to the current generation is no longer safeguarded or preserved for future generations. Cultural heritage management in Nigeria and Plateau State is neither well-organised nor coordinated, which suggests that many cultural heritage sites could disappear in the near future.

The Pan Chieftdom in Quaana Pan L.G.A., Plateau State, boasts a rich cultural heritage, including festivals, oral histories, art forms, and landmarks. However, this cultural wealth has not been fully exploited for sustainable development, resulting in missed economic and social opportunities. The heritage faces risks from modernisation, external religious influences, and inadequate protection due to a lack of policy support for local communities and traditional leaders in heritage management.

There is no doubt that sustainable heritage development can offer pathways to preserve cultural identity while fostering community development and economic growth through tourism and cultural education. Based on this premise, this study aims to explore the cultural heritage of the Pan Chieftdom in support of sustainable development in Plateau State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to leverage the cultural heritage of the Pan chieftdom for sustainable development in Plateau State. To achieve the stated aim, the following objectives are required:

To examine the importance of cultural resources in the growth of heritage tourism.

To identify the material aspects of culture in the Pan Chieftdom of Quaana Pan L.G.A. that are facing the threat of extinction;

To state the most suitable ways to empower local communities in the production of artefacts for sustainable cultural heritage development in Plateau State.

To suggest suitable ways to protect and conserve the cultural heritage of the Pan people to promote cultural tourism in Plateau State and Nigeria at large.

Concept of Cultural Heritage

Culture includes all learned, socially transmitted customs, knowledge, material objects, and behaviours. It covers ideas, values, customs, and artefacts of a group (Schaefer, 2002). This shows that culture is a pattern of human

activities that gives meaning to societal life. It reflects established behavioural patterns, a broad and diverse concept that encompasses every aspect of an individual's life and the traits of a group or society that are inherited, preserved, and passed down through generations (Odogwu, 2010). Cultural heritage comprises creative or symbolic resources passed down from one generation to the next within each civilisation, and ultimately to humanity (Madandola & Boussaa, 2023).

According to ICOMOS, as cited in Brooks (2002), cultural heritage reflects a community's way of life and encompasses customs, practices, objects, artistic expressions, and values that are passed down through generations. Bradshaw (2011) expands this by describing cultural heritage as artefacts, places, customs, celebrations, and rituals that embody history. Both a nation's cultural heritage and its natural history hold great value and contribute to a unique identity that can be shared worldwide. Cultural heritage helps affirm our collective identity by preserving sites, old buildings, monuments, shrines, and landmarks of cultural and historical significance. It also mirrors and shapes societal values, beliefs, and aspirations, thus maintaining our integrity as a people.

Types of Cultural Heritage

The definitions of cultural heritage stated above show that it can be tangible or intangible. Tangible cultural heritage (TCH) refers to physical entities and artefacts that can be physically experienced and stored. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge that a society cannot survive or function without the construction and utilisation of objects (Ogundele, 2014). TCH can be further divided into two types:

i) Immovable tangible cultural heritage includes monuments, sculptures, buildings, caves, inscriptions, and city centres. It also covers archaeological, ethnological, historical, and underwater sites, as well as cultural landscapes, geographical locations, natural resources, wildlife, domestic birds and animals, activities, and aesthetic values.

ii) Movable tangible cultural heritage: consists of artefacts such as sculptures, paintings, collections, and objects such as audio, video, music, books, plays, and consumer and manufacturing goods. TCH provides a solid basis for historical studies and authentic memories, and is vital for validating the past and providing proof in history. Preserving TCH reveals one's identity in ways different from those of other communities (UNESCO, 2018).

Conversely, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is fragile yet essential for preserving cultural diversity in today's rapidly evolving world. ICH includes art forms, drama, performance, literature, language, martial arts, livelihoods, customs, food traditions, norms, values, philosophies, folklore, folk songs, dances, oral histories, and accumulated knowledge (Ogundele, 2000; Nnonyelu, 2009). Regardless of their form, these elements constitute part of our cultural heritage and require active efforts to protect. Intangible cultural heritage plays a crucial role in sustaining cultural diversity amid increasing globalisation.

Cultural Heritage of Nigeria

Nigeria covers an area of 923,768 km² and is the most populous country in Africa, with over 140 million people as of the 2006 census. It is a diverse nation with more than 250 ethnic groups, making it multi-ethnic and multi-lingual (Onyima, 2016). Nigeria boasts a rich and distinctive history and cultural heritage, encompassing historic sites, diverse landscapes, unique physical environments, rich biodiversity, and a wealth of traditions both past and present. Its cultural practices, indigenous knowledge, and modern technological influences also play vital roles in the lives of its communities (Ezenagu, 2020).

Cultural heritage is vital to the existence of a society, especially in Nigeria, which has the largest Black population worldwide (Anifowose, Akanbi, Odeyemi, Tafa, Zaidu, & Eleje, 2024).

Research indicates that many countries actively work to preserve their cultural heritage. Nigeria also promotes its rich cultural diversity, but many of these traditions have faded among younger generations due to Western influences, as well as the influence of Islam and Christianity. Bankole (2013) notes that Nigeria has a wealth of cultural heritage and tourism possibilities, yet much of this has not been fully utilised or promoted

internationally. Therefore, Nigeria could gain significantly by effectively harnessing and promoting its cultural assets for economic and social growth.

Plateau State is blessed with over 50 ethnic groups, a rich cultural and historic heritage, and excellent weather, which has the potential to make the State a destination for tourism and recreation if properly harnessed and promoted to the outside world (PLSG, 2023a).

To effectively utilise the State's tourism resources, previous administrations created the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Hospitality. This body is responsible for identifying, developing, preserving, documenting, and promoting the State's tourism assets, arts, and cultural heritage (PLSG, 2023b).

There is limited literature on the rich cultural heritages of Plateau State, especially regarding the Pan Chieftdom in Quaan Pan L.G.A. Based on this, the research aims to identify the material aspects of the Pan people's culture that are perceived as endangered and to revive them to support the development of cultural heritage in Plateau State.

Culture as a Tool for Sustainable Heritage Development

Efforts to safeguard cultural heritage resources are experiencing renewed global momentum. Protecting cultural heritage is crucial not only for economic reasons but also for its historical and cultural importance. While cultural heritage preservation is not yet as ingrained in Nigerian society as football, many individuals and organisations recognise these resources as vital to the country's economic growth (Ekwelem et al., 2011). Community-level preservation is possible when people understand the significance of these resources better (Keitumetse, 2013), fostering awareness of their social benefits and importance, as highlighted by Dümcke and Gnedovsky (2013). Giliberto and Labadi (2022) note that cultural heritage is being used to address global issues, including poverty among marginalised groups (economic), gender equality and women's empowerment (social), and environmental sustainability (environmental). Cultural resources valued and respected by both locals and tourists are key to sustainable tourism development (Terzić, Jovićić, & Simeunović-Bajić, 2014). Research by Ma, Wang, Dai, and Ou (2021) demonstrates that traditional culture can significantly influence residents' perspectives and behaviours, serving as a vital source of livelihood by leveraging both tangible and intangible cultural assets to attract tourism. As a growing approach, sustainable tourism enhances existing tourism planning frameworks by centring on residents (Choi & Sirakaya, 2005).

Cultural heritage tourism accounts for approximately 80% of tourism activities in Morocco (Siamak & Hall, 2020). The importance of cultural heritage for sustainable development is widely recognised and promoted by major international organisations, including United Cities and Local Governments (2010), ICOMOS (2011), UNESCO (2013), UN-HABITAT (2016), and Labadi et al. (2021). Oladeji, Oyeniran, and Ayodeji (2022) also emphasise that the government should enhance the condition of heritage resources through active conservation, sustainable oversight, and increased community involvement in cultural heritage preservation.

Study Area

Plateau State is one of Nigeria's 36 states, comprising 17 Local Government Areas. It features many natural and artificial attractions, such as notable rock formations like Riyom Rock, Shere Hills, and Wase Rock, as well as favourable weather, game reserves, and diverse ethnic communities rich in culture. Figure 1 shows that Quaan Pan L.G.A. is one of the 17 L.G.A.s located in the southwestern part of the state, with its headquarters in Baap. It covers an area of 2,478 km² and had a population of 196,926 according to the 2006 census (PLSG, 2023a). The district divisions include Doemak, Bwall, Kwalla, Dokan Kasuwa (Jagatnoeng), Kwa, Kwang, Namu (Jepjan), and Kwande (Moekwo). However, Kwande (Moekwo) is not part of the Pan Chieftdom.

The seven districts share the same dialectic identity: Mernyang, Doemak, Kwagalak, Jagatnoeng, Bwall, and Teng. The people of the Pan Chieftdom are predominantly farmers with a rich cultural heritage.



Fig.1: Map of Plateau State showing the location of the Quaana Pan L.G.A.

Source: (Adopted from Kurghur, Yanjoh & Ogbu, 2020)

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative approach given its objectives. Altinay and Paraskevas (2012) argue that research seeking to elicit respondents' statements, feelings, and perceptions is best suited to a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the seven (7) districts that made up the Pan Chiefdom in Quaana Pan L.G.A. Five respondents were purposefully selected from each of the seven districts in the Pan Chiefdom, for a total of 35. Those involved were traditional rulers, elders, political leaders, youth leaders, and community association leaders who have lived in the study area for at least 20 years and are knowledgeable and conversant with the cultural heritage of the Pan people. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent.

The questions asked during the interviews were as follows.

1. What are the key elements of the tangible cultural heritage (tangible) of the Pan people?
2. What threats are facing the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Pan people?
3. How can community participation be enhanced to promote sustainable heritage development in the Pan Chiefdom?
4. What strategies could be adopted to support heritage conservation in the Pan Chiefdom?

The questions aimed to determine participants' feelings and perceptions regarding the appropriateness of harnessing the cultural heritage of the Pan people for sustainable heritage development in Plateau State.

A thematic technique was adopted to analyse and interpret participants' responses from the semi-structured interviews.

Table 1: Distribution of interviewees in the seven districts of the Pan Chieftdom

District	Village	Respondent	No. of Respondents
Kwa	Kwa	District Head	1
	Fogol	Elder	2
	Lardang	Youth Leader	1
	Kwa Ward	Elected councillor	1
Kwang	Kwang	Elder	3
	Dardang	Elected councillor	1
	Fujing	You	1
Doemak	Doemak	Village	1
	Fuchim	Elder	2
	Kop-	Youth Leader	2
Dokan	Dokan	Elected	1
	Dungnoegoe	Elders	2
	Yilpia	Youths	2
Bwall	Bwall	Community leader	1
		Elders	2
		Youths	2
Kwalla	Kwalla	Village Head	1
	Shangfu	Elders	2
	Kwoor	youths	2
Namu (Jejan)	Namu	Elder	1
	Namu ward	Elected	1
	Langkaku	Youths	3

Field Survey (2025)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Knowledge and understanding of the cultural heritage of the Pan people

This central theme emerged regarding the knowledge of the cultural assets of the Pan people. Based on the central theme stated above, a sub-theme was identified: the present generation's low awareness of cultural heritage. Many respondents believed that, to harness the cultural heritage of the Pan Chieftdom, orientation and

advocacy are necessary precursors, which are currently lacking in most districts within the chiefdom. They stated that: “

The youth do not care to learn about their heritage, particularly those living in cities. Their parents hardly speak the local dialect to their children, and they do not appreciate their local food, dance, artefacts, traditional buildings, and so forth.”

The non-appreciation of the cultural heritage of the Pan people is further buttressed by the statement of most of the traditional rulers in the seven districts that made up the Pan Chiefdom: “The present generation of youths do not care to learn from elders about the culture of the land [...] you can see that they no longer participate in the different cult groups, such as Komteng, Mulak, Mufan... You see, there are not many of our traditional buildings in most areas. For instance, local barns, thatched houses, and items like grinding stones, large clay jars for storing water, kambil, and many other artefacts are not available due to a lack of continuity among younger people.

Knowledge and understanding of the cultural heritage of the Pan people are limited, particularly among the younger population. A youth leader stated that: “Most of the Pan people do not understand and participate in the cultural activities due to so many factors, which include Western education, rural-urban drift, and the influence of foreign religious practices. For instance, the production of our local artefacts is nearly non-existent because the younger generation does not want to learn from the older generation. This is a pathetic scenario.

Safeguarding the cultural heritage assets

This theme emerged from the identification and preservation of the cultural assets endowed by the Pan Chiefdom. For this category, a clear theme emerged: the loss of tangible and intangible assets of the Pan people's heritage, such as oral traditions, traditional dances, artefacts, and traditional architecture.

Most of the traditional rulers in the seven districts of the Pan Chiefdom responded as follows:

“The issues facing the preservation of our culture are so many that they require urgent attention by all of us. Younger people do not listen to the elders in our communities because they feel they have acquired a Western education, and they also believe that engaging in cultural activities like festivals and the rest are against their religions... like Christianity and Islam.”

Similarly, a counsellor in one of the Wards in the L.G.A. stated that:

“There is a need for elected officials and the traditional rulers in the Chiefdom to map out how to protect the heritage which was passed on by our ancestors to the present generation... to continue to strive for cultural identity. People without an identity are lost, lacking a sense of direction. It means we have to support our traditional leaders to sustain our heritage”.

Community involvement and empowerment

The central theme that emerged was the threat to the preservation of the Pan people's cultural heritage. To preserve the cultural heritage of the Pan Chiefdom, the local government area, in collaboration with the Plateau State Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Hospitality, must identify and empower individuals skilled in the production of local artefacts to support sustainable heritage development in the state.

A traditional ruler in one of the districts stated:

“There are still a few individuals in the chiefdom who have the skill to produce our local materials. They can help identify them, and what they need is advocacy and funding to produce local materials for their use. Again, the L.G.A. can organise a sponsored traditional festival in the seven districts of the chiefdom. If this is properly organised and advertised, it will go a long way in showcasing our heritage, and thereby contribute to the socio-economic development of our areas”.

Strategies for showcasing cultural heritage

The main issue arose from the decline of the Pan People's cultural assets. A new approach is essential to preserve and promote their heritage, supporting sustainable heritage tourism development in Plateau State. Participants provided numerous suggestions, resulting in the emergence of several subthemes.

Firstly, **the need to balance tradition with modern innovation to preserve and promote the culture of the Pan people**

Most community and youth leaders stated that we are in the modern era and that we need to integrate technology into preserving our land's culture. The use of digital tools and social media can help preserve and promote heritage. In today's world, cultural heritage is beyond physical material and involves local communities in the digital storytelling of their heritage.

Secondly, **Education and institutional support**

A prominent ruler in the chieftom emphasised that to harness and promote the Pan people's cultural heritage, a concerted effort is required to establish a Pan cultural heritage museum at each district head office. The various District Heads can instruct the clans in the respective villages, which are custodians of different cultural heritages, to donate their artefacts for display in a museum. This will help safeguard the different artefacts... Again, our government officials can liaise with non-governmental organisations and schools to teach and assist in documenting the various cultures in the area.

CONCLUSION

Preserving cultural heritage is important to a society or community's identity. Cultural heritage comprises the tangible and intangible assets of a particular society. The Pan Chieftom in Quaan Pan L.G.A., Plateau State, is rich in cultural heritage, which, if properly harnessed and promoted, can enhance cultural development in the state.

The literature shows that a people's cultural heritage can drive sustainable development through social inclusion, economic empowerment, and environmental sustainability. However, data on harnessing the cultural heritage of the Pan Chieftom are limited, and there is no action plan in place to package the heritage for sustainable development.

The understanding of the diverse cultural heritage of the Pan people is limited, particularly among urban residents. The issues of the Western way of life, religions (Christianity and Islam), lack of unity among the different tribes in the chieftom, lack of collaboration between the local communities and government in heritage preservation, and the non-existence of a museum in the district heads in the seven districts that made up the Pan Chieftom have currently impeded the preservation of the heritage of the Pan people.

From the foregoing challenges on harnessing the cultural heritage of the Pan Chieftom for sustainable development in Plateau State, it is therefore recommended that the traditional rulers and local government officials, in conjunction with the State Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Hospitality, should organize awareness and advocacy campaigns in the Pan Chieftom on the need to value and preserve their cultural heritage for sustainable heritage development. Again, there is a need to establish a Pan-cultural Museum in the Long Pan Palace, where district heads in the chieftom will donate artefacts for display in the central museum. The integration of digital technology in the preservation of the cultural heritage should be used.

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