

Cultural heritage management (CHM) in Kilwa : towards a sustainable conservation and management of Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara world heritage sites

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Kilwa Kisiwani world Heritage site is a unique and important cultural heritage of medieval period. It was among famous and prosperous Swahili towns on the Tanzania coast with a thousand year of history. Recent research findings reveal that the site was occupied much earlier than previously thought. There are reports that early occupation of the site was from Middle Stone Age (Chani, 2005; Sassi, 2006), whereby cultural materials of all periods up to the beginning of the Swahili stone towns have been recovered archaeologically. During 13th and 14th centuries Kilwa Kisiwani was at the peak of its civilization commanding and controlling the famous gold trade. As a result, it became the most important political, economic and cultural Centre on the entire East African coast. It served as a springboard for a vibrant trade then going on between the interior of Southern Africa, on one hand, and Arabia, India and Europe, on the other. The accumulated wealth from such proceeds led to construction of magnificent stone masonry structures of which their ruins survive to date. Despite being inscribed in the UNESCO's World Heritage List (WHS) in 1981 under criteria III, and several conservation strategies been in place, the heritage had been experiencing stiff conservation, and management challenges as well as threats from both anthropogenic or human and physical agencies for several decades now. Through surface survey and direct observation methods, the study sought to solve the problem of land-use conflicts as its major objectives and suggested as well as recommending appropriate measures for a sustainable conservation and management of this WHS for posterity.