



Capacity Development for Safeguarding Underwater Cultural Heritage in Africa

Name and unit of project officer	Damir Dijakovic, UNESCO Harare
Geographical scope:	Sub-Saharan Africa
Duration (in months):	36 months
Partner(s) institutions:	Centre for International Heritage Activities; Centre for African Heritage Activities
Total estimated budget inclusive of Programme Support costs	1 200 000 USD

Rationale and Background

The African coast is a very rich domain for underwater cultural heritage, whose archaeological remains are only beginning to reveal the extent of indigenous nautical technology, regional and international social contacts, and far-reaching maritime trade routes sailed for millennia. The diversity of remains found under water range from cultures up and down the African coastline to further afield: from China, points surrounding the Indian Ocean, to the Persian Gulf, Middle East and Europe. Some important steps to investigate and preserve this heritage have already been taken over the last 20 years. However, this heritage has also been subjected to extensive and serious disturbance by commercially-oriented salvage programmes. These salvage activities have not only had a very negative impact on the state of the cultural resources themselves, but have also prevented the access of legitimate scholars to these resources. Among the meritorious efforts to improve this situation, in Africa and world-wide, are the 2001 UNESCO Convention for the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage and initiatives to implement this instrument as well as to build capacities to work in a scientific way along it.

The potential of Underwater Cultural Heritage for the African continent comes to light from researches, accidental discoveries by fishermen, written records and oral tradition. In addition Africa offers a rich maritime cultural resource with diverse maritime communities, and living heritage such as boat building styles, boat building and landing sites.

An urgent need is however currently to build local capacity in the research, management and protection of underwater cultural heritage. It is also essential to increase the awareness of heritage protection ethics and to discuss with the local populations how to make underwater heritage, once protected, beneficial for the local populations. Long-term projects have to be elaborated to create national plans, competent authorities, scientific institutions and local initiatives, ranging from research over site access to museum development.

Why UNESCO?

UNESCO has engaged in fostering the protection of underwater cultural heritage since the first days of development of underwater archaeology. As response to the alarming increase in the destruction of submerged archaeological sites by treasure-hunters and industrial activities the Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage was adopted in 2001. Complementary to this, UNESCO has trained underwater archaeologists worldwide, among others in Tanzania, South Africa, Nigeria and many other African States, engaged in policy work to achieve a better protection of sites, and fought treasure-hunt and pillaging. It also provided a forum for States to allow them to adopt a common approach to heritage protection and endeavored to change the perception of the public of underwater cultural heritage to make it known and appreciated as that what it is – a unique legacy of humanity. But to indeed save the underwater cultural heritage, many more urgent actions are needed.

The present project proposal is developed on the basis of the outputs of the sub-regional Workshop on underwater cultural heritage held on 20 and 21 April 2009 in Cape Town, South Africa as well as on the report of the Regional Africa Regional Meeting on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage Abuja, held in Nigeria on 11 and 12 November 2013.

Overall Goal/Objective

Main goal:

Underwater cultural heritage along the coasts of sub-Saharan Africa shall be systematically protected and researched and included in the overall management of heritage resources, made beneficial for sustainable development of local communities.

The objectives of the project are:

- Improve the legal and operational protection of underwater cultural heritage sites in Africa;
- Build capacities in site protection, underwater cultural heritage research and management;
- Encourage the creation of specialized research and education centre(s) and competent national authorities;
- Raise heritage awareness and heritage visibility;
- Increase the awareness of underwater cultural heritage and improve its responsible public use.

Main expected results

Expected Result 1

Capacities as well as legal and operational protection of underwater cultural heritage sites in Africa improved

Expected Result 2

Specialized Research and Education Centres and national structures in underwater archaeology encouraged

Expected Result 3

Heritage awareness and heritage visibility raised and pilot project for the beneficial valorisation of underwater heritage developed

Activities and outputs relating to the achievement of the expected results

Expected result 1 - Activity 1

Capacities as well as legal and operational protection of underwater cultural heritage sites in Africa improved

The training activities will encompass theoretical and practical training. The participants completing the trainings will constitute the critical mass of African expertise at variety of levels (from technical to the decision making), thus achieving also the strengthening of institutional structures and the legislative and policy frameworks.

Output/deliverable 1.1

2 International training courses organized to strengthen professional capacities in underwater cultural heritage research and protection;

Output/deliverable 1.2

1 Regional Meeting for Africa organized and appropriate legal and institutional frameworks encouraged

Expected result 2 - Activity 2

Specialized Research and Education Centres and national structures in underwater archaeology encouraged

Output/deliverable 2.1

Assistance in the elaboration of national educational, research and management strategies

Output/deliverable 2.2

Assistance in the creation of specialized Research and Education Centres and national structures in underwater archaeology

Expected results 3 - Activity 3

Heritage awareness and heritage visibility raised and pilot project for the beneficial valorisation of underwater heritage developed

Output/deliverable 3.1

Development of pilot project on the beneficial management and valorisation of underwater heritage for local communities in a selected country

Beneficiaries and stakeholders

UNESCO will be responsible for the overall implementation and coordination of the project. The project will be implemented in close cooperation with, among others:

- National authorities responsible for culture and cultural heritage (directly such as Ministries of Culture and indirectly such as Ministry of Defence/Navy or other law enforcement agencies) as direct beneficiaries in terms of capacity development;
- Universities as key research platforms and HR development partners;
- Local communities and local businesses as the custodians of underwater cultural heritage and direct developmental beneficiaries;
- NGOs accredited to work with UNESCO 2001 Convention (such as the Centre for International Heritage Activities CIE);
- Tourism agencies and chambers of commerce.

Implementation strategy

The special value of cooperation with UNESCO is its extensive experience in the field of heritage and especially underwater cultural heritage protection. Since the 1960s, UNESCO has been actively cooperating with governments, national authorities, NGOs, scientists and police forces to improve the protection of the underwater cultural heritage. UNESCO is supported by a strong force of partnering international institutions, universities, experts, museums and the eleven leading NGOs working in the field of underwater archaeology. A UNESCO university twinning Network for Underwater Archaeology associates moreover a number of leading universities to UNESCO. The main professional associations in archaeology and underwater archaeology have also officially endorsed and supported the UNESCO 2001 Convention. UNESCO's 2001 Convention, its Operational Guidelines, as well as its Scientific and Technical Advisory Body, are expected to shape the discipline of underwater archaeology while raising public awareness about the importance of submerged heritage. Already 46 States have ratified the Convention; many more are preparing to join.

Through the work with its partners as well as UNESCO's own operational work in training, policy-making and awareness raising UNESCO has become the leading force in underwater heritage protection today. It occupies the central role in policy-setting and capacity-building in this field. It has high credibility and support in the international community. Its actions can hence be accurately focused and implemented, addressing and involving the crucial stakeholders. It has also a high ability to put actions timely into place due to its 17 Offices in sub-Saharan Africa.

Sustainability and exit strategy

The activities here foreseen will benefit selected professionals and crucial stakeholders in the research, protection and management of underwater cultural heritage. This reinforces the transmission of the scientific standards approved by the International Community and defended by UNESCO towards the safeguarding of the submerged cultural heritage. Thus the sustainability of the project will be ensured over the long term.