BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE AND HERITAGE STUDIES

ENHANCING CULTURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION THROUGH PUBLIC CONSULTATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUMS AND MONUMENTS OF ZIMBABWE

RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE AND HERITAGE, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE BACHELOR OF HONOURS DEGREE IN CULTURE AND HERITAGE STUDIES

BY

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ABSTRACT

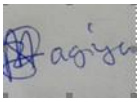
This study evaluated the role of public consultation in enhancing cultural heritage conservation at the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ). Heritage governance in Zimbabwe has long been criticised for its top-down, expert-led character, which marginalises local communities from decision-making and threatens the long-term sustainability of both tangible and intangible heritage. The research problem centred on the persistent alienation of grassroots stakeholders, the ad hoc nature of participatory mechanisms, and the absence of a statutory duty to consult. A qualitative case study design was employed, treating the NMMZ as a single bounded system. Primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with seven purposively selected key informants two NMMZ directors, four community members from the Mazowe area, and a local government councilor and triangulated with a critical analysis of the NMMZ Act. Thematic analysis revealed that while the NMMZ demonstrates rigorous technical proficiency in documentation, its operational model is elite-centred, urban-based, and socially isolated. Public consultation functioned as a tool for information extraction rather than genuine partnership, producing a damaging "them and us" divide. Existing community engagement initiatives, such as Adopt-a-Site, were found to be unsustainable because they rest on institutional goodwill rather than legal mandate. The archaic 1972 Act was identified as the primary structural obstacle: it lacks provisions for public hearings, community nomination rights, or the protection of intangible and liberation heritage. The study concluded that sustainable, inclusive heritage conservation demands comprehensive legislative reform, institutional decentralisation to district level, a formal policy of language inclusivity, and a shift toward joint programming that co-creates heritage products with communities. These recommendations align with Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 goals of innovation and industrialisation and offer a blueprint for transforming heritage governance from exclusionary custody to collaborative stewardship.

APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certify that they have supervised the student **Natasha Mvumba Manuel** dissertation entitled: **Enhancing cultural heritage conservation through public consultation: A case study of the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe** submitted in Partial fulfillment of the requirements of the **Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Culture and Heritage Studies** at the **Bindura University of Science Education.**

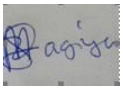


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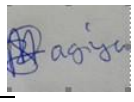
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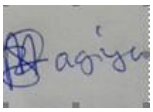
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DECLARATION FORM

I, Natasha Mvumba Manuel, declare that this dissertation is my own original work. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university. All sources used or quoted have been duly acknowledged by means of complete references.

Student Signature:  Date: 03/09/2026

Supervisor Signature:  Date: 03/09/2026

 03/09/26

Chairperson's Signature Date

DEDICATION

To my family, whose unwavering support and encouragement made this journey possible, and to the communities of Mazowe, whose voices inspired this study.

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I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. M. E. Sagiya, for his patient guidance, insightful feedback, and steady encouragement throughout the research process. My thanks also go to the seven key informants who generously shared their time, knowledge, and experiences. I am indebted to the NMMZ staff for granting me access and to the community members of Mazowe for their warm welcome and trust. Finally, I thank my family and friends for their love and moral support, without which this dissertation would not have been completed.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Abbreviation	Full Name
ESS8	Environmental and Social Standard 8 (World Bank)
ICCROM	International Centre for the Study of the Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Property
ICOMOS	International Council on Monuments and Sites
NHRA	National Heritage Resource Act
NMMZ	National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAHRA	South African Heritage Resource Agency
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ZNHC	Zambia's National Heritage Conservation Commission

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the study by providing the background to cultural heritage conservation in Zimbabwe and the role of the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe. It presents the statement of the problem, highlighting the marginalisation of local communities from decision making, followed by the purpose and significance of the research. The chapter then outlines the research objectives and questions, states the key assumptions, and explains the study's contribution to knowledge. It also defines the delimitations and limitations, clarifies essential terms, and concludes with a brief dissertation outline.

1.1 Background of the Study

Cultural heritage conservation has shifted globally from expert led, state controlled models toward inclusive processes that recognise communities as custodians and knowledge bearers. International agencies such as UNESCO and ICOMOS advocate participatory governance through public consultation. In Australia and Canada, indigenous groups are directly involved in heritage management, producing policies that reflect local values. Africa has seen growing attention to participatory heritage management in response to illicit trafficking, site degradation, and funding shortages (Pwiti & Ndoro, 2018). Nigeria's Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove integrates indigenous custodianship with formal conservation, while South Africa's Heritage Resources Agency uses community heritage councils to institutionalise public consultation. However, limited institutional capacity, political interference, and fragmented governance continue to hinder inclusive management across the continent.

In Zimbabwe, the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) manages over 130 national monuments, archaeological sites, and museums. The agency faces serious challenges including resource constraints, vandalism, urban encroachment, and climate related deterioration (Mupira, 2020). Despite its statutory mandate, the NMMZ is often perceived as alien by local communities, with negligible mechanisms for grassroots participation. Iconic sites like Great Zimbabwe National Monument generate few heritage linked economic opportunities for locals, leading to disinterest and lack of ownership (Chirikure et al., 2019).

Public consultation frameworks remain piecemeal, donor driven, and poorly institutionalised, resulting in inconsistent implementation (Ndoro, 2021).

The absence of systematic consultation undermines cultural transmission and threatens heritage sustainability. Existing initiatives such as cultural festivals, school heritage education, and community associations are fragmented and under resourced (Munjeri, 2020). The UNESCO Operational Guidelines (2021) emphasise that communities must be partners, not beneficiaries, in heritage management. Embedding good governance principles such as transparency, accountability, participation, inclusiveness, and responsiveness can enhance trust and sustainable outcomes (Graham & Howard, 2020). This study therefore explores how the NMMZ can improve public consultation by institutionalising community participation and embedding governance principles, ensuring that Zimbabwe's cultural heritage conservation becomes truly inclusive, community based, and resilient for future generations.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to examine how public consultation can be used in the improvement of the state of cultural heritage conservation in Zimbabwe, with particular reference to the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Community participation in heritage management and consumption of heritage sites and museums in Zimbabwe remains generally poor, while international pressures threaten the long-term sustainability of these sites (Pwiti & Ndoro, 2018). All too often, local communities in Zimbabwe perceive the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe as a removed institution, with decision-making concentrated among experts and policymakers, excluding grassroots voices. Such alienation reduces local ownership, impedes intergenerational transfer of indigenous knowledge, and weakens community support for conservation initiatives (Chirikure, Manyanga, Ndoro & Pwiti, 2010). At the same time, instances of public consultation in heritage planning are ad hoc and underfunded, with minimal incorporation into

the national policy framework; pressing economic development and urbanization pressures are even diverting attention from cultural heritage conservation (Ndoro & Wijesuriya, 2021). Without sustainable strategies for embedding inclusive public consultation mechanisms and community-centered governance, Zimbabwe faces the risk of not only physical deterioration at its heritage sites but also erosion of the cultural identity they represent. As such, this research seeks to explain how public consultation can underpin heritage conservation by allowing the NMMZ to devise inclusive governance frameworks that capture community voices, promote local ownership, and support sustainable cultural continuity.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to evaluate the role of public consultation in enhancing cultural heritage conservation in Zimbabwe. Specifically, the objectives are to:

- Explore current trends, practices, and challenges in cultural heritage conservation under the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe.
- Examine the role and significance of public consultation in fostering inclusive heritage conservation and community participation.
- Evaluate existing consultation initiatives within NMMZ, assessing their effectiveness, limitations, and sustainability.
- Propose practical strategies and policy recommendations for strengthening public consultation in cultural heritage conservation in Zimbabwe.

1.5 Research Questions

To guide the study and achieve the objectives, the following research questions are posed:

- What are the current trends and challenges in cultural heritage conservation under the custodianship of NMMZ?
- How does public consultation contribute to inclusive cultural heritage management and conservation in Zimbabwe?
- What consultation mechanisms currently exist within NMMZ, and how effective are they in fostering participation and ownership?
- What strategies and policy recommendations can strengthen public consultation for sustainable cultural heritage conservation in Zimbabwe?

1.6 Assumptions of the Study

The study is based on the following assumptions:

- Public consultation constitutes an essential mechanism for effective cultural heritage conservation, and its absence represents a risk to the sustainability of Zimbabwe's cultural heritage.
- Engaging communities, stakeholders, and local experts in heritage decision-making can enhance ownership, awareness, and active participation in preserving heritage sites and museums.
- Institutional support, policy backing, and deliberate strategies are necessary to integrate public consultation meaningfully into heritage management practices.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for three main reasons. First, it provides empirical understanding of how public consultation affects cultural heritage conservation, showing how inclusive or exclusive community voices impact the protection, management, and sustainability of heritage resources, thereby arming policymakers and heritage managers with insights for more effective governance. Second, it offers practical suggestions for strengthening public consultation

frameworks at the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, guiding participatory programs, community engagement, and policy reforms to ensure local stakeholders become active decision makers, which in turn fosters collective ownership, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and cultural awareness that cements national identity and pride. Finally, the study highlights the urgent need to incorporate perspectives from all stakeholders into heritage management as a foundation for safeguarding both tangible and intangible cultural resources in Zimbabwe.

1.8 Contribution to Education 5.0

Integrating public consultation into heritage conservation creates a framework linking cultural protection, education, and industrialisation for sustainable development in Zimbabwe. Traditional top down projects have failed to embrace community input, resulting in limited ownership and low sustainability (Chirikure et al., 2019; Ndoro & Wijesuriya, 2021). Participatory methods empower communities as custodians, cocreators, and innovators through workshops, cultural forums, digital platforms, and advisory councils, while developing problem solving and strategic skills among youth and educators. Heritage based education enables local innovation and entrepreneurship by transforming intangible knowledge into commercially viable outputs such as digital tours, interactive exhibits, and mobile applications. Schools can integrate heritage into curricula, and cultural institutions can collaborate with the private sector to develop gamified learning tools and augmented reality experiences. These initiatives generate revenue through cultural tourism and digital products, aligning with Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 goals of innovation and industrialisation.

Participatory approaches also reinforce intergenerational knowledge transfer and community cohesion. Traditional custodians contribute oral histories, rituals, and crafts, which can be documented and passed to younger generations through festivals, school competitions, and digital storytelling. This nurtures shared identity, enhances social cohesion, and builds a resilient society. Communities gain capacity to engage in economic activities such as producing educational kits, handicrafts, and tourism services, ensuring equitable distribution of heritage benefits. This research contributes to discourse on heritage based education and participatory governance, showing heritage as a dynamic resource for educational, social, and economic transformation. It provides a blueprint for developing countries on using indigenous knowledge and community participation for sustainable development. Practically, community voices

increase policy relevance, institutional accountability, and operational effectiveness. Communities support conservation they helped decide on, leading to better site maintenance. Digital technologies scale cultural and economic impact, bridging culture, technology, education, and entrepreneurship.

1.9 Delimitations of the Study

This research focuses on specific aspects of cultural heritage conservation and public consultation practices within the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe. The study limits its inquiry to selected heritage sites, NMMZ offices, and related community fora, excluding any informal or peripheral heritage activities that may fall beyond the institution's purview. Only those participants who have had direct involvement in the consultation processes, such as NMMZ staff, policymakers, community representatives, and cultural practitioners, are considered. While the wider heritage management frameworks are taken into consideration in this study, it does not deal with private heritage enterprises or international heritage sites falling outside Zimbabwe.

1.10 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations might affect the depth and scope of the findings: First, focusing on the selected sites and surrounding communities within NMMZ might not cover consultation practices in all heritage institutions in Zimbabwe. This is proposed to be addressed by the purposive selection of sites so as to ensure geographic, cultural, and administrative diversity. Second, there may be participant bias if respondents report socially desirable consultation practices; this would be minimized by ensuring anonymity, building rapport, and asking probing questions. Third, the qualitative nature of the study means that generalisability is limited; credibility and application, however, will be enhanced by the amount of detailed, context-rich data triangulated across several sources. Lastly, the time and resource constraints

may limit the number of participants or depth of engagement; it is proposed to be mitigated through good planning, prioritization of key sites, and piloting of tools for data collection.

1.11 Definition of Key Terms

- **Cultural Heritage Conservation**

It has been defined as the protection, maintenance, and safeguarding of tangible and intangible cultural assets in a continuous manner for future generations (UNESCO, 2003; Throsby, 2010). In the context of this research, it will refer to the processes and initiatives taken by NMMZ in the conservation, management, and promotion of Zimbabwe's cultural heritage; it encompasses the tangible heritage sites, practices, and communal knowledge.

- **Public Consultation**

Public consultation is defined as a structured process through which stakeholders, including community members, experts, and policy makers, are engaged to provide input, feedback, and recommendations on decisions affecting heritage management (Pretty, 1995; Reed, 2008). In this study, public consultation is understood as the deliberate involvement of the public in NMMZ programs and decision-making processes to foster inclusive and participatory heritage conservation.

- **Intangible Cultural Heritage**

Intangible cultural heritage represents the non-physical aspects of culture, such as traditions, practices, knowledge, and skills passed on through generations that identify the community (UNESCO, 2003; Throsby, 2010). Herein, it is taken to mean those customs, practices, oral histories, and other representations of Zimbabwean culture which constitute part of national heritage and which are conserved through programs undertaken by NMMZ.

- **Community Engagement**

Community engagement is generally defined as the active participation of local stakeholders in the initiation of activities that are proposed to affect them socially, culturally, or educationally (Pretty, 1995; Reed, 2008). In this thesis, this perspective is understood as consultative processes with local communities, cultural practitioners, and other relevant stakeholders in support of heritage conservation under NMMZ.

- **Stakeholder Participation**

Stakeholder participation is defined as the process in which individuals, groups, or organisations with a vested interest in a project or policy contribute their knowledge, feedback, and decision-making inputs (Arnstein, 1969; Reed, 2008). For the context of this study, this will be understood as the active contribution of communities, heritage experts, and NMMZ officials in the planning, decision-making, and evaluation of heritage conservation initiatives.

- **Sustainable Heritage Management**

It includes strategies and methodologies that can ensure long-term protection, accessibility, and relevance of cultural heritage, balancing conservation with social, educational, and economic needs. According to Smith (2015) and UNESCO (2018), in this study, it is understood as NMMZ efforts towards the conservation of cultural heritage through inclusive and participatory approaches, where it involves public consultation, policy alignment, and community engagement.

1.12 Dissertation Outline

The study is structured into five chapters as follows:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** – Provides the background, statement of the problem, research objectives and questions, significance, and scope of the study.
- **Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework** – Reviews global, African, Southern African, and Zimbabwean literature on cultural heritage conservation, public consultation, and community participation, and discusses relevant theories.
- **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology** – Details the qualitative case study approach, population, sampling, data collection, analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.
- **Chapter 4: Data Presentation and Analysis** – Presents findings from interviews, focus groups, and documentary analysis using thematic analysis and NVivo.
- **Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations** – Interprets the findings, identifies implications for heritage conservation through public consultation, and proposes practical strategies for NMMZ, policy makers, and communities.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a systematic review of literature on cultural heritage conservation, prioritizing the role of public consultation across global, continental, regional (SADC), and national scales. With the study adopting this hierarchical approach, the review establishes a comprehensive context for understanding how participatory and stakeholder theories transition from abstract concepts into practical management tools. This synthesis identifies critical gaps in existing scholarship providing the theoretical and empirical justification for examining inclusive conservation strategies within the specific framework of the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ).

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes Participatory Theory and Stakeholder Theory as complementary lenses to examine public consultation within the NMMZ. While Participatory Theory promotes the democratic ideal of inclusion, it often lacks the tools to address power imbalances, potentially treating the community as a simplistic equal group. To mitigate this limitation, Stakeholder Theory is deployed to identify, categorize, and navigate the competing interests and influence of various actors. Together, these theories provide a robust framework for analyzing power dynamics, consultation procedures, and the practical viability of community-led heritage conservation.

2.1.1 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory, rooted in commerce and organisational management (Freeman, 1984), holds that organisations exist within a network of relationships and that any group or individual affected by, or capable of affecting, an organisation's goals must be considered in decision making. In heritage conservation, the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) serves as the organisation, while stakeholders comprise diverse actors with varying influence and interest. Scholars have adapted this theory to move beyond top down, state centric models. Ntlhabo (2022) notes that in African heritage contexts, traditional custodians and local communities are primary stakeholders whose spiritual and ancestral links to sites should theoretically supersede bureaucratic interests.

In practice, these groups are often marginalised by professional experts. Pies and Valentinov (2024) emphasise that stakeholder theory is essential for navigating trade-offs between tourism, economic benefit, and site integrity, allowing heritage managers to shift from information sharing to meaningful collaboration. To analyse dynamics within the NMMZ, stakeholders can be categorised as primary (descendant communities, local inhabitants, NMMZ professionals) and secondary (tourists, NGOs, funders, media) (Bashir & Sawhney, 2023). Applying this theory requires exploring how the agency identifies these groups and addresses power disparities. As Li et al. (2024) suggest, effective governance requires transparency and structures that allow stakeholder opinions to influence final outcomes. This study therefore examines whether the NMMZ's consultation mechanisms are symbolic or genuinely legitimate, evaluating how stakeholder input is incorporated into management plans and whether feedback loops ensure accountability, community benefit, and sustainable conservation.

2.1.2 Participatory Theory

Participatory theory, rooted in the works of Chambers (1997) and Arnstein (1969), holds that the sustainability of any conservation project is directly proportional to the level of community agency. Local ownership and empowerment are achieved only when communities move beyond being passive recipients to becoming active architects of decision making and monitoring. In heritage management, this requires shifting from authorised heritage discourses where state professionals hold a monopoly on defining significance toward collaborative models where stakeholders and communities define values, plan interventions, and manage sites together (Cunha Ferreira et al., 2024).

However, scholars note significant limitations. Abbas (2025) critiques the tyranny of participation, warning that it can mask power imbalances or be used to co opt dissent. Jopela (2022) observes that in African contexts, participation is often hindered by lack of resources and expertise, leading to consultation fatigue without tangible influence. These limitations justify this study's use of Stakeholder Theory alongside participatory theory. To evaluate the NMMZ, the study utilises Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Participation, which categorises engagement into three levels: non participation (manipulation or therapy), tokenism (hearing without power), and citizen power (genuine decision making authority). For the NMMZ, this lens assesses whether public consultation is sincere and continuous, whether communities are equipped to participate meaningfully, and whether the authority modifies plans based on local input, ultimately determining if practices foster genuine community empowerment or merely reinforce top down governance.

2.2 Literature Review

A systematic review of academic and policy literature on heritage conservation, public consultation, and stakeholder engagement is presented in this section. It is arranged geographically into the following categories: global, African, SADC/Southern Africa, and Zimbabwe at the national level. This multi-scalar approach is critical as it situates the Zimbabwean experience within a broader funnel of international standards and regional trends. An examination of these diverse tiers allows the study to distinguish between universal challenges in heritage management and the site-specific socio-political dynamics unique to the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe. This global-to-local analysis provides a benchmark for evaluating whether the NMMZ's current consultation practices align with emerging international best practices in inclusive governance.

2.2.1 Global Perspectives on Heritage Conservation and Public Consultation

Around the world, the heritage sector is moving away from a conservation paradigm that is solely led by experts and towards more inclusive, people-centered governance models (Otero,

2022). The UNESCO Declaration of 2022, which recognises heritage as a global public good, suggests increased public access and stakeholder participation. For instance, inclusive consultation in heritage documentation and access was emphasised in the UNESCO Memory of the World consultation on ancient manuscripts in the Sahel region. (UNESCO, 2020).

2.2.1 Global Scholarship and International Standards

International heritage governance has shifted from a purely curatorial focus on the physical built environment toward a people centred approach that prioritises the social and economic rights of local communities (Madgin & Lesh, 2021). This evolution is driven by global standards from UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM, and IUCN. The ICOMOS Charter (2008) mandates that site interpretation incorporate oral histories and living traditions of local stakeholders, while the ICCROM People Centred Approaches (2015) framework argues that heritage management achieves long term sustainability only when it provides tangible benefits to society and moves beyond expert only decision making models.

Beyond cultural advocacy bodies, international financial institutions have institutionalised public consultation as a mandatory safeguard. The World Bank's Environmental and Social Standard 8 (ESS8) recognises cultural heritage as essential for sustainable development and requires meaningful, ongoing consultations with affected parties throughout a project's lifecycle (Labadi et al., 2021; Gibbons et al., 2022). Avrami (2020) notes that this standard emphasises risk mitigation and equitable benefit sharing. Despite these robust frameworks, a persistent gap remains between global rhetoric and local implementation. Huq and Puthuvayi (2024) find that many heritage projects still undervalue stakeholder perspectives, prioritising physical conservation over community values. Consequently, the quality of participation is often ritualistic or symbolic, with power imbalances preventing stakeholder input from reshaping outcomes (Torrent, 2021).

2.2.2 Global Context

Europe possesses a strong institutional framework for heritage governance, where legal instruments such as the Valletta Convention and the European Landscape Convention provide the statutory basis for public consultation. According to Tanrıkul (2023), research from participatory initiatives in Mediterranean nations suggests that community engagement

significantly improves site relevance, visitor experience, and social value. Cunha Ferreira et al. (2024) argue that stakeholder participation in values based conservation planning enhances authenticity, integrity, and continuity of heritage assets. Their longitudinal case study of the Ocean Swimming Pool demonstrates that effective consultation must account for the heterogeneity of the public by segmenting participants into communities of place (geographic neighbours), communities of interest (shared passion), and communities of practice (professional practitioners), which makes management more inclusive and nuanced.

Scholarly trends in the Americas and Asia further emphasise that while public consultation is globally recognised, its application is often contested by political and economic pressures. In North America, Moore et al. (2024) note that literature frequently focuses on collaborative stewardship, particularly regarding Indigenous heritage, where consultation must transition into Indigenous led co management to be considered legitimate. In Latin America, Marques (2024) highlights the tension between state led urban patrimonialisation and local resistance, where communities fight to ensure that heritage designation does not lead to gentrification or the displacement of living cultures. Asian scholarship, as observed by Kwanda (2024), reflects a transition from expert dominated colonial legacies toward living heritage approaches, with traditional Western conservation models that prioritise physical fabric often clashing with local spiritual and social values that demand active, ritualistic site use.

Common across these geographies is the observation that, despite international advocacy, consultation is often restricted to specific project phases rather than integrated into long term governance. In Australia, Huq and Puthuvayi (2024) find that community heritage surveys reveal support for protection depends heavily on how the public perceives heritage value relative to other essential public services. Collectively, global scholarship suggests that the primary challenge is no longer a lack of policy but an implementation gap, where ritualistic meetings fail to address power imbalances or allow community input to genuinely reshape heritage management outcomes.

2.2.3 African Context

Heritage conservation and public consultation across Africa are shaped by historical and contemporary pressures, with colonial frameworks remaining a primary obstacle. As Ngitir (2024) observes, many national heritage laws are rooted in Eurocentric monumentalist

philosophies that prioritise physical structures over living, intangible values. This colonial inheritance creates a disconnect between state authorities and traditional custodians, resulting in scarce resources and limited capacity for deep engagement. Bandarin (2024) notes that rapid urbanisation, mass tourism, and extractive industries force heritage agencies into reactive positions, while King (2023) argues that African heritage management is navigating structural change with shifting state roles and decentralised models. In North Africa, Hima (2025) highlights that UNESCO's 2020 initiatives on ancient manuscripts in the Sahel revealed difficulties coordinating input across diverse linguistic groups. In contrast, research remains scarce in Central Africa. Boden (2023) attributes this to prolonged instability shifting focus to emergency archaeology, while Tshibanda (2022) notes that extractive industries often destroy heritage sites, revealing a lack of meaningful consultation mechanisms. Throughout the continent, scholars have scrutinised organisations similar to the NMMZ. Kipkoech (2024) finds that Kenya's National Museums struggle with professional hegemony, Nyathi (2023) emphasises that South Africa's SAHRA suffers from bureaucratic tokenism despite progressive legislation, and Abdou (2025) argues these agencies treat consultation as a legal hurdle rather than a partnership, mirroring the global implementation gap. This suggests the NMMZ's challenge is part of a broader continental struggle to reconcile modern state led management with traditional African custodianship.

Notable instances of community involvement exist, particularly in Eastern Africa. Loza (2023) reports that local communities actively participated in site management and governance in the transnational Maloti Drakensberg Park UNESCO project, which increased legitimacy and promoted ownership. In West Africa, Tchumtcha (2022) notes that formal methods like community meetings, written submissions, and public notices have become more common for stakeholder consultation. The Peace Parks Foundation (2025) provides a recent example: the iSimangaliso Wetland Park's 2025 expansion into South Africa and Mozambique used

structured consultation processes to gather feedback from impacted local communities. These examples demonstrate the rise of inclusive frameworks, yet thorough scholarly assessment of the efficacy and sustainability of these consultations remains lacking, indicating a need for more research and policy development.

2.2.4 Southern Africa Regional Perspective

In the SADC region, heritage conservation and public consultation are increasingly integrated into regional policy frameworks such as the draft SADC Heritage Protocol (Oosthuizen, 2025). However, empirical scholarship reveals friction between policy ideals and institutional reality. Ndlovu (2011, 2016) criticises South Africa's SAHRA, arguing that despite democratic legislation, institutional culture remains exclusive and public participation is a box ticking exercise. Similar trends appear in Namibia and Zambia: Grandcourt (2025) notes Namibia's National Heritage Council consults only for high value tourism, while Mwewa (2021) finds Zambia's National Heritage Conservation Commission (ZNHC) lacks capacity and clear mandates to resolve conflicts between state laws and customary rights. These challenges mirror those faced by the NMMZ in Zimbabwe.

The importance of community centric models is shown in Malawi. Banda et al. (2024) demonstrate how community based research at the Khulubvi Traditional Temple preserved tangible and intangible heritage, providing a regional benchmark. When heritage institutions act as facilitators rather than sole authorities, sustainable outcomes are achievable. Collectively, Southern African scholarship highlights a regional crisis of participation: the primary hurdle is not lack of public interest but a lack of robust, transparent, and well funded mechanisms within state heritage institutions to facilitate genuine collaborative stewardship.

2.2.5 Scholarly Review on NMMZ

The National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe operates as a body corporate established by the National Museums and Monuments Act [Chapter 25:11]. It is the premier heritage organization in the country, tasked with the immense responsibility of managing five national museums and over 14,000 recorded archaeological and historical sites. Ndoro (2001) and Chirikure et al. (2010) describe the NMMZ as an institution that has spent the last four decades attempting to shed its colonial administrative skin to become a more socially inclusive and "people-centered" entity.

2.2.6 Origins, History, and Development

The historical trajectory of the NMMZ is deeply rooted in the centralized, expert-driven traditions of the early 20th century. The institution was formed in 1972 through the merger of the National Museums and the Historical Monuments Commission (Katsamudanga, 2022). This amalgamation was intended to streamline heritage management, but it also solidified a monumentalist approach where the primary focus was on the physical fabric of sites rather than their social or spiritual significance to the indigenous majority. Pwiti and Ndoro (1999) argue that the colonial-era legislation, which forms the basis of the current Act, was designed to exclude local communities from their ancestral sites, effectively turning living heritage into frozen scientific specimens for archaeological study.

In the post-independence era, the NMMZ underwent a major administrative shift towards decentralization (Mokoena (2022). The country was divided into five administrative regions: Northern, Western, Eastern, Central, and Southern. While this was meant to bring heritage services closer to the people. Mawere (2015) notes that the top-down bureaucratic culture remained largely intact. Development during this period focused on nationalist narratives using sites like Great Zimbabwe National Monument to build a post-colonial identity but often at the

expense of local, minority, or unofficial memories (Senda, 2025). The development of the NMMZ has thus been characterized by a persistent tension between the state's need for a unified national history and the diverse, often contradictory, heritage claims of local communities.

2.2.7 Community and Public Engagement Programmes

Recognising the limitations of fortress conservation, the NMMZ has pioneered community engagement initiatives such as the Community Museums Programme beginning around 2000, which allows minority groups to curate their own history. Manyanga (2006) cites the BaTonga Community Museum in Binga and the Nambya Museum in Hwange as vital steps toward cultural equity, democratising the museum space by letting locals serve as primary narrators rather than subjects of professional study. The NMMZ has also implemented public engagement strategies like Heritage Educational Programmes and the Adopt a Site initiative (Nyambiya et al., 2022), which incentivise rural communities to protect sites in exchange for tourism opportunities or development aid. UNESCO (2023) has hailed the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site Management Plan (2024–2028) as a benchmark for inclusive planning, as it incorporates traditional leaders, spiritual practitioners, and local business owners. However, Tevera (2024) argues that many programs fall into consultation as ritual, where stakeholders are informed of decisions already made by NMMZ professionals rather than being true co managers. Because the NMMZ Act lacks a specific legal requirement for public consultation, Southalan (2023) notes that engagement programs depend on the goodwill of individual managers or international donor requirements, creating an unsustainability of inclusion where community involvement peaks during a project's funding cycle but fades after the project ends. This study therefore evaluates whether the NMMZ's recent digital documentation and decentralisation efforts represent genuine power sharing or a continuation of expert led tokenism.

2.3 Review of Heritage Governance and Consultation in Zimbabwe

The National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, established under the National Museums and Monuments Act [Chapter 25:11], serves as the principal state authority for cultural resource management. However, academic discourse suggests that the transition from its colonial predecessor the 1972 Rhodesia Act to a post-colonial, inclusive model remains a contested process. Scholars argue that the institution has inherited structural and philosophical legacies that continue to influence its approach to public consultation and the representativeness of national heritage.

2.3.1 Institutional Origins and the Politics of Representation

A significant point of contention in Zimbabwean scholarship is the perceived monumentalist bias in the NMMZ's heritage register. Ndoro (2001) and Chirikure and Pwiti (2008) argue that the colonial era legislation forming the bedrock of the current Act was designed to prioritise physical stone structures over the living, intangible values of indigenous communities. This is reflected in the National Monuments Register, where Chirikure (2013) observes that approximately 38% of declared sites relate to Rhodesian or Portuguese colonial history. Mawere (2015) identifies this disparity as a politics of exclusion, where the state sanctioned list fails to mirror the diverse cultural identities of the Zimbabwean public. Without a more inclusive listing process that involves local community values, the NMMZ risks maintaining a frozen version of history that alienates the very people it seeks to serve. This listing bias serves as a primary driver for inclusive consultation, as Manyanga (2006) notes, because it highlights whose history is deemed national and whose remains peripheral.

2.3.2 The Statutory Gap and Professional Hegemony

A major hurdle in the literature is the lack of statutory anchoring for public consultation within the NMMZ Act. Mwarora (2025) notes that while the Act provides powers for statutory control and protection, it remains silent on mandatory stakeholder forums or community feedback mechanisms. Taruvinga (2022) finds that, unlike contemporary SADC heritage laws such as South Africa's National Heritage Resources Act, Zimbabwe does not legally require the NMMZ to consult before management decisions. Sibanda and Chiripanhura (2024) refer to this institutional culture as professional hegemony, where curators and archaeologists act as sole gatekeepers of heritage knowledge, treating communities as passive beneficiaries. Because consultation is not legally required, Chirikure (2013) argues engagements are often ritualistic or project based, triggered by donor requirements rather than institutional policy. The ICCROM (2019) review highlights that heritage protection in Zimbabwe is frequently superseded by the Mines and Minerals Act, where extractive interests are legally prioritised over cultural conservation, bypassing community voices in favour of national economic extraction.

2.3.3 Challenges in Operationalizing Consultation

Recent scholarship emphasizes that even when the NMMZ initiates engagement, several operational challenges hinder its effectiveness. Li et al. (2024) and Banda et al. (2024) argue that the absence of formal feedback loops and monitoring systems means that community input rarely reaches the decision-making level. While there are institutional moves toward decentralization, King (2023) notes that resource constraints and staff shortages at the district level often result in consultation events being one-time workshops that lack long-term sustainability. Scholars argue that for consultation to be meaningful, it must move beyond "information sharing" and toward a model of "collaborative stewardship" where local custodians have a genuine say in the management of sacred and sites.

2.4 Gap Analysis: Rationale for the Study

Based on the review of global, regional, and national literature, the following gaps in knowledge have been identified, which this study seeks to address:

1. **The Procedural Gap:** While scholars have critiqued the colonial and top-down nature of the NMMZ (Ndoro, 2001; Mawere, 2015), there is a lack of empirical research mapping the actual procedures of consultation across its five administrative regions. Most studies offer theoretical critiques; this research provides empirical data on how consultation is operationalized daily.
2. **The Sustainability Gap:** Literature suggests that engagement is often tied to donor-funded cycles (UNESCO, 2023). There is a gap in understanding how consultation can be institutionalized within the NMMZ to survive beyond the funding lifecycle of specific projects.
3. **The Feedback Loop Gap:** Existing research highlights the absence of community influence but does not detail the specific mechanisms for handling stakeholder feedback. This study investigates the transparency and effectiveness of internal feedback processes.
4. **The Representation Gap:** While minority representation is discussed generally there is little scholarship on how specific demographics women, youth, and rural custodians perceive the efficacy and sincerity of the NMMZ's consultation platforms.

2.5 Chapter Summary

The theoretical and empirical groundwork for investigating the function of public consultation in NMMZ cultural heritage conservation has been laid out in this chapter. The study deploys the Stakeholder and Participatory Theories to evaluate the effectiveness of the NMMZ's public consultation mechanisms, specifically by analyzing the power dynamics between state heritage

professionals and local communities and determining if current engagement strategies move beyond symbolic tokenism toward genuine collaborative stewardship. While public consultation in heritage governance is widely acknowledged, there are still a number of gaps, especially in African contexts and within state heritage agencies like NMMZ, according to a review of the literature conducted at the international, continental and national levels. These gaps highlight the necessity of the study's focus, which is to examine contemporary practices and trends, assess consultation efforts, and offer tactics and policy suggestions to improve inclusive heritage conservation through public consultation in Zimbabwe. The methodology for examining consultation within NMMZ is introduced in the upcoming chapter, which will then be followed by a discussion of the empirical results.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the research design and methodology used in this study. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the role of public consultation in achieving inclusive community-centered cultural heritage conservation at the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe and to propose strategies for strengthening participatory governance. The study adopted a qualitative case study design, which is appropriate for generating an in-depth, context-rich understanding of the complex social dynamics, institutional behaviours and power relations that characterise the NMMZ's engagement with its diverse stakeholders. This chapter provides a detailed account of the research design, methodology, population and sampling techniques, data collection instruments and procedures, measures to ensure trustworthiness, the data presentation and analysis plan, and the ethical considerations that informed this study.

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative case study design. A research design is the logical plan for linking the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and to its conclusions (Yin, 2017). It is the blueprint for the entire research process. This design is ideally suited to the research problem because it allows for an in-depth and multifaceted exploration of a complex, contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. A case study design is the most appropriate tool for investigating institutional practices, especially where the boundaries between heritage management and the lived context of community life are not clearly evident. The NMMZ, as a single bounded system, constitutes the case for this study. It is a specific national heritage organisation with its own Act, administrative culture, and history. This design

enables the researcher to draw upon multiple sources of evidence, which in this study are semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. The aim is to build a holistic portrait of the consultation ecosystem. This approach moves beyond measuring the frequency of consultation to understanding its quality, meaning, and impact from the perspectives of heritage professionals, a policy maker, and community members. This is essential for applying Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Participation as an evaluative tool. Similar case study designs have been effectively used in Zimbabwean heritage governance research; for example, Sagiya (2019) used this approach to explore the administration of archaeological heritage in Hwange district, demonstrating the value of this design for examining marginalised voices and institutional failures.

3.2 Research Methodology

A research methodology is the systematic, theoretical analysis of the methods applied to a field of study. It comprises the principles and processes that guide the research. The methodology for this study was constructed to focus explicitly on two issues: the level of community agency within the NMMZ's operational structure and the power dynamics between the institution and its various publics. This focus comes directly from the theoretical framework, which incorporates the Participatory Theory of Arnstein (1969) and the Stakeholder Theory of Freeman (1984). The methodology is divided into an empirical and a non-empirical component to ensure a comprehensive investigation.

3.2.1 Empirical Study using Primary Data

The empirical dimension of this study was qualitative in nature. Primary data was gathered directly from the field using a single instrument: semi-structured key informant interviews. This approach is justified because the research objectives are not concerned with measuring statistical frequencies; rather, they are concerned with capturing the depth of meaning and the

texture of institutional relationships focusing on the qualitative gap between policy rhetoric and lived experience. This primary data forms the evidential core of the study providing direct, unfiltered voices from the heritage landscape. These voices are then triangulated against the secondary literature and the documentary analysis of the NMMZ Act.

3.2.2 Non-empirical Study

A non-empirical study was conducted to complement the fieldwork. This involved a philosophical and conceptual analysis of the National Museums and Monuments Act [Chapter 25:11]. This component was essential for addressing a core finding from the literature review: the existence of a critical Statutory Gap in public participation. The documentary analysis involved a close, critical reading of the Act to identify provisions for or silences on public notification, public hearings, stakeholder nomination of sites, and community-based management. The study analysed the language, scope, and omissions of the Act to establish how the legal architecture itself enables or constrains the participatory ideals advocated by the theoretical framework. This non-empirical analysis provided the structural context without which the empirical data on institutional practice could not be fully understood, linking the lived experiences of stakeholders to the formal, legal rules of the game.

3.3 Population and Sample

The target population comprised all individuals and groups with a direct stake in the management and conservation of cultural heritage under the NMMZ. This diverse population included NMMZ professionals such as directors, curators, and archaeologists responsible for technical and administrative governance; traditional leaders and spirit mediums who hold ancestral and spiritual authority over sacred landscapes; ordinary residents of heritage-rich districts like Mazowe, whose daily lives and livelihoods intersect with national monuments and a policymaker from local government. A sample of seven key informants was purposively

selected from this target population. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique defined by the deliberate selection of participants based on specific characteristics or knowledge relevant to the research objectives (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Informants were not chosen at random; they were strategically selected because they possess a direct ancestral, professional, or experiential stake in the heritage sites and consultation processes under investigation. The sample was structured to ensure representation from the primary stakeholder categories identified by Stakeholder Theory:

- NMMZ officials (representing the institutional and expert perspective),
- Community custodians and members (representing local and indigenous epistemologies), and
- A policy maker (representing the governance perspective).

The selection criteria included a minimum of five years of direct involvement with NMMZ sites for professionals, or long-term residency for community members, ensuring the data was grounded in deep and longitudinal experience. The final sample size of seven was determined by the principle of data saturation, the point at which new interviews ceased to yield substantially new themes (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006).

3.4 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data was collected using a single primary instrument semi-structured interviews and triangulated with documentary evidence to enhance the richness and trustworthiness of the findings. Triangulation across sources is a core strategy for establishing credibility in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each data collection instrument is described separately below.

3.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The primary data collection instrument was the semi-structured key informant interview. A semi-structured interview uses a flexible interview guide containing a set of open-ended questions and prompts, allowing the researcher to probe deeply into emerging themes while maintaining focus on the research objectives. An interview guide was developed based on the themes in the theoretical framework, and it was flexibly adapted to the expertise and position of each respondent. Interviews were conducted in the language preferred by each participant. The two NMMZ professionals (P1 and P2) and the policy maker (P7) were interviewed entirely in English, as they were comfortable with technical and policy terminology in that language. The community members (P3, P4, P5, and P6) were interviewed predominantly in Shona, their mother tongue, to allow them to express complex cultural and spiritual values naturally. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The recordings were later transcribed verbatim. For interviews conducted in Shona, the transcriptions were first produced in Shona and then carefully translated into English for analysis. The researcher, a native Shona speaker, performed the translation, and a back-translation of selected portions was carried out by a colleague to check for loss of meaning, as recommended by Squires (2009). Detailed written notes were taken during and immediately after the interview and these notes were treated as data. All transcribed data were anonymised and stored securely.

3.5 Validity and Reliability (Trustworthiness)

In qualitative research, validity and reliability are reconceptualised as trustworthiness which is established through the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Several rigorous strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and findings. Data triangulation was systematically applied as evidence was collected from multiple stakeholder categories (NMMZ professionals,

community members, and a policy maker) and was cross-referenced with the documentary analysis of the NMMZ Act and the scholarly literature reviewed in Chapter Two. This multi-source triangulation provided a multidimensional view of the phenomenon strengthening both the credibility and confirmability of the conclusions.

3.6 Data Presentation and Analysis

The qualitative data generated by the study was analysed using a thematic approach. Thematic analysis entailed a systematic process of coding the data from the transcribed interviews according to emerging themes. In this context, a theme is an abstract construct that the researcher identifies before, during, and after data collection, capturing something important about the data in relation to the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were developed deductively from the relevant literature and the theoretical framework including concepts like Professional Hegemony, the Statutory Gap, and Arnstein's Ladder and inductively from the text recorded during the interviews. The transcribed text was coded into nodes using a word processor and the theoretical framework was applied as a lens to interpret the power dynamics and structural barriers at play.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The conduct of this research was governed by strict ethical principles designed to protect the rights and well-being of all participants. Informed consent was obtained prior to every interview. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their absolute right to withdraw at any point without penalty. The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were paramount; all quotes presented in Chapter Four use codes (P1–P7) and have been stripped of direct personal identifiers to protect informants, particularly those who might be vulnerable to professional censur. Audio recordings were stored on a password-protected device and access to raw data was restricted to the researcher

and the supervisor and transcriptions are not attached here because of data protection ethics. The study also operated with a principle of cultural respect, observing the norms and protocols of traditional leadership when engaging with participants.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the comprehensive methodology deployed to investigate the role of public consultation in cultural heritage conservation at the NMMZ. The qualitative case study design was justified as the appropriate framework for an in-depth exploration of contemporary institutional practices within their real-life context. The methodology was guided by Participatory and Stakeholder Theories and combined an empirical study using semi-structured interviews with a non-empirical analysis of the NMMZ Act. The chapter detailed the purposive sampling of seven key informants, explained the single-instrument data collection procedure (with attention to language and translation), and described the rigorous strategies for ensuring trustworthiness. This methodological framework lays the groundwork for the empirical findings presented and analysed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses, and discusses the empirical findings from semi-structured interviews conducted with two NMMZ professionals (P1, P2), four community members (P3, P4, P5, P6), and a government policy maker (P7). The data were gathered to answer the study's research objectives: to explore current conservation practices and challenges, examine the role and significance of public consultation, evaluate existing consultation initiatives, and identify pathways for strengthening inclusive heritage governance. A thematic analysis approach was employed, and the findings are triangulated with the literature and theoretical models from Chapter Two. The chapter is structured according to three primary themes that emerged from the data. For each theme, the raw data (direct quotations from participants) are presented first, followed by an analysis and discussion that interprets the findings using Participatory Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and the scholarly literature.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Participants

The seven participants were purposively selected to capture a cross-section of expertise and lived experience. The sample comprised five males and two females. This gender imbalance reflects the current reality within the senior technical and directorial levels of the NMMZ, where positions are predominantly held by men and within traditional community leadership structures which are often male-dominated. Despite this, a deliberate effort was made to include female voices (a primary school teacher, an elderly woman and a youth community member) to capture gendered perspectives on heritage engagement. The participants' ages ranged from the early twenties to approximately sixty-five years, ensuring both youth perspectives on

cultural transmission and the deep institutional memory of senior professionals and elders. Table 4.1 below summarises the demographic profile of the key informants.

Table 4.1: Demographic Profile of Key Informants

Code	Category	Designation/Profile	Gender	Age Group
P1	NMMZ Professional	Staff	Male	45–55
P2	NMMZ Professional	Expert	Male	40–50
P3	Community Member	Teacher	Female	30–40
P4	Community Member	Youth	Female	20–25
P5	Community Member	Elder	Female	60–65
P6	Community Member	Youth	Male	20–25
P7	Policy Maker	Expert	Male	40–50

4.2 Current Practices and Challenges in Heritage Conservation

This theme addresses the first research objective: to explore current trends, practices, and systemic challenges in cultural heritage conservation under the NMMZ.

4.1.1 Technical Proficiency and the Documentation Process

The raw data reveals a deeply institutionalised procedure for heritage documentation. When asked to describe the current conservation practices (P1) detailed the standardised documentary protocol:

> *The first process of conservation is documentation. ... We record that, and then we ensure that each site gets a site number. And after a site number, it gets a form ... so that anyone who wants to trace it can trace it back. ... Grid references, the site descriptions ... everything which gives the site a unique identity.* (P1, Interview, 5 May 2025)

A community member confirmed that this technical work is largely unknown at the local level. A primary school teacher from Mazowe (P3) stated:

> *Most of the time we only hear about heritage issues when there is a problem. Like when a sacred site is threatened by mining or construction. There is little direct outreach to ordinary villagers.* (P3, Interview, 5 May 2025)

The policy maker (P7) reinforced the institutional view, defining the NMMZ as "the legal custodian of our culture and heritage. They are the technical experts responsible for the physical upkeep and protection of cultural heritage sites."

P1's words powerfully illustrate the professional culture within NMMZ. The technical act of cataloguing is equated with the primary act of conservation. Through the lens of the theoretical framework, this shared understanding enforces a form of Professional Hegemony wherein the curator or archaeologist serves as the sole gatekeeper of value and significance. The focus on grid references, site numbers, and unique identities reflects a persistent monumentalist bias (Ndoro, 2001). The heritage object is treated as a stand-alone scientific specimen, divorced

from its social and spiritual context. While this scientific precision is essential for a national register, it effectively sidelines the intangible values, oral histories, and living traditions that local custodians associate with the site. P3's testimony starkly reveals the consequence: a community that only hears about "heritage issues" when a "sacred site" is threatened by mining thereby indicating a complete absence of proactive outreach. This demonstrates that conservation in Zimbabwe remains a largely expert-led technical exercise, a legacy of the colonial administrative frameworks discussed by Pwiti and Ndoro (1999).

4.1.2 The Challenge of Centralization and Elite Centrism

A major structural challenge identified by stakeholders is the NMMZ's urban-centred operational model. P1 offered a candid critique of this flaw:

> *NMMZ does not spread to the districts or to where the heritage is. It is … centered in towns. … We are not devolved to the district level. That is the first shortcoming which the institution has.* (P1, Interview, 5 May 2025)

The policy maker corroborated this reality, acknowledging that *"Often, we end up speaking with traditional leaders or specific vocal stakeholders. The average community member might feel left out, which is a gap I acknowledge we need to bridge."* (P7, Interview, 5 May 2025)

This evidence exposes a critical operational gap that fundamentally challenges any attempt at inclusive community-based heritage management. Applying Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Participation, this spatial and bureaucratic distance makes it almost impossible to progress beyond the bottom rungs of non-participation or tokenism. When the institution's personnel and decision-making power are locked in distant urban offices, community members must navigate a complex and foreign bureaucratic system to have their voices heard, a process that inherently disempowers them and sustains the "them and us" divide. This finding provides the

empirical evidence for the "politics of exclusion" described by Mawere (2015): the state-sanctioned heritage management system fails to reflect the diverse, localized cultural identities of the nation because it is structurally absent from the localities.

4.1.3 Skills Flight and Human Resource Instability

A persistent challenge of human resource instability compounds the problem of centralization. P2, the Director of the Eastern Region, articulated the deep concern surrounding staff turnover: *"Staff turnover … bothers us. Training a curator who understands the nitty gritty takes time. And yet you can lose them overnight."* (P2, Interview, 5 May 2025). The phrase "understands the nitty gritty" is significant; it implies a level of tacit, experiential knowledge that goes beyond formal academic training, including local community dynamics, site-specific histories, and unofficial oral narratives. When such an individual leaves, the institution loses a repository of social capital and community relationships essential for building trust and facilitating genuine consultation. This challenge of skills flight is not unique to NMMZ, it is a common theme in African heritage management literature (King, 2023) but it renders community engagement an unpredictable, personality-driven endeavour rather than an institutionalised, systems-based practice. The constant cycle of training and loss disrupts the long-term relationships necessary to move from Tokenism to Citizen Power on Arnstein's ladder; trust cannot be built with a revolving door of institutional representatives.

4.1.4 Resource Constraints and Competing Development Pressures

Beyond institutional structure and human resources, severe resource constraints and competing development interests were identified as fundamental systemic strains. P7, the government councillor, outlined these intertwined pressures with stark clarity:

> *"The primary hurdle is resource constraints. It's hard to prioritize heritage issues when there are immediate needs like roads and water. Additionally, there is a clash*

> *of interests between modern urban development and the need to protect ancient historical sites."* (P7, Interview, 5 May 2025)

P2 similarly noted that *"Government is the main funder ... heritage is competing with other priorities. So ... the share of the cake we get may not be adequate."* (P2, Interview, 5 May 2025). These admissions situate heritage conservation within the broader national development dilemma. When a government must choose between funding a new water project and conserving a rock art site, heritage loses out. The "clash of interests" is not merely a local conflict; it is a structural battle in which the legal frameworks for mining and infrastructure often carry more political and economic weight than the NMMZ Act. This finding triangulates with literature that highlights how the Mines and Minerals Act frequently supersedes heritage legislation (Sagiya, 2019). The policy maker's words reveal that heritage is not just neglected; it is actively triaged to the bottom of the priority list.

4.2 Role and Significance of Public Consultation in Inclusive Conservation

This theme addresses the second research objective: to examine the role and significance of public consultation in fostering inclusive heritage conservation.

4.2.1 Consultation as Information Extraction

The primary finding under this theme is that public consultation is strategically deployed as a tool for extracting specific data from communities, with decision-making power remaining exclusively with the professionals. P1 described the interaction in purely instrumental terms:

> *"Public consultation is part of the documentation process. We involve them for information extraction mostly. It is because we need information. But the scientific processes of restoration reside mostly with curators."* (P1, Interview, 5 May 2025)

The policy maker's perspective further illuminates how this plays out: *"Current policies provide a formal framework for consultation ... However, they can be a bit top down. ... the bureaucracy involved sometimes makes the process feel more like just a formality."* (P7, Interview, 5 May 2025)

This is a direct and unambiguous articulation of how consultation currently functions. The phrase "information extraction" is critical: it frames the community not as a partner with inherent rights and agency, but as a passive data source to be mined. On Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Participation, this is a textbook example of the lower rungs Manipulation or, at best, Informing which constitute non-participation. The community provides information but has absolutely no power to influence how that information is used or interpreted. P7's candid assessment confirms that even from the government's side, the legally mandated consultation is perceived as a rigid, bureaucratic exercise, a ritual of informing rather than a dialogue for shared decision-making. Stakeholder Theory would identify this as a failure to grant legitimacy to the most primary of stakeholders: the communities with ancestral and spiritual links to the sites.

4.2.2 The "Them and Us" Divide

The instrumental nature of this interaction has created a recognised social and operational divide between the institution and the community. P2, despite being a senior insider, acknowledged this unhealthy dichotomy and articulated a vision for change: *"We should actually do programming together with the communities. That way they feel they are a part of what we are doing. So that we bridge the 'them and us' divide."* (P2, Interview, 5 May 2025). The phrase "so that they feel they are a part" powerfully indicates that communities explicitly do *not* feel part of the institution's work. This "them and us" division is the logical outcome of the information extraction model: the community is the "them" the outsider, the subject, the

data source while the NMMZ is the "us" the insider, the expert, the decision-maker. P2's aspiration for "joint programming" aligns perfectly with the principles of collaborative stewardship advocated in global scholarship (Cunha Ferreira et al., 2024) and directly challenges the institutional status quo. Shenjere-Nyabezi et al. (2024) demonstrated the success of such an approach in north-western Zimbabwe, where involving Nambya communities as knowledge producers dismantled barriers and fostered pride, showing that a path forward exists.

4.2.3 The Significance of Consultation Revealed Through Crises

The true significance of continuous public consultation is paradoxically revealed by its absence during times of crisis. P3, the teacher from Mazowe, captured the reactive nature of the relationship:

> *"Most of the time we only hear about heritage issues when there is a problem. Like when a sacred site is threatened by mining or construction. There is little direct outreach to ordinary villagers."* (P3, Interview, 5 May 2025)

This testimony reveals the ultimate cost of a non-participatory system. A "sacred site" is, by its nature, sacred; its location is often known only to traditional custodians. The fact that the community and the NMMZ fail to communicate until this site is "threatened by mining" is a catastrophic systemic failure. Without a legally mandated, trust-based consultation mechanism, the NMMZ is often the last to know about a threat, making proactive protection impossible. The "little direct outreach to ordinary villagers" means there are no trusted communication channels, no established feedback loops, and no early warning system. This reactive posture is the direct antithesis of sustainable heritage management, proving that consultation is not a bureaucratic luxury but a frontline tool for site protection.

4.3 Evaluation of Existing Consultation Initiatives and Institutional Structures

This theme addresses the third research objective: to evaluate the effectiveness, limitations, and sustainability of existing consultation initiatives within NMMZ.

4.3.1 The Unsustainability of Goodwill-Based Programs

The NMMZ has pioneered community-facing programs such as "Adopt a Site." However, an evaluation of their operational basis reveals a critical structural deficiency. P1 explained the precarious nature of these initiatives:

> *"We have programs like Adopt a Site. We ask schools or communities to take care of heritage sites. Sometimes for a fee, sometimes for gratuities. But the problem is consultation is presently carried out as goodwill. It is not mandatory."* (P1, Interview, 6 May 2025)

The core of the problem lies in the final clause: "It is not mandatory." This confirms the sustainability gap identified in the literature review. The act of consulting or partnering with a community is legally framed as institutional goodwill an optional, revocable privilege rather than a legally enforceable right. The provision of "a fee" or "gratuities" frames the community relationship as a transactional one of hired labour, not a partnership of co-custodians. This makes the programs dependent on the personal disposition of the Regional Manager or the availability of donor funds the very definition of an unsustainable model. Mawere et al. (2012) documented this exact failure at Chibvumani National Monument, where the Adopt-a-Site program by-passed traditional leadership, leading to vandalism and community discontent.

4.3.2 The Statutory Gap as the Primary Obstacle

The lack of a legal mandate for consultation constitutes the primary systemic obstacle to inclusive heritage governance. P1 highlighted this critical flaw in the legal architecture:

> *"The structure of the Act does not place the responsibility of nomination to the public. We don't do public hearings. The public might wake up tomorrow and we have a national monument within their midst. And they are not even aware."* (P1, Interview, 5 May 2025)

P7, the councillor intimately familiar with the legislative process, provided detailed context on the stalled efforts to rectify this: "NMMZ started a formal review in August 2014 to align the 1972 colonial Act with the new Constitution of Zimbabwe. The process reached the public consultation stage, with provincial hearings beginning in Manicaland in Sept 2014. … Review began 2014 but Act still not repealed/replaced as of 2026. Last amendment was 2001." He identified the "outdated colonial framework" and the "slow legislative pipeline" as key hurdles, noting that *"the 1972 Act has no mechanism for meaningful public participation, which the new Constitution requires."* (P7, Interview, 5 May 2025)

This is a devastating indictment of the governance framework. The "wake up to a national monument" scenario is not an exaggeration; it is a legally permissible reality under the current Act. P7's testimony systematically confirms that the statutory gap is an active, prolonged policy failure a legislative deadlock that has persisted for over a decade, leaving the public without any legal right to participate. This vividly demonstrates the complete absence of Citizen Power at the highest level of heritage decision-making, as Sagiya and Fontein (2022) detail in their account of the historical exclusion of local communities at Great Zimbabwe National Monument.

4.3.3 The Act's Inability to Encompass Modern Heritage

The limitations of the NMMZ Act extend beyond procedural flaws to a conceptual poverty in the very definition of heritage. P2 articulated this limitation with policy expertise:

> *"The NMMZ Act is limited both in terms of the scope and the language of the Act itself. It cannot cover heritage in its diversity. There is no explicit reference to liberation heritage. There is no explicit reference to intangible cultural heritage."* (P2, Interview, 5 May 2025)

This finding uncovers a representation gap that is legally codified at the highest level. The foundational law fails to explicitly protect the physical sites of the liberation struggle, and the complete absence of "intangible cultural heritage" confirms that the Act remains trapped in a colonial monumentalist bias (Ndoro, 2001). By law, what the state can protect as heritage is a physical thing; this delegitimises the practices, performances, oral traditions, and indigenous knowledge systems that form the bedrock of why communities value a site. This legal myopia means that when a sacred forest is destroyed by mining, the state can only legally assess the loss of physical trees, not the profound rupture of a community's spiritual identity, as Sagiya (2019) demonstrated in Hwange.

4.3.4 The Call for Decentralised Mandates

In response to these identified failures, a clear policy proposal emerged from the government side. P7 articulated a reform vision that would fundamentally redistribute power:

> *"I would propose decentralizing the NMMZ's authority. We need policies that mandate Ward Level Heritage Committees. If we move the decision making power closer to the people living next to these sites, participation becomes natural rather than a forced exercise."* (P7, Interview, 5 May 2025)

This proposal is a direct antidote to the "top down" and "formality" critiques. It envisions a structural shift from an urban-centric elite model to a devolved, community-embedded one. The concept of "Ward Level Heritage Committees" would legally mandate representation at

the smallest administrative unit, transforming participation from an act of goodwill into a "natural" governance function. This aligns with the highest rungs of Arnstein's Ladder delegated power and citizen control. The quote demonstrates that even within the policy-making establishment, there is a clear understanding that sustainable inclusion requires legal and structural decentralization, though it has been trapped in a frozen legislative pipeline for over a decade.

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented and analysed the core empirical findings from the seven key informant interviews. The evidence confirms a deep paradox within the NMMZ: a high degree of technical proficiency in documentation is coupled with severe social isolation. Conservation is hindered by an elite-centred, urban-centric operational model, a critical skills flight problem, severe resource constraints, and constant development pressures. Public consultation is reduced to a tool of information extraction and bureaucratic formality, perpetuating a damaging "them and us" divide and relegating communities to the bottom rungs of Arnstein's Ladder. The evaluation of existing initiatives demonstrates that their fundamental flaw is a lack of sustainability, as they are acts of goodwill rather than mandates grounded in a statutory framework. The archaic NMMZ Act itself was identified as the primary root obstacle to inclusive conservation, suffering from procedural failings, excluding modern heritage categories, and remaining in legislative deadlock since 2014. However, a clear path forward exists in the form of proposed ward-level decentralization. The next chapter will synthesize these findings into conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter brings the dissertation to its logical conclusion. It produces the key findings, draws evidence based conclusions, and proposes actionable recommendations for the reform of cultural heritage administration and governance in Zimbabwe. The study set out to investigate how public consultation can enhance cultural heritage conservation at the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ). This purpose has guided every stage of the research process. The chapter begins with a summary that situates the entire study, including its aim, objectives, theoretical frameworks, methodology, and key findings. Based on this summary, conclusions are drawn that are directly aligned with the four research objectives. The conclusions provide clear and defensible answers to the research questions. The chapter then puts forward a set of practical, targeted recommendations that speak directly to the statutory gap, the institutional culture, and the operational challenges identified. The chapter concludes by identifying promising areas for further research. The ultimate purpose is to move from analysis to action, translating the empirical evidence into a coherent plan for embedding public consultation as the bedrock of a sustainable and inclusive cultural heritage conservation framework for Zimbabwe.

5.1 Summary of the Study

This study was perceived against the backdrop of a global paradigm shift in heritage management from expert led, state centric models towards inclusive, people centred governance. International frameworks such as the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, the ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites, and the

ICCROM People Centred Approaches framework all advocate for meaningful public participation in heritage decision making. In the African context, scholars such as Ndoro (2001), Chirikure and Pwiti (2008), and Mawere (2015) have consistently critiqued the persistence of colonial era monumentalist biases and the marginalisation of local communities from the management of their ancestral heritage. In Zimbabwe, the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ), established under the NMMZ Act [Chapter 25:11], is the premier statutory body responsible for the protection of over 14,000 archaeological and historical sites and five national museums. Despite its mandate, scholarship has long critiqued the NMMZ for its top down, elite centred operational culture and the absence of legally mandated mechanisms for public participation.

The aim of this research was to evaluate the role of public consultation in achieving inclusive, community centred cultural heritage conservation at the NMMZ, and to propose strategies for strengthening participatory governance. Four research objectives guided the study: (1) to explore current trends, practices, and challenges in cultural heritage conservation under the NMMZ; (2) to examine the role and significance of public consultation in fostering inclusive conservation and community participation; (3) to evaluate existing consultation initiatives within the NMMZ, assessing their effectiveness, limitations, and sustainability; and (4) to propose practical strategies and policy recommendations for strengthening public consultation in cultural heritage conservation in Zimbabwe. Corresponding research questions were posed to address each of these objectives.

The study was anchored in a dual theoretical framework comprising Participatory Theory and Stakeholder Theory. Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Participation provided an evaluative tool for measuring the depth of community agency, while Freeman's (1984) Stakeholder Theory enabled the identification and analysis of power dynamics among the various actors in the

heritage landscape. A qualitative case study design was adopted, treating the NMMZ as a single bounded system. Primary data were collected through semi structured interviews with a purposive sample of seven key informants: two NMMZ directors (representing the institutional and expert perspective), four community members from the heritage rich Mazowe area (representing local and indigenous epistemologies), and a local government councillor (representing the policy making perspective). These data were triangulated with a close conceptual analysis of the NMMZ Act and the scholarly literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The data were analysed using thematic analysis.

5.2 Summary of Research Findings

The study found that the NMMZ operates as a technically proficient organization with a globally recognized capacity for the scientific documentation and conservation of physical heritage. The first process of conservation is a rigorous system of documentation that gives each site a unique, traceable identity through site numbers, grid references, and detailed site descriptions. However, this institutional strength is profoundly undermined by deep and persistent social isolation. The NMMZ's operational model remains elite centred and concentrated in urban areas, leading to a critical structural shortcoming: the institution does not spread to the districts or to where the heritage actually resides. This centralization reinforces a professional hegemony in which curators and archaeologists act as the sole gatekeepers of heritage value. The challenge is compounded by a damaging cycle of skills flight, where the institution invests heavily in training a curator who understands the intricate local context, only to lose that expertise and social capital overnight.

The most significant finding concerns the nature of public consultation within the NMMZ. Despite theoretical and international policy commitments to participatory governance, consultation is practiced as a tool for information extraction. It primarily serves the technical

documentation process, with the scientific and decision making aspects of restoration residing exclusively with the experts. This instrumental approach has created an explicitly acknowledged "them and us" divide between the institution and the communities it serves, hindering genuine co management. The consequences of this reactive model are most visible during crises. Communities in Mazowe reported that they only hear about heritage issues when a secret site is threatened by mining or construction. This reveals a total absence of proactive, routine outreach to ordinary villagers, traditional custodians, and youth.

The evaluation of existing consultation initiatives revealed a fundamental problem of unsustainability. Programs like Adopt a Site are carried out as acts of institutional goodwill rather than as mandatory statutory obligations. Consultation is not legally required; therefore, it can be granted or withdrawn at the discretion of individual managers or according to the availability of donor funding. The 1972 NMMZ Act itself was identified as the primary structural obstacle to inclusive conservation. The Act's architecture places no responsibility for site nomination on the public, does not mandate public hearings, and provides no mechanism for community objections. A community can legally wake up to find a national monument declared within its midst without any prior awareness or consent. Furthermore, the Act is critically limited in its conceptual scope. It contains no explicit reference to liberation heritage or intangible cultural heritage, rendering it incapable of protecting the full diversity of Zimbabwe's national estate. Despite the initiation of a formal legislative review in 2014, which included provincial public consultations and the drafting of principles for a new Act, the NMMZ Act remains unrepealed and unreplaced as of 2026, trapped in a slow legislative pipeline.

5.3 Conclusions

The conclusions are drawn from the empirical findings and are structured in direct alignment with the four research objectives.

5.3.1 Objective 1: Current Practices and Challenges

The study concludes that heritage conservation under the NMMZ is characterized by a profound paradox. The institution demonstrates rigorous technical proficiency in the scientific documentation and cataloguing of physical heritage. However, this archival strength is systematically undercut by an elite centred, urban focused operational model that creates a deep structural distance between the authority and the heritage. The lack of institutional devolution to district level reinforces a culture of professional hegemony, where curators function as the sole arbiters of heritage significance. The persistent challenge of skills flight ensures that institutional knowledge, social capital, and community relationships are perpetually fragile. In its current form, the conservation model is technically sound within the archive but operationally and socially isolated in the field. This fracture renders the entire system vulnerable and reactive when confronted with threats from urban development, mining, and other extractive industries.

5.3.2 Objective 2: Role and Significance of Public Consultation

The study concludes that public consultation, as currently configured within the NMMZ, falls drastically short of fostering inclusive heritage conservation. Consultation is not structured as a mechanism for citizen power or genuine partnership. It is an instrument of information extraction, wherein community knowledge is mined to complete an expert led documentation process while the communities themselves gain absolutely no influence over management decisions or site interpretation. Measured against Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Participation, this practice occupies the lowest rungs of tokenism and non-participation. It has generated a damaging and explicitly recognized "them and us" divide between the institution and local

stakeholders. The significance of genuine, continuous consultation is paradoxically and tragically revealed only through its absence, as communities and the institution fail to communicate until a crisis, such as a mining incursion on a sacred site, is already underway. In its current form, consultation does not empower communities; it uses them as passive data sources.

5.3.3 Objective 3: Evaluation of Existing Consultation Initiatives

The study concludes that existing community engagement initiatives, such as the Adopt a Site program, are fundamentally unsustainable because they operate without a statutory foundation. These programs are acts of institutional goodwill rather than expressions of a legally mandated duty. Their existence and continuity depend precariously on the disposition of individual regional managers, the availability of donor funds, and the requirements of specific project cycles. The root cause of this unsustainability is the Statutory Gap in the 1972 NMMZ Act. The Act's silence on public hearings, community nomination rights, and mandatory feedback mechanisms means there is no legal obligation for the NMMZ to consult, and no legal right for the public to be heard. This legal vacuum is compounded by the Act's anachronistic conceptual scope, which explicitly excludes liberation heritage and intangible cultural heritage. Existing initiatives are therefore structurally and legally designed to be inconsequential, ephemeral, and incapable of delivering holistic, culturally sensitive conservation.

5.3.4 Objective 4: Strategies and Recommendations

Based on the totality of the evidence, the study concludes that the pathway towards genuinely inclusive heritage governance in Zimbabwe requires a multi-pronged reform agenda. The single most foundational step is comprehensive legislative reform of the NMMZ Act to make public consultation a mandatory, non-negotiable component of all heritage management processes, from site nomination to the development of management plans. This legal reform must be accompanied by a deliberate policy of institutional decentralisation, embedding

permanent heritage officers at the district level to build sustained, trust based relationships. Furthermore, a formal policy of language inclusivity is required to dismantle the linguistic barriers that perpetuate the "them and us" divide. Finally, the NMMZ must shift from an extractive consultation paradigm to a model of joint programming, collaboratively co creating heritage products with communities and thereby aligning heritage conservation with the innovation and industrialisation goals of Education 5.0.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following policy oriented recommendations are proposed. Each recommendation speaks directly to a specific gap identified in the empirical data.

5.4.1 Recommendation 1: Enact Comprehensive Legislative Reform

The most foundational step is to repeal and replace the 1972 National Museums and Monuments Act [Chapter 25:11] with a new statute that aligns with the Constitution of Zimbabwe and contemporary international best practice. The reform must address both procedural and conceptual deficiencies. Procedurally, the amended Act must mandate public notification in local languages and public hearings as non-negotiable, legally required steps for the nomination, declaration, and declassification of national monuments. It must legally devolve heritage management responsibilities and decision making authority to district level structures. It must formally and unambiguously recognise traditional leaders, spirit mediums, and community based heritage committees as statutory consultees with enforceable rights. Conceptually, the new Act must expand the legal definition of heritage to explicitly include liberation heritage sites, intangible cultural heritage practices, and cultural landscapes. Without this legal backing, all other strategies will remain optional acts of goodwill, vulnerable to institutional whim and political change.

5.4.2 Recommendation 2: Implement a Policy of Language Inclusivity

To dismantle the "them and us" divide that the data reveals as a major barrier to co management, the NMMZ must implement a formal, institution wide policy of language inclusivity. All official consultation meetings, outreach programs, public notices, and heritage interpretation materials must be conducted and disseminated in the primary local languages of the affected communities, specifically Shona, Ndebele, and other recognised minority languages as appropriate. This policy must move beyond simple translation of pre-determined messages. It must facilitate genuine, two way dialogue where community members, particularly elders and traditional custodians, can articulate complex spiritual and cultural values in their mother tongue without the filter of an interpreter. Language is a primary carrier of intangible cultural heritage and a fundamental tool of power. Making local languages the official medium of heritage discourse is a direct act of shifting power to communities and is a prerequisite for moving beyond tokenism on Arnstein's Ladder.

5.4.3 Recommendation 3: Drive Innovation through Joint Programming

In alignment with Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 doctrine, which prioritises innovation and industrialisation, the NMMZ must fundamentally re engineer its engagement model from information extraction to joint programming. This involves establishing collaborative platforms where communities, NMMZ curators, educators, and technology developers work together as equal partners to co create heritage products. Communities should be empowered and resourced to co-develop digital storytelling projects, augmented reality mobile tours, and interactive museum exhibits that narrate site histories explicitly from indigenous perspectives, using local languages and oral traditions. Traditional custodians and local educators should co design heritage based educational kits for integration into the local school curriculum, transforming artefacts, sites, and oral histories into commercially viable, culturally authentic outputs. This model simultaneously generates economic value for communities, preserves and

transmits heritage, fosters a genuine sense of shared ownership, and creates a sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem around heritage. The successful work of Shenjere Nyabezi et al. (2024) in north western Zimbabwe, which treated Nambya communities as knowledge partners rather than passive subjects, provides a practical precedent for this approach.

5.4.4 Recommendation 4: Enforce a Policy of Institutional Decentralisation

The empirical data clearly demonstrates that the NMMZ's urban centred, elite centric operational model is a primary structural barrier to inclusive conservation. To address this, the NMMZ, with support from the Ministry of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage, must enforce a policy of institutional decentralisation. This requires establishing permanent, district level heritage monitors based within the rural districts where the heritage sites are physically located. These officers should be recruited from, or have deep familiarity with, the local communities. Their core mandate must be proactive, continuous, and routine direct outreach to villagers, traditional leaders, local councils, schools, and youth groups, replacing the current reactive crisis management posture where the institution only appears when a problem has escalated. These district monitors would serve as the trusted, permanent human interface between the institution and the community, responsible for maintaining the feedback loops, early warning systems, and personal relationships that are currently entirely absent. This structural devolution is the only sustainable way to bridge the spatial and social divide identified in this study. It would ensure that the NMMZ is the first, not the last, to know about local developments affecting heritage, and it would institutionalise community relationships so that they do not evaporate with each instance of staff turnover.

5.5 Areas for Further Research

This study has identified two priority areas for further scholarly inquiry. First, research is needed into the social impact of emerging cloud based digital databases for heritage records in

Zimbabwe, examining whether they broaden access or reproduce existing power imbalances and language barriers. Second, a critical legal study is urgently required into the structural conflict between heritage legislation and extractive industry statutes, particularly the Mines and Minerals Act, to document the real world impact on both declared monuments and unregistered sacred sites in rural communities such as Mazowe. Both inquiries will build upon this dissertation's findings and contribute to the struggle for inclusive, protective heritage governance in Zimbabwe.

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