THE BAROTSE PLAINS CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Western Province
ZAMBIA
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The Lozi people of the Western Province of Zambia have traditionally managed the Barotse Cultural Landscape in various ways as outlined below:

- Their Traditional structure has Indunas in charge of natural and cultural resources, canals, forests, fisheries
- They have strong traditional laws (mechanisms) to safeguard culture and nature
- They have royal burial sites secured through Ling’ombokti
- They have a tradition of voluntary canal clearing
- They have a tradition of acceptable fishing methods
- They have strong belief systems
- They have a Traditional land tenure system
- They have a strong tradition of taboos giving individuals protective authority over resources
- They have a law against indiscriminate burning of specific grass and natural fibres where animals inhabit

ABSTRACT
The BCL, a large expanse of a gently undulating floodplain criss-crossed by man-made canals, has been settled by the Lozi people for over 400 years, thus creating an exceptional and dynamic inter-relationship between nature and man. The landscape, dissected by the mighty Zambezi River, is richly endowed with biodiversity and cultural resources and thus presents a rare example of combined works of nature and of man that have been well preserved and sustainably utilised through a traditional management system.

THE BAROTSE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE (BCL)
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It is an exceptional example of a landscape designed and created intentionally by man, an organically evolved, and associative cultural landscape because of its system of mounds, royal graves, canals, royal palaces and the transhumance. This landscape is characterized by the intense transformation of the natural environment, premised on the construction of mounds for homesteads and royal graves and canals for transportation, land drainage, flood control, and agricultural activities all achieved due to intelligent traditional management systems.
System of mounds

The mounds are spread all over the plains. Trees and shrubs on the landscape are found on these mounds. The mounds are either natural termite mounds (*mazulu*), or man-made (*liuba*) as the grounds were raised to build homesteads or for cultivation. Through a process of land reclamation, soil was piled up over the centuries to form mounds upon which the communities in the plains could undertake their activities of habitation, farming, burials, etc.
There are over twenty two (22) royal graves in the BCL that are as a result of a cult system in which each Litunga selects his burial place/mound before his death. Consequently, villages develop at a chosen place where the king would be buried. The royal graves are located at the centre of these mounds and special trees are planted on the edges of the selected grave area. In addition, other trees are planted on the edges of the mounds whilst gardens are also made and tendered on the slopes. It is because of these special trees that the royal graves mounds tend to stand out prominently in this treeless plain.
On the landscape, these royal graves are sacred sites and act as places of offering where the dead are appealed to as guardians of lineages. The royal graves represent centres of mystical power of the kingship, and those of its past holders. A caretaker called the *Ng’omboti* is appointed by the *Kuta* as keeper or custodian of the royal grave.
Canals were constructed for diverse purposes. These include transportation, irrigation, drainage, flood control, provision of fish stocks and as sources of water for humans and livestock. The construction of canals was necessitated by the environmental constraints and opportunities which the plains presented.
Royal palaces

There are three palace complexes in the BCL

PALACE COMPLEX AT LEALUI

The Lealui capital is the seat of power for the Litunga and it is from this site that the transhumance ceremony commences.

The kwandu at Lealui

Limulunga palace
PALACE COMPLEX AT LIMULUNGA

Constructed by the British in the 1930s, the palace at Limulunga, is the seat of temporary power when the Litunga moves from his capital, Lealui, at the height of the floods.

PALACE COMPLEX AT NALOLO

The complex was set up in the 16th Century. The Nalolo palace is the seat of power for the female ruler.
The Zambezi plain which encompasses the BCL begins to flood every year from about the middle of December. By March the whole plain becomes a vast expanse of water. Although the people in the plain build their villages on mounds, the land gets wet and life becomes uncomfortable. The Litunga and all the villagers in the plain have to come out of water onto the dry land. This is when the Kuomboka, an annual traditional ceremony is held to mark the movement of the king to higher ground at the beginning of the rains.
OTHER SACRED SITES

There are other sacred sites in the BCL aside from the royal graves which are in the form of groves, lagoons or pools, lakes and forests.
SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF THE BCL

Sustainable management of the Barotse Plains has been on-going since 1600 when the Lozi entered and occupied the Plains. Upon their occupation of the plains, the Lozi evolved and developed a highly centralized and elaborate political and administrative system that ensured proper management of land, water, fish, game and forestry resources in the plains and the immediate areas surrounding the plains.
The centralised political system now referred to as the BRE under the Litunga provided an effective traditional governance system over centuries. The Litunga took the lead in the sustainable management of resources. For instance, the Litunga’s reed-beds were also bird reserves and hunting was limited in them to prevent birds being killed out. Although game was regarded as public property, some animals such as eland, lechwe, leopard, hippopotamus and rhinoceros were declared as royal animals protected against indiscriminate killing. During his reign, Litunga Lewanika demarcated Liuwa Plains as a Game Reserve.
To ensure effective and sustainable management of the natural resources, the BRE through the appointed Councillors called Manduna (Induna-singular) had power over the use of land and all natural resources in the plains and in the whole Barotseland. For instance, Manduna were appointed to be in charge of land, fish resources, game, hunting expeditions and forestry resources. Other Manduna were in charge of public works such as construction of canals and formation of mounds. In addition, many taboos and norms which helped to maintain a number of traditional conservation practices, rules were laid down by the established court system called Kutas through which enforcement was done to bring offenders to book.
During the 20th century, the advent of the colonial rule and later the Republican Government as alternative Authorities brought about a new dimension in the conservation and management of natural and cultural resources in the Barotseland. During the colonial period 1900 – 1964, the Lozi traditional authority worked alongside the Colonial Officials in the conservation of some natural resources. For instance the ecological survey conducted in the 1930s revealed that Barotseland was unique in possessing a number of native forest laws. Certain forests were reserved by the king against cutting. For instance King Yeta had forest reserves in Lealui, Kalabo, Nalolo and Sesheke. In those forest reserves, trees could only be cut, subject to a fine, with the King’s permission.
Litunga Lewanika prohibited the cutting of six (6) wild fruit trees which were left standing in gardens. In 1924, the Lozi Court, on the suggestion of the Administration, placed restrictions on the cutting of the four most important timber trees and a Councillor of the Central Government was attached to the Government Forestry Officer to oversee the cutting of timbers and the cutting and burning of bush gardens. He was reporting periodically to the Central Court.

With regard to the protection of fish resources, in 1936, the Lozi court re-enacted an old law fixing the size of fishing – net meshes so that spawn would not be destroyed.
After independence in 1964, the Republican Government enacted a series of laws. In Barotseland, the understanding was that the national laws were going to back up traditional laws where the latter were not effective in protecting and conserving the natural resources. The national laws have resulted in the formation of various institutions charged with the conservation and protection of natural resources such as wildlife, forestry and fisheries.

The two systems- traditional management and the legal protection are complimenting each other well
Reference

The Barotse Cultural Landscape Nomination Dossier