

Disseminating archaeological heritage knowledge for development in Africa with special reference to Zimbabwe

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Abstract

In recent years, culture has gained recognition as a vital element in sustainable development efforts, both globally through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in Africa through the African Union's Vision 2063. However, there remains a significant gap between the scientific community and local communities in terms of understanding and benefiting from archaeological heritage resources. This article draws on a research project conducted in north-western Zimbabwe to explore strategies for effectively engaging communities and empowering them with archaeological knowledge that is traditionally confined to academic circles. In doing so, the discussion draws attention to the need for the adoption of more inclusive approaches to the utilisation of archaeological heritage knowledge for community and national development.

Keywords

Africa, archaeological heritage, development, dissemination, local communities, Zimbabwe

Introduction

The use of archaeology and heritage as resources for economic and social development has been gaining scholarly traction (Gould and Burtenshaw, 2014; Hampton, 2005; Keitumetse et al., 2020; Ndoro, 2015). In the ongoing discourse, heritage has emerged as a crucial driver of development (Galla, 2012). Ndoro (2015) argues that heritage as a resource can provide an opportunity for job creation, infrastructure development, and education opportunities in both rural and urban areas. Furthermore, the significance of heritage is underscored by its integration into global development frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Vision 2063 of the African Union (AU). While discussions have primarily focused on the material benefits of cultural heritage, including archaeological resources (Keitumetse, 2011; Ndoro et al., 2018), there is a need to shift attention towards the non-material dimensions of development. This includes recognizing the potential of archaeological heritage knowledge in promoting cultural identity, pride, and socio-political development within communities and nations.

Despite the growing recognition of archaeological heritage and its scientific value, on one hand, many African communities, particularly those in rural areas, have their own local

understanding and various versions of their pasts and its material remains. On the other hand, archaeologists often generate knowledge that is largely confined to their respective scientific or scholarly circles. Consequently, a gap has emerged between archaeologists and communities. This knowledge gap can be attributed, in part, to the limited efforts made by archaeologists and heritage management specialists to engage with communities and effectively communicate the goals and outcomes of their research (Chirikure and Pwiti, 2008; Lane, 2011; Pikirayi, 2015, 2016). Consequently, there is a need for deliberate and well-grounded initiatives to demystify archaeology and foster meaningful dialogue between professionals and local communities.

Drawing upon our experiences from a research project in north-western Zimbabwe (see Figure 1), this article explores practical strategies for engaging communities, enhancing knowledge transfer, and bridging the gap between archaeology, archaeological heritage management, and the public. The aim of disseminating archaeological heritage knowledge is to empower communities by making archaeological knowledge accessible beyond academic gatherings and scientific publications. To bridge the gap, effective dissemination and knowledge transfer mechanisms are essential. This article discusses various approaches that can be employed, including community workshops, educational programs, and the use of accessible language and mediums to communicate archaeological findings and their relevance to the local context. By fostering dialogue and creating opportunities for participation, archaeologists can empower communities with knowledges on their heritage and recognize its potential to contribute to their development.



Figure 1. Map of north-western Zimbabwe, showing location of the project research area.

This article highlights the critical role of archaeological heritage management in empowering communities. By involving local stakeholders in decision-making processes and integrating their perspectives into conservation strategies, communities can become active participants in shaping the management and preservation of their heritage (see King, 2023; Abungu and Ndoro, 2023). This approach not only fosters a sense of ownership but also enhances the sustainable development of communities and promotes cultural pride. We emphasize the need for a shift in the way archaeological heritage knowledge is disseminated and utilized and argue that by actively engaging communities and bridging the gap between academic research and local contexts, archaeologists and heritage management specialists can offer communities knowledge that is essential for their development. It is through such inclusive approaches that the full potential of cultural heritage, particularly archaeological resources, can be harnessed to drive sustainable development and foster cultural pride within communities and nations.

Archaeological heritage and development

Development is a complex and multifaceted concept which is multidimensional and often contested, encompassing economic, social, political, and human dimensions of progress and change. As a result, development is defined and redefined in various ways by scholars and development practitioners. Some have defined it as betterment from a current situation, which may be undesirable, to a future desired one (Rist, 2008; Sachs, 1992). Generally, the idea of development encompasses “change” in various aspects of the human condition, though what constitutes “good change” is often contested.

In this article, we conceptualize development as a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their aspirations. We prefer this understanding because it sees development as a people-centred process driven by the needs and goals of the population. We also embrace the various notions and understandings of sustainable development as presented in the various papers in Labadi et al. (2020) and Taruvinga (2022). However, we acknowledge that cultures vary in how they understand and conceptualise development. In most Western cultures, development is often equated with economic growth and technological advancement (Bullard et al., 2003; King, 2023; Sinamai et al., 2024), whereas in non-Western cultures, inclusive of our research area, development is understood in a more holistic way, encompassing community well-being and cultural preservation.

In 2023, the African Union came up with a long-term policy document for development, dubbed Agenda 2063 (The Africa We Want). Among other issues, this development blueprint outlines in its Aspiration five that the continent seeks “an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics” (Ndoro, 2021). This continental vision has been domesticated in different African countries. In Zimbabwe, for example, the government came up with Vision 2030, implemented through National Development Strategy 1 (2021–2025) and National Development Strategy 2 (2026–2030), and the role of archaeology and heritage resources in development is included in these national development aspirations, although not explicitly.

However, the nexus between archaeology, archaeological heritage resources, and development (broadly defined) is often seen as double-edged (Gould and Burtenshaw, 2014; Ndoro, 2015, 2021), and the subject has been of interest in the recent past among archaeologists and related disciplines. In 2002, the Institute of Archaeology at University College London organized a conference on archaeology and economic development. The conference was organized against the backdrop of a lack of theoretical, practical, and ethical understanding of

the use of archaeological resources for the benefit of the wider public (Gould and Burtenshaw, 2014). The proceedings of this conference were published in a 2014 special issue of the *Public Archaeology* journal. In a related development, the journal *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa* published a special issue on the ethics of archaeological practice in Africa in the same year. The articles in this journal called for ethical practice by archaeologists, focusing attention on the positive and negative roles of archaeology in contemporary African societies and on the need to move towards a more dynamic, reflexive, and responsible post-colonial mode of practice (Giblin et al., 2014; Smith, 2014). This is part of the background against which our discussion is located. To situate our discussion in broader perspective, however, we seek to problematize the challenges around the role of archaeological heritage in facilitating development in the absence of research to generate knowledge that can be used to create pathways to sustainable development. One of the key questions that we grapple with is how the archaeological record can address the issue of development and what can be extracted from it for use in the contemporary world. This is because, as already noted above, for over two decades now, the role of archaeology in bringing benefits to local communities through economic development or in developing public awareness of the value of cultural heritage has been a subject of some debate (see Endere et al., 2018; Gould and Burtenshaw, 2014; Lane, 2011).

The archaeological research project in north-western Zimbabwe

The different datasets that we present and discuss in this article emerge from a large-scale research project titled “The Past in the Present: The Zimbabwe Culture and Other Archaeological Heritage in North-Western Zimbabwe.” The research project took an interdisciplinary approach, encompassing archaeology, ethnoarchaeology, ethnohistory, and cultural heritage management. The main goal of this research project was to address the significant knowledge gap regarding archaeological and cultural heritage research in the north-western region of Zimbabwe, a region which has been largely overlooked in previous research, despite its archaeological significance (McGregor, 2005; Shenjere-Nyabezi et al., 2020). The project focused on the archaeological investigation and documentation of the three major Zimbabwe Culture stone-walled buildings of Bumbusi, Matowa, and Shangano. These sites have been recognized by archaeologists since the early 20th century but have received limited research attention (Kearney, 1907; Phillipson, 1975; Shenjere-Nyabezi et al., 2023).

The project had three main phases. Phase one (2017-2020) was dedicated to conducting field research activities, including archaeological excavations, surveys, and data collection. Phase two (2020-2021) focused on knowledge transfer, aiming to disseminate research findings to relevant stakeholders, local communities, and heritage management professionals. Phase three (2022-2023) was dedicated to the dissemination of research outcomes through various channels, such as academic publications, public presentations, and community engagement initiatives. The focus of this article is on the last two phases. Informed by our experiences in implementing these two phases, we address the critical issues of how archaeological heritage knowledge can be used to create pathways towards sustainable development.

Methodological approach

Scientific research findings can be complex and challenging to communicate effectively to a wider audience (Frangipane and Tuna, 2021). The process of simplifying and translating the knowledge generated from large-scale research projects such as the current north-western Zimbabwe archaeological and cultural heritage management project is imperative for informing and supporting development initiatives. The critical issues and questions revolve

around what information should be disseminated and how it can be presented to communities in accessible and impactful ways. In this project, we developed and implemented diverse dissemination strategies and activities that were informed by the project's aims, methodologies, and research outcomes. The overarching emphasis was on the utilization of archaeological heritage resources for the benefit and advancement of local communities.

Our strategy was grounded on the philosophical foundation and recognition of the thinking that the dissemination of archaeological heritage knowledge is vital for contributing to community development beyond materiality in non-material aspects, such as cultural identity, cultural pride, and socio-political progress. We therefore sought to advance this philosophical direction and bridge what we felt was a gap in the role of and relationships between archaeology and development (Keitumetse, 2011; King, 2023; Ndoro, 2015). By tailoring the communication of research findings to the needs and perspectives of diverse stakeholders, we aimed to demonstrate how archaeological discoveries and the knowledge thereof can inform and support sustainable development in north-western Zimbabwe and even beyond.

It is worth noting that communities across Africa, particularly in rural areas, often lack a clear understanding of archaeology and archaeological heritage management as academic disciplines (Ndoro et al., 2018; Schmidt and Pikirayi, 2016). We believe that this knowledge gap has stemmed, in part, from a lack of intentional, well-crafted, and informed efforts by specialists to engage with communities, to demystify archaeology, and to effectively communicate their research objectives and findings. This is the case even though if properly disseminated, the research can be used to actively contribute to community and national development. Bridging this divide between academic knowledge and community awareness is a critical challenge that needs to be addressed to unlock the full potential of archaeological heritage resources for sustainable progress.

By implementing tailored dissemination strategies, our aim was to foster a greater appreciation and understanding of archaeology among local stakeholders. We envisaged that this, in turn, would enable communities to become active partners in the preservation and utilization of their cultural heritage for development initiatives that are grounded in local priorities and needs. We sought to chart a course toward empowering communities with knowledge that is traditionally confined to the scientific and scholarly realms, rendering it inaccessible to the broader public. By exploring and mapping these pathways for knowledge transmission, our goal was to dismantle barriers and ensure that the benefits of scientific archaeological heritage research are widely shared.

This approach recognizes that communities are essential stakeholders in the management and application of their own cultural resources (Chirikure and Pwiti, 2008; Pikirayi, 2015). By providing local populations with the knowledge and tools to engage with archaeology, we aimed to facilitate their active participation in development planning and implementation that draws upon the rich tapestry of the region's cultural heritage. Through this process, we sought to bridge the divide between academic knowledge and community needs, ultimately strengthening the linkages between archaeological research and sustainable, community-driven development initiatives.

The project dissemination and knowledge transfer agenda

Our primary target groups for the dissemination and knowledge transfer efforts were the rural communities and school pupils in the Hwange District (Figure 1). Specifically, the focus was on the Nambya-speaking people, who claim direct descent from the pre-colonial Nambya state that exerted significant influence over much of the district. The Nambya people have a strong

historical and cultural connection to the major Zimbabwe Culture sites of Shangano, Bumbusi, and Matowa, which they understand as successive capitals of the Nambya state (McGregor, 2005; Ncube, 2004; Nyambiya, 2023; Shenjere-Nyabezi et al., 2023). While these three sites are highly revered, there are at least 50 other stone-walled sites in the district (Shenjere-Nyabezi et al., 2023).

By targeting the Nambya-speaking communities and local schools, the aim was to foster a greater appreciation and understanding of the region's rich cultural resources. This, in turn, would provide the different stakeholders with knowledges to become active custodians and advocates for the protection and appropriate utilization of their archaeological heritage for community development. To this end, 10 Zimbabwe Culture stone-built archaeological sites were purposively selected for specific community-focused activities. The selection of these sites considered various factors such as their archaeological, socio-political, and cultural significance to the communities, as well as their state of conservation and accessibility.

We also recognized the importance of engaging with the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZPWMA) rangers. This is against the background that a substantial part of the Hwange District falls under the Hwange Wildlife National Park. The rangers guide tourists, regularly patrol different parts of the park, and frequently encounter many archaeological sites found in the park. Enhancing their awareness of archaeological heritage was regarded as crucial in facilitating the recording and reporting of the sites within the protected areas. Through these targeted dissemination and engagement efforts, the project aimed to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and community-level understanding. By providing local stakeholders, including Nambya communities and ZPWMA rangers, with the knowledge and tools to identify, document, and advocate for their cultural resources, we sought to lay the foundation for sustainable heritage management and community-driven development initiatives.

Two workshops were conducted with ZPWMA rangers and other park staff, one at Hwange Main Camp and another at Sinamatela camp (Figure 2). These workshops provided a platform for engaging discussions and facilitated the exchange of knowledge between the project team and the ZPWMA staff. This contributed to a broader understanding and appreciation of archaeological heritage among the park rangers and personnel. By directly engaging with the ZPWMA, the aim was to enhance the awareness and capacity of these frontline staff to identify, document, and report on archaeological sites encountered within the protected areas. This was a crucial step in facilitating the effective management and protection of the region's cultural resources. In this regard, the immediate feedback from the rangers and other park staff was that the workshops successfully bridged the gap between academic knowledge and the practical experiences of the park rangers, enabling a collaborative approach to the stewardship of the area's archaeological heritage.

As previously mentioned, we implemented various communication strategies to facilitate dialogue between modern archaeology, heritage practitioners, local communities, school pupils, and the wider public. A key aspect of the communication strategy involved presenting the scientific approaches that were used in researching the archaeological heritage of the Hwange District, including its values and management practices. Concurrently, we engaged with communities to elicit their perspectives on their understanding of their heritage, including its local contextual values and traditional management systems employed for site preservation. The aim was to foster a reciprocal exchange of knowledge, where both scientific and community-based understandings were valued. The desired outcome of these communication strategies was to develop sustainable, long-term programs for site conservation practices that integrate both scientific and traditional systems. By combining scientific knowledge with community insights, we sought to create a comprehensive approach to heritage management

that respects and preserves the rich cultural heritage of the Hwange District for generations to come.



Figure 2. ZPWMA game rangers at Sinamatela Camp conducting a mock site-recording exercise during the workshop.

The dissemination component included the development of two exhibitions: a temporary mobile exhibition and a permanent one. The permanent exhibition was intended to be housed in the existing building that previously functioned as the Nambya Community Museum, which has been non-operational due to various constraints (Sagiya and Shenjere-Nyabezi, 2023). Efforts are now underway to revitalize this museum by redesigning, equipping, and modernizing it with new storylines that incorporate the findings from our archaeological research.

As part of the dissemination and awareness programme, a project documentary (Shenjere-Nyabezi, 2022) was produced.¹ The production of the documentary involved the active participation of two of the Hwange District traditional chiefs, their traditional leaders, and local communities. It showcased various aspects of archaeological field research and heritage management, and presented oral narratives of Nambya history and cultural activities at different stone buildings. At the time of writing, the documentary has been featured on national television at least six times and has gained substantial popularity, suggesting that it will continue to be broadcast in the future. Notably, to ensure access and inclusivity, the project arranged for the development of a version of the documentary with a Nambya voice-over, enabling the entire Nambya society to follow the script and fully engage with the content.

Another key output was the production of a flier and a popular book titled *The Past in the Present: The Zimbabwe Culture and Other Archaeological Heritage in North-Western Zimbabwe* (Shenjere-Nyabezi and Pwiti, 2022). These materials were distributed to communities and schools during the project workshops. Over and above these efforts, the project organized a One-Day Symposium held in Hwange Town in January 2023. The symposium provided a platform for local and international scholars to present papers on various aspects of the project and attracted a diverse audience from the Hwange District community, including schoolteachers, ZPWMA Rangers, traditional leaders, representatives from coal-mining companies, and various Nambya Associations. This symposium facilitated scholarly exchange and community engagement, contributing to a deeper understanding of the project's research outcomes.

To facilitate knowledge transfer and raise awareness of archaeological heritage resources, dissemination workshops were conducted in communities and high schools within the Hwange District. The workshops were designed to operationalize the project's goal and began with community engagement. A total of eight workshops were conducted at the homesteads of the five different chiefs, including two Headmen in the Hwange District. These workshops were well attended and followed a structured format. They commenced with the screening of the documentary, featuring the Nambya voice-over version (Figure 3), which was followed by discussions on the documentary as well as on various aspects of the archaeological heritage sites in the district. The discussions encompassed a wide range of topics, including interpretation and management issues related to these sites.



Figure 3. Screening of the project documentary at Chief Nekatambe's homestead.

The level of participation during the workshops was notably high, often accompanied by passionate and emotional discussions. One topic that evoked strong emotions was the issue of the restrictions on access to the major site of Bumbusi, located in the Hwange National Park. The Nambya people hold this site as their most important and most sacred ancestral place. It is the site where they traditionally gathered to connect with their ancestors to appease them, to seek their blessings, and, most importantly, to appeal for rains during years of drought. However, because it is in the national wildlife park, access to the site is strictly controlled and restricted, making it virtually impossible for them to hold their traditional rituals and ceremonies. They thus expressed deep dissatisfaction with the restrictions imposed by the park authorities, which limited their access to this significant site.

Another emotional matter that emerged during the workshops revolved around site preservation. Without exception, all the chiefs and their communities expressed their dismay at the neglect of their heritage sites by the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ). To this end, they appealed for involvement in the management of the dry-stone buildings and wholeheartedly committed themselves to actively participate in initiatives aimed at restoring the sites. They offered their labor and other available resources to contribute to the preservation of their invaluable heritage for the benefit of present and future generations. The commitment to safeguard their cultural treasures was unwavering, demonstrating their deep sense of responsibility and pride in their heritage.

Following the community workshops, the next target was the schools in the district, where the project worked in collaboration with the Hwange District Education authorities to identify suitable high schools for the dissemination workshops. In the end, a total of 18 high schools were selected and visited for one-day dissemination workshops. The format of these workshops closely resembled that of the community workshops. However, an additional component was introduced, focusing on discussion of heritage as a catalyst for community and national development. Furthermore, the project engaged in discussion with the students regarding the establishment of School Heritage Clubs, over and above the various other clubs that currently exist in the schools.

The concept of School Heritage Clubs was generally well received by the students, and there was evident enthusiasm to participate. It is against this background that it is now planned to make follow-up engagements in the future to assess the progress made by the schools in implementing the idea beyond initial pledges.

On the whole, the level of participation in the school workshops was vibrant; the participants were characterized by a strong desire to learn more about archaeology as a discipline and to deepen their understanding of the archaeological heritage within their district (Figure 4). The workshops sparked a spirit of curiosity and a genuine interest in exploring the rich historical and cultural heritage of the district.



Figure 4. Dissemination workshop at Hwange High School.

Discussion

Over the years, the contribution of archaeological heritage resources to societal, cultural, political, and economic development at local community level and beyond has long been recognized (Chirikure and Pwiti, 2008; Gould and Burtenshaw, 2014; Keitumetse, 2011; Labadi et al., 2020; Taruvinga, 2022). However, the operationalization of this recognition has not always been specifically accompanied by effective dissemination of archaeological and heritage management research findings to local communities and other stakeholders outside academic circles. Archaeological researchers and heritage practitioners have often tended to confine their knowledges to their professional circles and rarely sought to communicate research results and professional practices directly to local communities. At the same time, effectively disseminating research findings and heritage management practices to a wider audience is crucial for maximizing the impact and application of scholarly work (Schmidt and Pikirayi, 2016). Our aim in this article is to share our experiences and reflections on the links between disseminating archaeological heritage knowledge and development. By exploring strategies for translating academic research into formats and channels accessible to diverse stakeholders, we have sought to demonstrate how archaeological discoveries and the knowledges thereof can inform and support sustainable development initiatives at the local level and beyond.

From a scientific knowledge point of view, our experience demonstrated the potential of how such knowledge can build communities' sense of history and cultural pride. Drawing on the several scientific radiocarbon dates obtained from the Shangano, Bumbusi, and Chimwala/Halfway House excavations, we were able to show the local communities that their heritage sites date much further back in time, to as early as the 14th century AD. This new knowledge challenged the previously dominant narrative about the origins of the Nambya state and the Nambya people (see Mazarire, 2020; Ncube, 2004). The new scientific dating

questioned the long-held notion of a recent, 18th-century origin and history of the Nambya people and revealed a longer history of their presence on the landscape. This has engendered a strong sense of deep-rooted connection and belonging among the Nambya communities. The descendants of the Nambya state who are numerically and culturally dominant in the Hwange district are now aware that the Nambya state has a more extensive history in north-western Zimbabwe, and that its origins and development likely unfolded through processes beyond what was conveyed in the oral traditions.

This newfound knowledge is invaluable in unraveling previously hidden aspects of the local communities' history. It has given them a stronger sense of being an integral part of the regional and national narrative, rather than merely peripheral actors (McGregor, 2005; Sagiya, 2022). This information stands to play a crucial role in shaping the communities' sense of self, self-perception, pride, and engagement with their cultural heritage. By proactively sharing the results of the scientific dating, we were able to challenge and expand the local communities' understanding of their own past. This process of co-creating knowledge and reframing historical narratives has a transformative impact, fostering a deeper appreciation for the multifaceted nature of the region's history and the enduring legacy of its people.

Disseminating research findings to local populations is a crucial undertaking for several important reasons. First and foremost, the local stakeholders and communities are the owners of the heritage and deserve access to the knowledge they have helped to generate through their participation and engagement in the research process. Sharing the findings with them is not just the right thing to do, but it also creates valuable opportunities to explore the implications of the research from a local perspective. Furthermore, the dissemination of archaeological and heritage management research findings presents a unique avenue to bridge the gap between academic inquiry and practical applications. By fostering dialogue with local stakeholders and communities, the research can directly contribute to the development of the region, as exemplified by the case of this research project.

More broadly, the dissemination of research findings through collaborative engagement with local populations can play a crucial role in developing culturally relevant and impactful developmental interventions. This approach recognizes the inherent value of local knowledge, perspectives, and priorities, and harnesses them to ensure that research outcomes are aligned with the needs and aspirations of the communities themselves. In essence, the active dissemination of research findings to local stakeholders is not just a means of sharing information, but a strategic process of co-creating knowledge and catalyzing meaningful change (Frangipane and Tuna, 2021). It is a vital component of responsible and community-centric research that can yield lasting benefits for both the academic and local spheres.

However, despite the clear importance of disseminating research findings to local populations, in Zimbabwe, as may be the case in other contexts, archaeologists often fall short in this regard. This oversight is frequently driven by concerns with generating scientific knowledge and preserving heritage sites using modern methods and standards which are largely informed by the need to manage the materiality and physical well-being of the sites. In the end, limited, if any, budgetary considerations are given to dissemination efforts. Additionally, there can exist a lack of understanding among some researchers about the profound impact that sharing archaeological and heritage management findings can have on local stakeholders and communities. As we engaged with various local stakeholders in north-western Zimbabwe, we were repeatedly reminded of how other past researchers have not shared their research results with the communities in the area. Our experience not only underlined the need for this, but also underscored the powerful influence that heritage research can have on local populations when properly shared and contextualized.

As observed by Frangipane and Tuna (2021), it is crucial to make local communities aware of the role their heritage sites play in regional, national, and even international history. By actively disseminating research findings, archaeologists and heritage professionals can empower local populations to become active stewards and advocates for the preservation of their cultural assets. The current disconnection between research and community engagement points to the need for a shift in the field of archaeology and heritage management. Researchers must prioritize the dissemination of their work and the fostering of meaningful dialogues with local stakeholders, not only as an ethical imperative, but also as a strategic means of ensuring that the benefits of research are equitably distributed and the long-term sustainability of heritage initiatives is secured.

One of the key lessons learned from disseminating the research findings to local stakeholders and communities is the valuable role that this can play in conceptualizing the relevance and direction of future research. The local populations possess a deep understanding of their own values and needs, which allows them to provide crucial guidance on the relevance and applicability of the research outcomes. For instance, during the sharing of findings with one of the Hwange district chiefdoms, the community members pointed out other pertinent gaps in knowledge that they felt warranted further research attention and how such research would be relevant to them. This aligns well with the African Union's Agenda 2063, which emphasizes the importance of African societies having strong cultural identities, heritage, values, and ethics.

Conclusion

Dissemination of archaeological and heritage management research findings to local stakeholders and communities is a critical element in fostering non-material development, yet it has often been overlooked by researchers. Few studies have explored how to share results of long-term archaeological research projects (Frangipane and Tuna, 2021). In Zimbabwe and likely many other parts of the African continent, few studies have investigated how disseminating archaeological knowledge can contribute towards development. It is hoped that through the north-western Zimbabwe research project which forms the foundation of this article, we have demonstrated avenues that can be used towards demystifying archaeology as a science by engaging local communities as knowledge producers and research partners, rather than as mere providers of labor, as had often been the case in previous archaeological research projects, particularly during the colonial days. Similarly, it is hoped that we have demonstrated different ways of operationalizing research knowledge-sharing with local communities and their effectiveness. In this regard, the immediate feedback received from the different workshops that were held has been very encouraging and suggestive of how useful the knowledge dissemination strategies adopted by the project have been. As follow-up, the project plans to engage in periodic monitoring and evaluation among the different target populations. It is planned, for example, to visit the high schools to determine if School Heritage Clubs have been set and to obtain a sense of how they are functioning or operating.

The archaeological research has provided the Nambya people with new historical insights and knowledge about their past, instilling a sense of pride and strengthening their cultural identity. This newfound understanding of their heritage has fostered a lasting and positive sense of self within the communities. In particular, the screening of the documentary on national television, showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the Nambya people, has contributed significantly to their sense of pride and identity. In this regard, the feedback that has been coming through from different sections of the Hwange community, including schools, has been characterized by

appreciation of how the rich Nambya cultural heritage has finally been projected on the national landscape.

Feedback from various local stakeholders, including Nambya chiefs, community members, the Nambya Cultural Association (NCA), and workshop participants, indicates that the scientific research and dissemination efforts have produced considerable positive outcomes. The sharing of archaeological knowledge and findings with these local partners has laid a secure foundation for future initiatives in the region. This approach indicates that the research not only advances academic understanding, but also directly benefits the communities to whom this cultural heritage belongs.

In conclusion, the long-term benefits of disseminating archaeological and heritage management research in north-western Zimbabwe are twofold. First, it has created platforms and launching pads for future collaborative heritage preservation interventions between communities and heritage managers. Second, it has created a good sense of, and appreciation for, the discipline of archaeology and its goals among communities while at the same time demonstrating that scientific approaches themselves stand to benefit from incorporating local knowledges and knowledge systems. In our view, these achievements have established a solid platform for heritage-based sustainable development for the region and beyond, by creating frameworks for operationalizing collaboration between local stakeholders as active participants in the stewardship of their cultural assets and the state systems. As noted above, the research project plans to monitor and carry out periodic evaluation of the extent to which the immediate positive feedback on various aspects will be sustained.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the Volkswagen Foundation; A120216 and A130990.

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Footnote

1. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rsB40jUJC-4> (accessed 8 September 2024).

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