



# Heritage Impact Assessment: A Sustainable Tool for Historic Buildings and Sites Preservation in Ghana

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**Abstract. Purpose:** Historic buildings and sites are easily demolished for redevelopment without recourse to their importance and preservation.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** This study reviewed the literature to assess laws, policies and tools governing Historic Buildings and Sites Preservation (HBSP) and Town Planning policies in Ghana for sustainable cultural heritage preservation in the country.

**Findings:** The study realised lack of tools for HBSP and apparent disconnection between the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (GMMB) and the District Planning Authority (DPA).

**Research Limitation/Implications:** The study focused on historic buildings and sites preservation in Ghana.

**Practical Implication:** Recommends that Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) be adopted to the Ghanaian situation as the requirement for a permit with certification by Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (GMMB).

**Originality/Value:** This study developed the legal framework for Heritage Impact Assessment, Ghana Museums and Monuments Board and District Planning Authority indicating their roles that affect Historic Buildings and Sites Preservation in Ghana.

**Keywords:** Cultural heritage · Heritage impact assessment · Historic buildings and sites · Preservation · Sustainability

## 1 Introduction

Ghana has a rich and diversified culture, with different ethnic groups upholding different beliefs and values. Ghana's historic buildings and sites are manifested in three distinct eras namely, pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. It is becoming much easier to demolish these architectural heritage properties to be replaced by other redevelopments without options for preservation. For instance, many pre-colonial earth circular traditional buildings in the northern sector of Ghana are gradually being replaced with rectangular shaped buildings with totally different construction materials. Colonial buildings such as the Kumasihene's Palace at Adum, the ridge stilt and compound

houses are demolished with ease, especially in urban areas. These historic buildings and sites form part of Ghana's cultural heritage and a sustainable preservation mechanism is imminent. A sustainable tool for Historic Buildings and Sites Preservation (HBSP) is important in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 as efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage is strengthened through enhanced inclusive, participatory and integrated settlement planning and management (UN 2015). The UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) under Article 1 of the 1972 convention, defines cultural heritage as "architectural works, element or structures of an archaeological nature, monumental sculpture and painting, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combination of features, archaeological elements or constructions which are of outstanding universal worth from the perspectives of history, art, and science" (UNESCO General Conference 1972). If development is considered as an improvement in living conditions, then efforts to achieve long-term development must take into account the realm of culture (Sadowski 2017). HBSP promotes societal, environmental and economic development as it gives identity to towns and boosts tourism. Therefore, it requires policies and development models capable of sustainable preservation and respect for distinctiveness (UNESCO 2014). Over the past years, culture has evolved into diverse forms. This diversity is strongly influenced by the nature of the groups that encompass humans (Dragana 2009).

The notion of heritage is important for culture and development in so far as it contributes to the continual revalorization of cultures and identities and a pertinent drive for the transmission of expertise, skills and knowledge between generations (UNESCO 2014). Change in the surroundings or built environment is probably inevitable but it should not damage the Outstanding Universal Values of the heritage places, especially those on the World Heritage List. However, HBSP including the World Heritage Sites in Ghana leaves much to be desired since it is only a short-term reactive project-based initiative by site managers within communities (Fredholm 2016). This is because there is no clear management plan or tool, in addition to a lack of integration of heritage preservation, development planning and design.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana was the first nation to establish a Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and sanctioned the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1975. Ghana possesses several historic buildings and sites including, pre-colonial traditional buildings, colonial buildings and post-colonial buildings (10 years after independence). Ghana became a "State Party" after approving the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 1972), agreeing to ensure appropriate conservation, identification and protection of the heritage of the world (UNESCO 2011). UNESCO issues operational guidelines (OGs) to state parties, which state explicitly in paragraph 53 that the implementation of efficient control measures (scientific, legal, financial, policy, administrative) towards the management of World Heritage properties is the responsibility of the States Parties. These actions were adopted to protect and improve the integrity and/or authenticity of the property at the time of inscription in future items of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). Ghana faces obstacles such as lack of protection, management programs and legislative control measure. It also lacks adequately trained personnel and research on preservation tools for sustainable HBSP. Proper management and development of heritage require

a tool that focuses on the right balance for the preservation of architectural properties. Whereas the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (GMMB) is in charge of HBSP, the Planning Authority (PA) of the various Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) is in charge of development through the issuance of permits for new projects. A sustainable tool and collaboration between these entities would reduce the threat to historic buildings and sites in Ghana. Therefore, the present study attempts to review statutes enacted to sustain historic buildings and sites and identify the extent to which Ghana, as a State Party, has fulfilled its duty to domesticate the World Heritage Convention (1972) for sustainable HBSP.

## 2 Methods

In order to synthesize a holistic perspective for Ghana's sustainable development, this study reviews literature to assess tools, legislation, and policies guiding HBSP and town planning policies. The study attempts to answer the question: why is it easy to demolish architectural heritage property in Ghana? Therefore, the study reviews literature on preservation and management tool - Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA), legislation and administrative systems of bodies concerned with HBSP and town planning such as GMMB and PA of the MMDAs respectively. This article assesses the functions of GMMB, legal documents and development planning guidelines from 1960 to 2021.

### 2.1 Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA)

Sustainable preservation and management of architectural heritage properties including historic buildings and sites require assessment tools to identify and document threats and potentials for development. Historic Impact Assessments (HIA), which are applied to architectural heritage assets at the project or higher strategic levels, have become increasingly popular in recent years (HIA) (Pereira Roders and Hudson 2011, Pereira Roders et al. 2013, Rogers 2017). ICOMOS (2005) mission report indicates that management deficiencies and aggressive development form a significant part of threats to cultural heritage and recommended measures for effective management and preservation of such properties including HIA. Although the ICOMOS mission focused on threats to listed cultural world heritage properties, HIA could be useful for new developments too. UNESCO (2011) suggested HIA as a tool to support sustainable and continuous planning and design. HIA is a procedure that could be used for determining, communicating, forecasting and assessing the possible consequences of an ongoing or planned developmental policy on the community's heritage values, cultural life, institutions and resources. The HIA process' findings and conclusions are subsequently added to the overall planning and decision-making process, to minimize the unwanted consequences and boost positive outcomes (WHITRAP 2012). HIA emphasizes strategies that may change a specific cultural value or asset, and the study is limited to the cultural implications. Therefore, HIA serves as a sustainable tool to manage changes in historic buildings and sites as it identifies threats to heritage and recommends solutions for its preservation (Rogers 2017). HIA has a sequential flow (Fig. 1) used to maintain a high-level HBSP.

According to Rogers (2017), the HIA process begins with the identification of a potential threat or impact of a proposed development on heritage before data collection



**Fig. 1.** The HIA process is depicted in a flow chart. (Source: Rogers 2017)

to create a baseline against which findings may be monitored and compared before the project begins. This is followed by defining the significance of the property and identifying the physical attributes that embody the heritage value of the property. Subsequently, specific threats are identified to ascertain the direction of impacts to the development. Combining the detected threats with an assessment of the severity of expected repercussions can be used to determine the degree of impact. This is followed by designing a means of preserving the property which requires stakeholder inputs and feedbacks. Finally, a report is produced as a public document. It is interesting to note that Ghana does not have a standard practice for impact assessment of historic buildings and sites for development planning. However, there are laws and policies with regards to architectural heritage preservation as discussed in the next section.

## 2.2 Policy and Legislation Concerning the Preservation and Management of Architectural Heritage in Ghana

Cultural treasures especially historic buildings and sites in Ghana are being destroyed without considering their values to the society. The historic buildings, sites and monuments are representations of the past lessons and serve as examples for the present-day quality. Being mindful of the importance of cultural heritage, lawmakers in Ghana have enacted laws and policies for its preservation and management. This section (Table 1) presents some laws and policies in Ghana enacted from 1960 to 2021 on the preservation of the nation's cultural heritage.

The NLCD (387) National Museums Decree was revised by the Departments, Ministries, and Agencies (Funds Retention) Act, 2007 (Act 735). This act generally deals with the control of antiquities; duties and powers of the GMMB; meetings proceedings and remuneration; members of the board; officers and employees; accounts and audit. In detail, this decree spells out the procedure for the excavation and export of antiquities and seem more silent on HBSP. However, only Article 39 (4) of the 1992 Constitution

**Table 1.** Ghanaian legislation and strategies that take heritage preservation into account.

Item	Year	Legal document	Regulation/Law
1	1969	National Liberation Council Decree (NLCD) 387 National Museums Act	a. To preserve, equip, and run the National Museum; b. To maintain, create, equip and manage any other museums it deems appropriate; c. To conserve, repair, or restore any antiquity deemed to be of national importance; d. To examine and report on any issues on antiquity when requested by the Commissioner; e. To keep records of any antiquities it acquires or that come to its attention
2	1972	Executive Instrument (EI) 42	To protect European forts and castles along the coast
3	1992	Constitution	Article 39 (4) The state will make every effort to conserve and protect historical sites and artefacts

Source: Authors (2021)

spells out legislation that the state will make every effort to conserve and protect historical sites and artefacts. The rest are policies as outlined by Fredholm (2016) in Table 2 which consider issues on heritage in Ghana.

**Table 2.** Heritage concerns are addressed in Ghanaian policies and initiatives.

Entity	Year	Policy document about cultural heritage
National Development Planning Committee (NDPC): Socio-Economic Development	1996–2000	Coordinated Program of Economic and Social Development Policies Vision 2020
	2003–2012	The Coordinated Program for the Economic and Social Development of Ghana
	2006 – 2009	Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS II)
	2010–2013	Medium-term National Development Policy Framework

(continued)

**Table 2.** (continued)

Entity	Year	Policy document about cultural heritage
	2010–2016	The Coordinated Program of Economic and Social Development Policies Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda
National Commission On Culture (NCC): Development of Culture	2004	The Cultural Policy of Ghana. For the Promotion of Unity in Diversity
Ministry of Tourism (MoT): Development of Tourism	1996–2010	The 15-Year Tourism Development Plan
	2006–2010	National Tourism Policy, Seventh Draft
	2009–2012	National Tourism Marketing Strategy
	2013–2027	National Tourism Development Plan

Source: Fredholm (2016)

The common feature of these policies is mainly the diverse nature of Ghanaian festivals, traditions and culture, while HBSP is not mentioned. These policies demonstrate a lack of consistency across various development planning views. Historic buildings are a part of a country's cultural legacy and their preservation cannot be overemphasised as the next section looks at the history and legal framework.

### 2.3 History and Legal Framework of Cultural Heritage Preservation in Ghana

The quest to preserve her cultural heritage saw pre-independence efforts by the Gold Coast government to appoint a part-time curator (Thurstan Shaw) in 1937 to manage the nation's heritage at Achimota College (Kense 1990). Shaw's mandate expanded from collections of amateur archaeologists in the colonial era to broader conservation of antiquities and the restoration of architectural monuments which resulted in the establishment of the Monuments and Relics Commission (MRC) eleven years later (Myles 1989). The commission ensured that the forts and castles, together with some traditional buildings, were scheduled for preservation with some restoration works already started on the decaying Elmina and other castles along the coast. The increasing edge to preserve heritage by the Gold Coast government further resulted in the establishment of the Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings Division (AMHBD) under the leadership of A.W. Lawrence (Director of the MRC) in 1952 (Hyland 1995, Addo 2013). After being appointed as the director in 1951, Lawrence (an Archaeologist) was given the responsibility to set up the National, Regional Museums and the Archaeology departments (Currey 1990). The National Museum (NM) was then established to exhibit objects from diverse ethnic groups in Ghana and beyond to capture Ghana's first President, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's motto "unity in diversity", before independence (Kankpeyeng

and DeCorse 2004). Ghee (2015) recalls the establishment of the National Museum, beginning with the arrival of a British museum ethnographer, Harmann Justus Braunholtz, on the west coast of Africa in 1947. Braunholtz was on a two-month mission to survey the British colonies namely the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, the Gambia and Nigeria to advise the governments regarding the heritage “preservation of West African antiquities”. His recommendation realized the construction of the National Museum (NM) building in Accra, which was commissioned on 5th March 1957. It was not until 1957 when the Gold Coast ordinance 20 merged with the MRC and the NM to form the Ghana Museums and Monument Board (GMMB) (Kankpeyeng and DeCorse 2004, Gavua 2015) under the National Museums Ordinance of 1957 with the organogram in Fig. 2. In 1969, the 1957 Ordinance was revoked and supplanted by the National Liberation Council Decree, (NLCD 387). The GMMB now operates offices in seven of Ghana’s sixteen regions (Volta, Greater Accra, Central, Western, Upper West, Ashanti and Upper East regions).

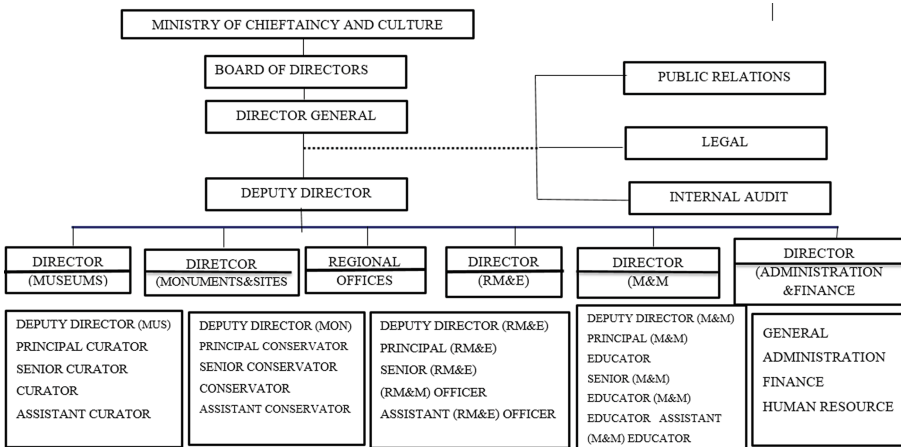


Fig. 2. Ghana Museums and Monuments Board Organogram. (Source: Ordinance 1957)

The GMMB, to date, is mandated to preserve and restore heritage sites in Ghana. GMMB currently has its head office in Accra (Kuntaa 2012) making it more centralized in all its endeavours. The GMMB is a statutory body, is empowered by the NLCD (387) and Executive instruments 118 of 1969, 42 of 1972 and 29 of 1973. The board is made up of two major divisions namely: the Monuments and Sites Division (MSD) and the Museum’s Division (MD). The MSD is of utmost interest in this study due to its responsibility of identification, listing, protection, preservation and management of Ghana’s historic buildings and sites. Additionally, the MSD division employs professionals including conservators and inspectors who interpret and exhibit historical monuments and places to tourists around the country (domestic and international). The MSD also has the responsibility of creating a full national register that contains the cultural inventory and heritage of national historic structures and sites, as well as the enactment of programs on buildings, assessing the state of dilapidation and applying restoration, preservation,

and renovation programs (Amekudi 2009). Unfortunately, historic buildings and sites are under threat due to neglect or demolishing for new development. Nevertheless, a permit for demolishing these properties to be replaced by new development is granted by Town and Country Planning Authority and not the GMMB as discussed in the next sections.

## 2.4 Development Planning in Ghana

There have been numerous calls for the Land Use and Spatial Planning Authority to ensure sustainable planning in Ghana due to the unnecessary sprawl and disordered growth (Botchway et al. 2014, Adarkwa 2012, Cobbinah and Amoako 2012, Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom 2010). As a result of the sprawl and chaotic growth, old buildings and places have been demolished for new development with little regard for preservation (Adarkwa and Oppong 2005, Twumasi-Ampofo and Oppong 2016). The Local Government Act 462 (1993) and the Local Governance Act 936 (2016) have been established to regulate the local government system as stated in the 1992 constitution of Ghana. Act 462 (1993) created the Metropolis, Municipalities and Districts Assemblies (MMDAs). Each MMDA is led by a CEO who is appointed by the President to steer the affairs of the assembly through the executive committee. Act 936 (2016) also created a Planning Authority within the MMDAs, which creates district development plans with the National Development Planning Commission's approval. The person, body, or organ in the district responsible for or involved with the implementation of the plans follows the authorized district development plan. Physical development may not be carried out in a district without prior clearance from the District Planning Authority (DPA) in the form of a written permit. The procedure and manner for securing a permit is prescribed by the Ghana National Building Regulations (GNBR) established in 1996 by Legislative Instrument (LI 1630). This regulation is divided into 19 sections, including regulations and building plans, site preparation and landscaping, building materials, thermal insulation, heat-producing appliances, hearths, chimneys, access accommodations, plot development, pest control and decay protection, air movement and ventilation, drainage, sound insulation, lighting and electrical installations, structural stability, sanitary conveniences, refuse disposal, water supply, structural fire precautions, special requirements for rural buildings and miscellaneous provisions.

The Ghana National Building Regulations (GNBR) does not feature HBSP. The DPA is represented by a board composed of 17 members. These members include; (a) a chairperson; (b) one representative each of: the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development; the Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation; the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources; the Ministry of Roads and Highways; the Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing; the Ministry of Food and Agriculture; (all of whom should not be below the rank of a director (c) the Chief Executive Officer of the MMDA; (d) Executive Director, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); (e) the Executive Secretary, Lands Commission; (f) the Stool Lands Administrator; (g) National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) representative not below the rank of a Director; (h) National House of Chiefs (traditional authority) representative; (i) a representative of the Ghana Institute of Planners; and (j) three private built environment professionals one of whom is a woman nominated by the Ghana Institute of Architects,



Ghana Institution of Engineers and the Ghana Institution of Surveyors. The chairperson should have considerable knowledge in human settlement, town planning and built environment or spatial planning related issues and not employed as a public servant in a full-time capacity. Section 4 provides that the function of the board is to “ensure the control of physical development in uncontrolled or less controlled but sensitive areas like forest reserves, nature reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, green belts, wetlands along the coast, rivers, lakes, mine sites, and public parks including open spaces for sustainable development of land and human settlements through a decentralised planning system (LUSP Act 2016, Act 925).

The Development Permitting Guidelines (2015:2.2.3) lists other subsidiary requirements (certified reports/permits) from Ghana National Fire Service and Environmental Protection Authority, depending on the type, scope and complexity of the development with an apparent exclusion of heritage impact. The board composition does not have a representative from the GMMB to enforce its mandate.

### 3 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study brings to fore, the legal framework for HIA, GMMB and DPA indicating their roles that affect HBSP in Ghana. The study shows that, even though the various constitutions mention the need to protect cultural heritage, (NLCD 387, 1969, EI 1972, Constitution, 1992) there is no clear policy document and tools for sustainable HBSP. Apart from the NLCD 387 (1969), not much has been achieved in terms of act enactments about functions of the GMMB. The available policies and legislation do not seem to be coherent as the Land Use and Spatial Planning Act 2016 (Act 925) which spells out the composition and functions of the DPA, to grant demolishing and development permit at the various MMDAs do not consider membership from MSD of GMMB, neither does it require certified reports or permits as spelt out in the Development Permitting Guidelines (2015). Apparently, there is no connection between HBSP and town planning in Ghana. The current rampant demolishing of historic buildings and sites call for effective collaboration between GMMB and the MMDAs through the utilisation of HIA (certified report) as a tool to connect the two entities. This HIA report should be submitted by prospective developers on special projects involving historic buildings and sites, as part of the permit requirement to indicate how the cultural heritage values of the property will be preserved and managed either partial or whole. It is also recommended that, the local government Act, Act 462 (1993) and Land Use and Spatial Planning Act Act 925 (2016) on the development planning authority’s board at the MMDA be amended to include representatives of GMMB, which has the mandate to preserve and manage historic buildings and sites. Furthermore, amendments to the Development Permitting Guidelines (2015) should be geared toward the additional requirement for a permit from GMMB through certified HIA reports by DPAs for sustainable HBSP in Ghana.

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