

## The Africa We Want: (Re)Positioning Land-as-heritage to Enhance Africa's Identity

Uchendu E. CHIGBU, Elvena HAYFORD, Jennilee M. KOHIMA, Aune SHIKONGO, Cathrine MARENGA, Mario SIUKUTA and Ntwala V. SIMATAA, Namibia

**Key words:** African identity, Land-as-heritage, Land branding, Policy influence, Diaspora engagement

### SUMMARY

The future of Africa, as defined and framed by Africans through the publication “*The Africa we want*” by the African Union (AU), recognises land and identity as key challenges on the continent. The framework, called *Agenda 2063*, embraces combined principles drawn from the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the local realities in African communities and beyond. It also recognises that the future of Africa depends on how land is managed to achieve a sustainability scenario that recognises the past, present and future use of land. However, land has multiple meanings to different people. It can be understood through various lenses, including culture and tradition, agriculture, natural resources, the economy, physical geography, spirituality, heritage, identity, the environment, human rights, and commodities. The capacity of people to access, use and enjoy rights over land is essential to their development. The exercise of land rights (positioning) depends on how they are promoted (branding) to establish, preserve, or maintain the distinct characteristics of a place that encompass lived memories (heritage), relationships, values, and experiences (identity) that create a sense of place. Heritage and identity are two critical aspects that have influenced Africa's development due to the continent's legacy of colonialism, slavery, and neocolonial practices. Addressing these heritage and identity crises can contribute to achieving a sustainable future for Africa. Therefore, this paper explores how branding land as heritage can position the exercise of land rights (i.e., land-as-heritage) in Africa to enhance Africa's identity. Using literature, the study conceptually evoked the term ‘land-as-heritage’ and analysed its interactional elements. In creating an understanding of land-as-heritage, it deconstructed a visual scenario of Africa's land-as-heritage using the town of Uturu in Nigeria. It then examined the status of land-as-heritage in Africa from the branding, identity, and positioning perspectives. It concludes that the current brand, identity, and positioning of Africa (from a land-as-heritage dimension), while reflecting a positive outlook, are blurred by its lowly rated political-economic situation in the global geopolitical space. It recommends and discusses a values-led planning approach as a path to enhancing Africa's branding and identity in the global marketplace through appropriate positioning.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The African Union (AU) adopted the Agenda 2063 Framework Document as the foundational strategy outlining Africa's 50-year transformation plan. One of the main aspirations to achieving the holistic goal of that strategy, "the Africa we want in 2063," is the enhancement of Africa's heritage to be achieved by "preserving African identity, traditions, languages, and creative industries as catalysts for unity (AU, 2015). Doing this demands respect for development practices that acknowledge that land has multiple representations to people (Sauer, 2012).

The representation of land in Africa, just as in any other place, can evoke different images in people's minds (Datta, 2015). It has symbolism in religious texts (such as in African traditional religious practices and the Bible or the Quran), which represent spiritual growth and convey a deeper meaning than mere geographical boundaries or the earth's crust. Perceptions of land vary considerably depending on social, cultural, and economic circumstances. For some communities, land represents spiritual and ancestral significance, rooted in historical attachment and identity. For others, land is primarily valued as an economic asset, associated with real estate development, investment, and wealth generation. Land may also be perceived as a source of natural resources, underpinning extractive activities such as mining for minerals and other valuable materials. Alternatively, land can represent a conservation imperative, particularly for those committed to protecting ecosystems and preventing environmental degradation (Chigbu, 2025).

Land could be all about human rights to you when your motive is fixated on protecting the rights of those who own or use it. Suppose you imagine yourself always in a landscape, surrounded by ancestral folklore, histories, teachings, and stories that shape your understanding of place and community. In that case, land may represent Heritage and identity. Land can have multiple meanings to different people. This is why it is understood through various concepts, including culture and tradition, agriculture, natural resources, economy, physical geography, spirituality, heritage, identity, environment, human rights, and commodities (Williamson et al., 2010). The capacity of people to access, use and enjoy rights over land is vital to their development (Chigbu and Babalola, 2025). However, the exercise of land rights (positioning) depends on how they are promoted (branding) to establish, preserve, or maintain the distinct characteristics of a place that encompass lived memories (Heritage), relationships, values, and experiences (identity) that create a sense of place.

In Africa, the meaning of land extends beyond its economic value (Mahtta et al., 2022). Cultural Heritage and identity are other aspects of land that matter to people in their communities. Heritage and identity are two critically interwoven aspects of artistic representations of land that the legacy of colonialism, slavery, and neocolonial practices (which did and continue to dispossess African communities of their land) has left Africa facing challenges today. This identity crisis affects Africans in Africa and the diaspora (Inyang and Hamilton, 2025). Many other scholars (see Clapham, 2020; Mitova, 2023; Uzoigwe, 2025) have called for the decolonisation of land narratives to empower Africa and promote a positive identity in African communities. Chigbu (2025: p. 77) noted that “colonialisation muddled up pre-colonial land tenure systems in Africa by replacing their tenure regimes and applications with European terms and traditions.” In the context of today’s development practices, Chigbu and Babalola (2025) have outlined several “land wrongs” being perpetrated in Africa that promote negative identity for the continent.

Considering the calls for decolonising land narratives in Africa to strengthen identity and Heritage, this paper explores how branding land as Heritage can position the exercise of land rights in Africa to improve Africa’s identity. The paper approaches this issue by focusing on (re)branding land as Heritage to position people’s land rights (i.e., land-as-heritage) in a way that promotes Africa’s identity. The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 (Section 2) presents the methodology. Section 3 focused on issues that emerged from the literature (findings, outcomes or results). It deconstructed a visual scenario of Africa’s land as heritage using the town of Uturu in Nigeria. It then reviewed the status of land-as-heritage in Africa from the branding, identity and positioning perspectives. Section 4 discussed the emerging issues from the literature and the current brand, identity, and positioning of Africa’s land-as-heritage status. The final part (Section 5) drew the inference that while the land-as-heritage scenario in Africa has a positive outlook, it is obscured by the political-economic context of the same situation, which is viewed as inferior in the global geopolitical landscape.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Terminological Definitions Applied to this Study**

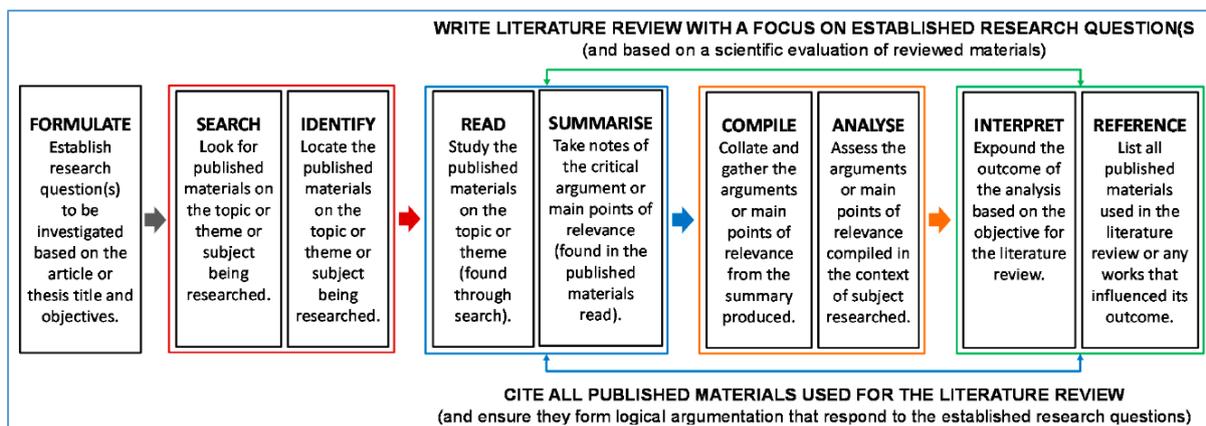
The disciplinary leanings of this study extend from applied social sciences (land governance) to management sciences (marketing) to the humanities (decolonial studies). This cross-cutting disciplinarity of the study raises definitional issues. Five important definitional issues in this study are the concepts of land, branding or rebranding, positioning, identity and Heritage. Land is viewed as more than just the physical earth, but also comprises indigeneity or ancestry (Behner, 2024). This renders it more than an economic commodity, a tool for survival, sustainability, and a sense of place (Chigbu, 2013). The paper embraces Jahan et al.’s (2024: p. 656) and Mochla et al.’s (2025) definition of branding as a strategic tool for “shaping consumer perceptions” to influence decisions, and foster loyalty. Where Africa is conceived as land, branding is a strategy for ensuring that Africans and diasporans view it as belonging to them. This means that successful branding is closely tied to positioning. Jahan et al. (2024: p. 657)

further note that positioning entails the “stand out” of products in “attracting a target audience and solidifying its place in the market.” In the context of this study, ‘position’ implies placing Africa and its land and people in a unique stance where their heritage and identity are respected. Heritage, as identified by Brooks et al. (2020), refers to features created in the past of a particular society that still hold historical importance in their lives today. This makes traditions (such as buildings, landscapes, customs, fashion, languages, and other forms of cultural expression) central to Heritage. Chirikure (2013) notes that “one of the greatest ironies about African heritage is that, despite being priceless, it often ranks very lowly in terms of government priority scales.”

In some cases, African heritages are ridiculed. Ndoro et al. (2017) have raised questions concerning why no one cares about Africa’s Heritage. This paper responds to such concerns. The basis of protecting a heritage is to secure uniqueness in identity, a concept embedded in the entire discourse of this paper. It relates to the traits that people and places possess, distinguishing them from others (Buckingham, 2008; Chigbu et al., 2018). In the context of this paper, branding and positioning relate to place branding and situating, conceived to ensure heritage preservation and identity protection.

## **2.2 Literature Review as the Approach for this Study**

Building multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary research can be complex, as it involves multiple disciplines (Snyder, 2019). This is because such studies require the deconstruction of concepts (as already done in the previous sub-section) and applying creativity “within post-positivist research” to contribute to the existing literature (Chigbu, 2019). Thus, a literature review suits this type of research. “A literature review can broadly be described as a more or less systematic way of collecting and synthesising previous research” (Snyder, 2019: p. 334; Tranfield et al., 2003). A well-conducted literature review can serve as a research method for advancing existing knowledge, developing theories and framing actions. This is because it presents a primary means of collecting secondary data (including findings, opinions, arguments, perceptions, observations, and perspectives of other scholars) in a manner that allows the reviewer to synthesise all of these to present their perspectives (Chigbu et al., 2023). In conducting the review for this study, the authors followed Chigbu et al.’s (2023) literature review process (see Figure 1).

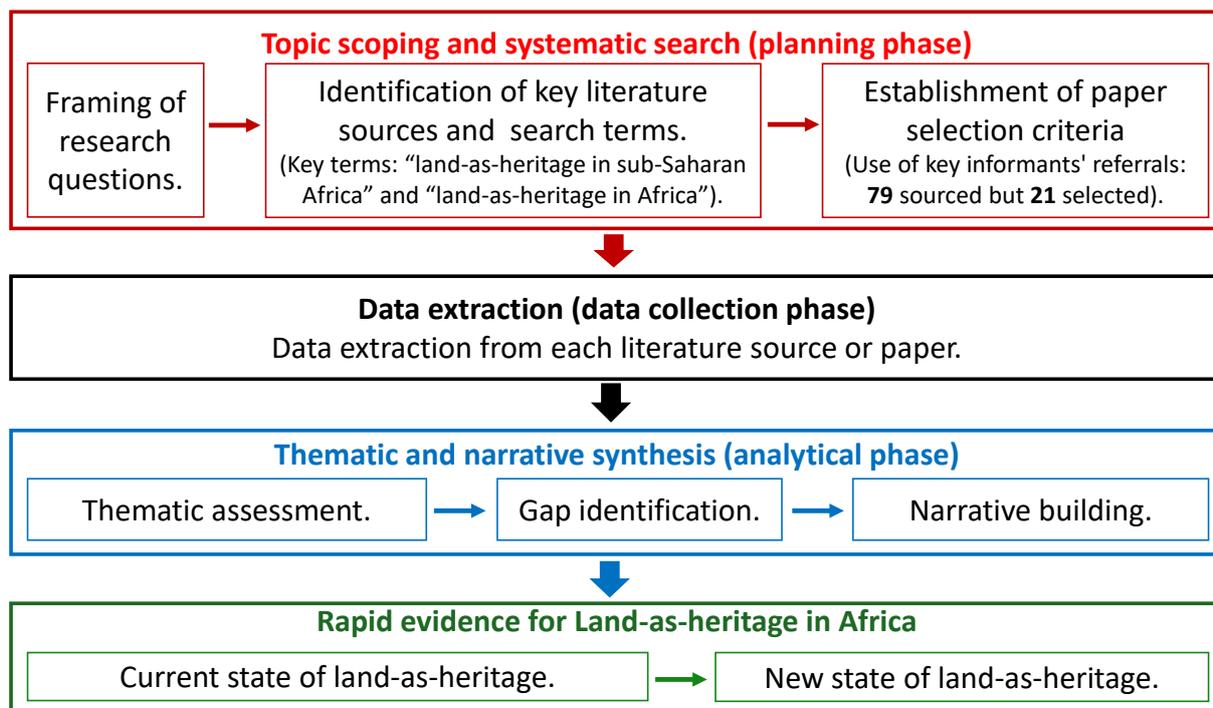


**Figure 1:** Activities in a literature review process (Chigbu et al., 2023: p. 3).

As the focus of this study is on land and Heritage, efforts were made to access conventional, semi-conventional, and unconventional literature. Conventional literature refers to works published in peer-reviewed journals, commissioned reports and books. Semi-conventional literature refers to website publications from agencies with authority on the subject under investigation. Unconventional literature refers to works or materials published by communities that reflect their land and heritage practices. The review involved formulating research questions, searching for relevant literature, and identifying suitable materials. These were followed by a process of reading, summarising, compiling, analysing, interpreting, and referencing the literature materials. The literature review employed a Rapid Evidence Synthesis (RES), a streamlined, systematic approach designed to efficiently collect and synthesise existing research on a focused topic within a constrained timeframe (Ganga et al., 2025).

### 2.3 Rapid Evidence Synthesis (RES) from Semi-structured Literature Review

The literature review, conducted during July to September 2025, is semi-structured. The methodology is adapted (not adopted) from principles outlined by Haby et al. (2024) in “What are the best methodologies for rapid reviews of the research evidence for evidence-informed decision making in health policy and practice?” This was considered an adaptation because the current study deviated from Haby et al. (2024) in some steps. The RES involved the four-stage process presented in Figure 2 and explained afterwards.



**Figure 2:** Rapid evidence synthesis followed for the semi-structured literature review

As shown in Figure 2, the 4-phase process began with topic scoping and systematic search (planning phase), followed by data extraction (data collection phase), then thematic and narrative synthesis (analytical phase), and finally the production of *rapid evidence for land-as-heritage in Africa*. In applying the rapid evidence synthesis, the 4-phase process is explained below.

**The planning phase:** This phase is the topic scoping and protocol. It involved three steps – the framing of the research question. Precise research questions were defined to bound the review. Since this study focused on (re)branding land as heritage to position people’s land rights (i.e., land-as-heritage) in a way that promotes Africa’s identity, these two key questions framed on the study: What is the status of land-as-heritage of Africa? How can it be (re)positioned to promote Africa’s Identity? Upon reviewing these questions, further sub-questions arose regarding what constitutes Africa’s land-as-heritage. And how can the emergent identity scenarios be improved? The need to respond to these questions determined (which is presented in the output section of this paper). It influenced the other two steps – the identification of key literature sources, the establishment of search terms, and the *paper selection criteria*. In identifying literature sources, two key terms were used. They are “land-as-heritage in sub-Saharan Africa” and “land-as-heritage in Africa.” These terms were searched in the Scopus and Google Scholar databases, but they did not yield direct hits (search results). Direct hits are search results (papers or publications) that directly show any of these terms in their titles. Indirect hits are search results that may or may not be on theme but do not directly include any of these terms in their titles. Due to the limitation of having to ransack through thousands of

manuscripts, the study resorted to identifying key materials through direct contact with ten ( $n=10$ ) purposively selected experts on the topics via the snowballing method. Hence, direct referral was used to identify seventy-nine ( $n=79$ ) publications. The criteria for the assimilation of publications for use in the review were based on their relevance to the topic of land-as-heritage in Africa, with a focus on a practical or policy perspective. Considering that the identification followed a referral process, all seventy-nine ( $n=79$ ) publications were either wholly or partly read. This process yielded a rejection of fifty-eight ( $n=58$ ) papers and a final corpus of twenty-one ( $n=21$ ) publications used for the review. The referral approach meant the study did not fully adhere to a systematic search and screening. It is this deviation that led to this manuscript being described as a RES-based semi-structured literature review. It is RES because it is rapid in its approach, given the difficulty of specifically identifying land-as-heritage documents under It is semi-structured because it did not fully adopt a systematic search and screening approach based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) method (as in Adewunmi et al., 2023; Haby et al., 2024; Muela-Bermejo and Tabernero-Sala, 2026). This is why the twenty-one ( $n=21$ ) publications used for the research became a mix of conventional, semi-conventional, and unconventional publications. Given the topic's uniqueness, this mix of literature proved a strength rather than a weakness.

**Data extraction (data collection phase):** This phase involved extracting data from the selected publications. A standardised template was used to extract key data from the twenty-one ( $n=21$ ) publications relative to the research questions previously framed.

**Thematic and narrative synthesis (analytical phase):** This stage involved three steps: a thematic assessment, gap identification, and narrative building. The first step (thematic assessment) involved evaluating the themes that emerged from the data extraction. The second step (gap identification) involved drawing from the themes the identification of the gaps in land-as-heritage in the African context. This involved identifying, comparing, and grouping the extracted findings into recurring themes, patterns, and contradictions across the twenty-one ( $n=21$ ) papers. The third step (narrative building) focused on creating the land-as-heritage narrative that responds to the research questions. The synthesised themes were woven into a coherent narrative summary. This narrative described the current state of knowledge, highlighted areas of strength and identified key gaps that need improvement.

**Rapid evidence for Land-as-heritage in Africa:** the first three stages led to the production of a Rapid evidence for Land-as-heritage in Africa, which is presented as the main output of this research. This part involved two steps. The first is the framing of the current state of land-as-heritage. Then (using the knowledge of the current state of land-as-heritage), with recourse to the gaps identified, the second step was an argument for a new state of land-as-heritage.

In general, the RES method for literature review provided a rigorous yet pragmatic framework. By following a transparent, pre-defined protocol, it minimised bias and enhanced reproducibility. The thematic synthesis of twenty-one ( $n=21$ ) papers provided a rich, qualitative understanding of the research landscape, moving beyond simple summaries to generate integrated insights and a clear agenda for future research. Its main weakness was a lack of a

strict, systematic approach. Given the time limitations faced by the researchers, a rapid approach was necessary. The next sections of this paper present the research outputs.

### 3. FROM LITERATURE: CONCEPT AND STATE OF LAND-AS-HERITAGE IN AFRICA

#### 3.1 Characteristics of the Reviewed Literature or Sources

Out of the twenty-one ( $n=21$ ) materials used for the review, eighteen ( $n=18$ ) were conventional literature. One ( $n=1$ ) material is semi-conventional, and the rest ( $n=2$ ) were unconventional. The semi-conventional source provided access to Africa’s land-based Heritage, as reported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The unconventional literature provided access to data, enabling the presentation of a picture of the land-as-heritage situation in a typical African community. Of the conventional sources, three ( $n=3$ ) were commissioned reports, which included reports from the AU. The characteristics of the reviewed literature are presented in Table 1, focusing on the authors, titles, and their land-as-heritage themes.

**Table 1:** List of the publications from which the literature interpretations were derived (authors’ compilation based on reviewed literature).

Author and year	Title	Land and heritage focus (at specific levels)
AU (2010)	Framework and guidelines on land policy in Africa – land policy in Africa: A framework to strengthen land rights, enhance productivity and secure livelihoods.	Framing of continental policy for physical and non-physical Heritage and identity and positioning of Africa (continental level).
AU (2015)	Agenda 2063 report of the commission on the African Union: The Africa we want in 2063.	Strategic plan for achieving physical and non-physical objectives in the Heritage and identity and positioning of Africa (continental level).
Ashukem & Ngang (2022)	Land grabbing and the implications for the right to development in Africa.	Impediments to physical and non-physical Heritage and identity and positioning of Africa (continental level).
Brooks et al. (2020)	African Heritage in a changing climate.	The Heritage concept of Africa is discussed (conceptual level).

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The Africa We Want: (Re)Positioning Land-as-heritage to Enhance Africa’s Identity (13728)

Uchendu Chigbu, Elvena Hayford, Jennilee Kohima, Aune Shikongo and Cathrine Marenga (Namibia)

FIG Congress 2026

The Future We Want - The SDGs and Beyond

Cape Town, South Africa, 24–29 May 2026

Chigbu (2013)	Fostering rural sense of place: the missing piece in Uturu, Nigeria.	Experience of land-based place-attachment in African Heritage (local level).
Chigbu (2015)	Repositioning culture for development: women and development in a Nigerian rural community.	Cultural repositioning in land-based heritage protection and branding (national level).
Chigbu (2025)	Decolonising women's land rights: gender and landownership in pre-colonial Africa.	Decolonising the Heritage and brand to construct a new brand (continental level).
Chigbu et al. (2018)	Land, Culture, Culture Loss and Community: Rural Insights from Sub-Saharan Africa.	Cultural repositioning in land-based heritage protection and branding (continental level).
Chimhowu et al. (2019)	The 'new' African customary land tenure. Characteristic, features and policy implications of a new paradigm.	Documentation of emerging changes in Africa's customary land heritage and identity (conceptual level).
Chirikure (2013)	Heritage conservation in Africa: The good, the bad, and the challenges.	Heritage unpacked (conceptual level)
Cotula et al. (2006)	Changes in "customary" land tenure systems in Africa.	Documentation of emerging changes in Africa's customary land heritage and identity (conceptual level).
Inyang & Hamilton (2025)	Neocolonialism and the African identity crisis: implications for economic independence and thought leadership.	Decolonising the identity and brand to construct a new heritage and brand (continental level).
Kohima et al. (2023)	(Neo-) segregation, (neo-) racism, and one-city two-system planning in Windhoek, Namibia: What can a new national urban policy do?	Strategic plan for achieving physical and non-physical objectives in the Heritage and identity and positioning of Africa (national level).
Mathebula (2022)	The Construction of African identities and values: the need to bridge the gap between ideologies, research, and practice.	Reconstructing physical and non-physical Heritage and identity and repositioning of Africa (continental level).
Ndoro et al. (2017)	Managing Heritage in Africa: who cares?	Decolonising the Heritage and brand to construct a new brand (continental level).

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Mitova (2023)	Why epistemic decolonisation in Africa?	Decolonising the Heritage and brand to construct a new brand (continental level).
Sauer (2012)	Land and territory: meanings of land between modernity and tradition.	Multifaceted perspectives on land encompass both symbolic and physical notions of land for identity (conceptual level).
UNESCO (2025)	New World Heritage Sites in Africa: Periodic reporting – Third Cycle.	Protection of physical identity and Heritage (continental level).
Uturu Development Union (2006)	Uturu cultural Heritage: Volume 1.	Exploration of real-time physical and non-physical Heritage and identity (local level).
Uturu Peace Committee (1989)	The Uturu Peace Committee 1988 Report.	Preservation of real-time physical and non-physical Heritage and identity (local level).
Uzoigwe (2025)	A critical reflection on decolonisation of Africa from the perspective of language and culture.	Decolonisation themes in non-physical Heritage (conceptual level).

\* The tabulated list of literature was the focus of the reviews from an empirical perspective. They exclude other forms of citational works used from introduction to conclusion parts of this paper.

Source: Author’s own Compilation (based on reviewed literature)

The outcomes from the reviewed literature relate, first and foremost, to creating an understanding of what land-as-heritage entails and its status in the African context, focusing on identity, branding, and positioning. Evidential case studies were presented, as identified from the literature. All of these provided responses to the key questions of the study, which were later discussed in succeeding sections.

### **3.2 State of Land-as-heritage in Africa: Identity, Brand and Positioning**

While many communities in Africa may not fully share the land-as-heritage experience of Uturu, they all have more in common than they do in differences. Hence, with the picture of Heritage presented on Uturu and the emergent definition of the term, it is possible to discuss land-as-heritage in Africa from the perspectives of identity, brand, and position.

#### **3.2.1 Identity – Communal Lifestyle as a Living and Evolving Identity**

The dominant identity of Africa is that of its tangible and intangible heritages, that has defined the continent's (as a land of habitation) unique contributions to human civilisation and its crippling dominance by other cultures. Africa's identity as a land has been shaped by multifaceted factors (Brooks et al., 2020). It is a complicated concern because three main heritages have shaped it. They are a mix of pre-colonial traditions, colonial legacies, and post-colonial developments. The predominant land tenure (i.e., the relationship between people and land) has evolved during these periods. The evolution has been driven by land-as-heritage-driven changes, including alterations in customary land management institutions, shifts in intra-family land relations, and modifications in land transfer mechanisms (Cotula et al., 2006). Chimhowu (2019: p. 897) noted that "a quiet paradigm shift has been taking place, transforming the way such land is governed." Chimhowu (2019: p. 897) further asserted that these changes are "Driven in part by adaptations to changing context but also accelerated by neo-liberal reforms, this shift has created a 'new' customary tenure."

From its pre-colonial Heritage, the continent is highly identified for its diverse customary land ownership, which emphasised communal living that is documented through oral storytelling, and dependence on subsistence land uses (such as smallholder farming). The negative consequence of this unique identity is that there is a big gap between the stereotypes and realities on the continent. Africa is often portrayed in Western media as being reduced to poverty or wildlife, overshadowing its innovations (e.g., intellectualism, sports, music, and arts) and philosophical contributions (e.g., Ubuntu and Harambe ethics) (Chigbu et al., 2018). This Land-as-heritage Identity is always in a state of flux. It is not static. It constitutes a dynamic negotiation lifestyle that connects Africa's past, present, and future. This makes the current identity of the continent a living and evolving identity.

### 3.2.2 Brand – Chain of Cultural and Natural Resource Abundance

This study likens land-as-heritage identity to be the dominant perception (i.e., the visual and verbal elements) that people have about Africa's tangible and intangible heritage. So, suppose the identity of Africa is that of a place of customary land ownership and communal life. In that case, the branding aspect relates to the image people have of Africa, which is the emotional connection they have with the continent. The land-as-heritage brand of Africa is a two-way phenomenon. To diaspora Africans, it constitutes a mix of worlds, with a dynamic fusion of cultural richness, historical resilience, and hope. To the global north, it constitutes a land of leisure (Gissibl, 2022). Within these two brand viewpoints lies a flow of consistent and conflicting connections.

The conflicting brand is perceived by the Global North, which associates the continent with both leisure (tourism) and war simultaneously. Positively, the land-as-heritage brand is evident in aspects of a place with old game parks, where one can come for game hunting or park visits. On the one hand, they view the brand from the perspective of natural resources exploration

(positive) but consider Africa as a place of wars and poverty (negative). The Diaspora Africa relates to the image of the continent in terms of its land-based cultural Aesthetics and Artistic influences, indigeneity (including indigenous knowledge) and ancestry. In this regard, they refer to Africa as Motherland” to highlight its status as the birthplace of humanity (and their origin) and to recognise its rich history and cultural importance that spans across other continents. In this regard, they tend to relate to the continent’s highly heterogeneous visual arts and fashion, whose materials are linked to land. For instance, African textiles (attire such as Kente, tie-dye, and Ibheshu) are celebrated globally. These fashion wears originated from land-as-heritage materials – including crops like cotton (Kente), dyes from trees (tie-dye) and animals such as calfskin (ibheshu).

Further, there are one hundred and eight (108) properties identified by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites in Africa. These include 42 natural properties, 61 cultural properties, and 5 mixed properties (UNESCO, 2025). Among these are natural parks, natural wonders, rivers, mountains, groves and shrines, ancient cities, tombs, caves, forests, and various forms of wondrous landforms on the continent. The inference from the land-as-heritage branding situation of Africa is that it relates to cultural abundance and natural resources abundance.

### 3.2.3 Positioning – Beacon of Hope, Creativity and untapped potential

How does Africa want to be seen or viewed by others? What constitutes the positioning of the continent? In marketing terms, it requires creating a distinct image which others can understand and appreciate. In this regard, Africa’s positioning in the world has undergone shifts from one of dependence to one of cultural resurgence and socioeconomic assertiveness. There is a renewed sense of land and natural resource sovereignty. Governments in African countries have attained self-awareness that the continent is a powerhouse for land and natural resources. Approximately 30% of the world’s mineral reserves (e.g., cobalt, diamonds) and 65% of arable land are in Africa (Zabelin, 2023). This makes the continent a significant player in the global quest for food security. As a result, they are diversifying their partnerships to include China, India, Russia, Europe, and the USA, ensuring a balanced positioning in the global marketplace (Kaura, 2024). The leverage for such positioning is a consequence of the land-as-heritage advantage it has over other continents and global economic powers.

Africa also has the demographic advantage, as it has a population that can work the land and inherit it for heritage, ensuring transferability to future generations. The continent has a youth advantage, with a median age of 19.7 years (Kaura, 2024). It is projected to have a population of 2.5 billion by 2050, which can drive its land markets, labour, and development (Signé et al., 2025). With these, an inference is that the communal identity and abundance of cultural/natural resources branding in Africa has led the continent to position itself as a beacon of hope and creativity (for the diaspora) and as an untapped potential (for the Global North). Such a positioning is only possible because of its rich land-as-heritage status.

### 3.2.4 Africa's Land-as-heritage Challenges

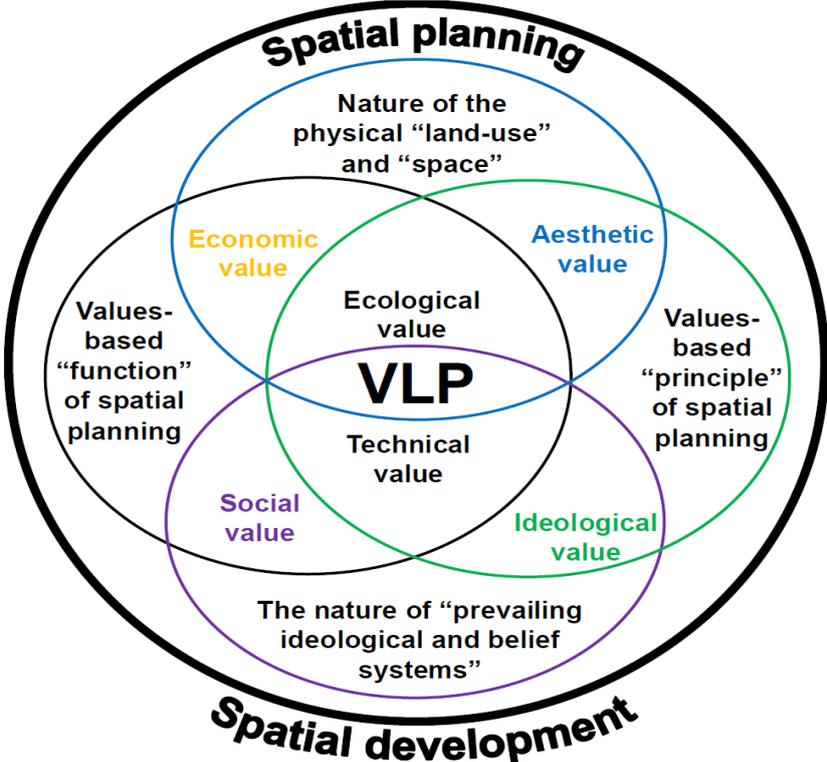
Each of the three aspects of Africa's land-as-heritage status comes with its unique challenges. In terms of identity, the continent faces challenges in balancing centrality and diversity in land policy affairs. It has struggled in creating a pan-African community spirit that generally endears with respect for local ethnic identities. This leaves it with a fragmented identity (Inyang and Hamilton, 2025). Other identity challenges relate to the difficulty in navigating current modernity issues without erasing Heritage, mainly traditional values and knowledge on customary land governance. This includes making the system responsive to gender, technology, and Western democracy without losing other invaluable practices in traditional land, forest, and water management. Another core challenge relates to the globalisation pressures that affect the protection of land-as-heritage from exploitation (e.g., land and natural resource grabbing and transnational large-scale land acquisitions), which impoverish rather than enrich the communities (Ashukem, 2022). These challenges are exacerbated by the identity issues relating to the anglophone, francophone, hispanophone, arabophone and lusophone divisions (Chigbu, 2020). It creates weakness in the collaborative capacities of communities across linguistic and geographical divisions.

Branding and positioning challenges are closely intertwined. A key challenge is that most Africans have yet to accept the African brand. Considering its diverse and multifaceted identity, Africa faces significant challenges in branding that hinder its ability to project an authentic and cohesive image globally. These challenges stem from historical, structural, and perceptual barriers, as evolving from the colonial distortions of identity and the post-colonial struggles to create one (Kohima et al., 2023). While the continent has a notable land-as-heritage brand, this is overshadowed by its continental economic brand, which suffers significantly from negative media portrayals, both within and mostly outside Africa. Harmful stereotypes in international media weaken promotion and investments in the land-as-heritage sectors, which include real estate and tourism, while undermining the critical minerals sector (Faloyin, 2022). Intellectual Property (e.g. for the prospecting of hydrocarbons) means that even though Africa has a lot of essential minerals and hydro carbons (e.g., gold, oil and gas, silver, copper, platinum, gold and diamond, and many others), it is unable to mine them freely because it lacks the knowledge capacity and IPs to directly engage in the technology for exploring, prospecting, and processing them. The implication is that it makes little in comparison to what multinational companies make from their land-based economies. When it comes to positioning, the future of Africa needs to be reclaimed by Africans – this means telling their own stories, restructuring their states, and revising their policies.

## **4. (RE)POSITIONING AFRICA'S LAND-AS-HERITAGE FOR ENHANCED IDENTITY: A VALUES-LED-PLANNING APPROACH**

When it comes to shaping the future of development, planning is everything – it provides the tool, the vision and the means of executing that vision (Kohima et al., 2023). The land-as-

heritage is as much a planning issue as it is about land and heritage. It is not surprising that planning is being invoked at this stage of the study, which involves solution-seeking. After all, planning is a tool capable of shaping both land (as in land use planning) and heritage (as in placemaking) (Brooks, 2020; Beehner, 2024; UNESCO, 2025). Positioning or repositioning Africa’s land as heritage implies embracing new sets of elemental values that can help ameliorate some of the land-as-heritage challenges on the continent, while enhancing existing statues of identity and brand. However, any approach proposed for improvement must focus on narrative reclamation, land policy implementation that centres on identity preservation, cultural IP protections, and technological sovereignty. Hence, this study proposes that adopting a values-led approach to planning would enable the enhancement of land-as-heritage identity in Africa. A values-led planning, as expressed by Auzins and Chigbu (2021, p. 7), is a spatially focused planning and development system that embraces four key elements. That is – “the nature of the physical land-use and space being planned, the values-based function of spatial planning, the values-based principle of spatial planning, and the nature of prevailing ideological and belief systems under which spatial planning operates” (Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** A values-led planning for improving the land-as-heritage identity of Africa (Auzins and Chigbu, 2021: p. 7).

As Figure 3 shows, the four elements of planning are of interest in deriving core values that can help enhance land-as-heritage. These core values for improving the land-as-heritage identity of Africa necessitate a set of values that encompass the economic, social, ideological, ecological,

aesthetic, and technical aspects (Auzins and Chigbu, 2021). Auzins and Chigbu (2021) identified these values as follows: Economic value can be achieved by applying land use and development to create welfare gains. Social value entails enhancing social inclusion and security. Ideological value explores traditions and cultural matters as they are reflected in beliefs. Ecological value hinges on environmental quality and ecological livability. Aesthetic value involves emotional perception and critical attitudes in planning. Technical value relates to the application of technology-based knowledge, as reflected in stimulating planning innovations that enhance land-as-heritage conditions. Considering that Auzins and Chigbu's (2021) work has a Eurocentric undertone, it is essential to contextualise their values-led planning approach in the African reality. To achieve this, the Framework and Guidelines for Land Policy in Africa (AU, 2010) must provide a framework for the centrality of land-as-heritage measures on the continent. Importantly, the Agenda 2063 vision should serve as a guiding aspiration for creating a strong identity for the continent (AU, 2015; Mathebula, 2022). This requires the development of a continental spatial development agenda that will incorporate land management's role in spatial planning to promote land-as-heritage values in all aspects of national development. This can serve as a direct way to sensitise and encourage the interest of the African public in land-as-heritage programmes through spatial development affairs.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Cultural renaissance is a key element in the search for “the Africa we want” (AU, 2015) to contribute to a knowledge base for understanding how best to achieve a Renaissance Africa that embraces culturally decolonised identity. It relates to an embrace of new consciousness, new values and attitudes through a new era of land use and management. To further this agenda through capacity development and education, the AU (through the Network of Excellence on Land Governance in Africa) introduced the *Guidelines for the Development of Curricula on Land Governance in Africa* (AU, 2022). The Guidelines acknowledged that land is “a source of social status, cultural identity and is often tied to spirituality and the essence of life” (AU, 2022: p. 1). Specifically, the “Guideline 4” of this continental document stated that “Curricula on land governance ought to pay attention to the promotion and understanding of the legitimacy of marginalised groups and indigenous land rights in Africa, viewed through the prism of human rights, and how they relate to spirituality, cultural identity and food security” (AU, 2022: p. xi). All of these require an understanding of land-as-heritage and how it can be (re)positioned to promote Africa's Identity.

Therefore, this study sought to unpack and answer questions related to Africa's status of land-as-heritage and how it can be (re)positioned to promote Africa's identity. In answering those questions, this study has taken a marketing, rather than a political, approach to decolonising the land narratives in Africa. It has conceptualised the land-as-heritage concept to create a better understanding of how to best strengthen Africa's identity through the promotion of its land-related Heritage (i.e., positioning). In doing so, it reflected on the state of land-as-heritage in Africa from the context of identity, brand, and positioning. It noted that the current brand, identity, and positioning of Africa as a land-as-heritage construct, while reflecting a positive

outlook, is blurred by its political-economic context, which is viewed as inferior in the global geopolitical space. It also identified that any approach going forward must include narrative reclamation and the implementation of heritage-focused land policy, among others. This is why it proposed a values-led approach. A values-led technique is essential because it can create a “positive synergy in managing land-related resources” and “territorial capabilities”, which can lead to “land use policies and better territorial governance,” capable of facilitating land-as-heritage scenarios to benefit societies (Auzins and Viesturs, 2017: p. 275). Values-led planning has been suggested as a measure for improving this scenario, as it provides an opportunity to test new values-led tools and techniques. However, future research is needed to ascertain what constitutes African values in all aspects of planning. Such research is essential due to the diverse nature of African ethnic populations, linguistic communities, and regional divergences.

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