

Celebrating the British Museum's Africa Programme



Some of the participants from workshops in 2010-11

Welcome to the first issue of the Africa Programme newsletter. This will be a bi-annual publication with a summer and a winter issue and we hope that you will enjoy reading about the many projects and workshops taking place in Africa and in the UK run or inspired by the Programme. The newsletter is also available to download at britishmuseum.org where you can find further details of current activities as well as adding your own comments through the Africa Programme blog. We hope that this will encourage partners in Africa and colleagues in the UK, Europe and the USA to exchange views and news and to participate in an ongoing dialogue about Africa. The Africa Programme was initiated in 2003 supported by a major grant from the UK government's Department

for Culture, Media and Sport. The original aims of the Programme are still resonant today and focus largely on collaboration with museums across the continent to develop the professional capacities of staff. In addition, these activities also increase understanding of the rich diversity and cultural heritage of African countries and their people, and emphasise Africa's contribution to world cultures. The Programme's first major project was a highly ambitious collaboration between the British Museum and the National Museums of Kenya to develop a loan exhibition in Nairobi. *Hazina: Traditions, Trade and Transitions in Eastern Africa* opened in March 2006 and received significant attention and public acclaim in Africa and elsewhere. Learning from this project

led to the development of focused in-country training workshops tailored to the specific needs and priorities of African partners. In 2007, thanks to generous funding from the Ford Foundation, a complementary programme of skills sharing and exchange was developed for West Africa focusing on Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Over the past four years the Programme has succeeded in developing a model for working in Africa that is based on dialogue and exchange with projects that bring benefits to all partners. Perhaps most significantly it aims to ensure a legacy by investing in people, developing their professional skills and instilling confidence in a positive learning and sharing environment.



George Gandi, Omar Abdallah and Chole Kizili, Nairobi, 2010.

To date, the British Museum's Africa Programme has worked with more than 40 museums and cultural heritage institutions in Africa and with eight UK regional museums to develop and deliver training workshops and touring, temporary or permanent exhibitions, as well as supporting staff exchanges, work placements and community enterprise projects. The Programme's current long-term partners are in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. In this first issue we will celebrate some of the key recent achievements both in and out of Africa.

Julie Hudson, Africa Programme Coordinator

Learning through the Africa Programme

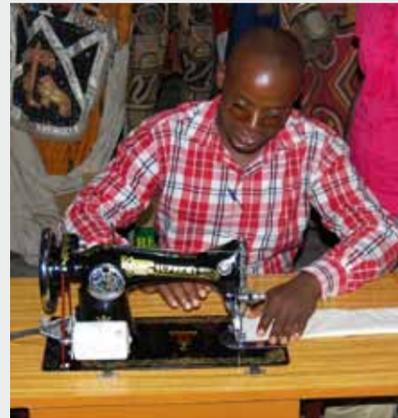
'It's all about teamwork. When we work together, we learn from each other.'
Gordon Frimpong, Manhyia Palace Museum, Kumase

Over the last four years the Africa Programme team has trialled different training methods, from formal didactic presentations and structured group-based discussions to practical activity sessions. With some methods proving more engaging than others, we now feel that we have a robust and flexible model to use as the Programme moves ahead. 'Learning by doing' sums up the ethos of the Programme, and museum colleagues are encouraged to fully participate in the training experience. Along with discussing theoretical aspects of collections management, participants might also be asked to assess environmental conditions, create new storage areas, mount objects for display, or design learning activities. Team-building is also actively pursued in this context and colleagues are frequently invited to work together to complete tasks. Theory and practice are discussed from the beginning and local knowledge

shared so that the most relevant methods can be employed for each situation. It is never assumed that 'one size fits all', everything must be adaptable.

Sustainability is essential to the success of the Programme's approach to training. African colleagues need to be able to apply and maintain new ideas and systems wherever they are located. Therefore, careful preparation for workshops based on scoping, consultation and hands-on experience is vital if Programme teams are able to judge whether something is appropriate or practicable before proposing it. Key baseline resources can be supplied by the Programme, but any materials needed for frequent use must be available locally and must be affordable on a limited budget. After that it is motivation, application and flexibility that makes things happen.

Complementary training in the UK forms a smaller but significant part of the Programme. The opportunity to spend time at the British Museum and at other UK museums and heritage sites is of enormous benefit. It expands



Nsikak Okokon Nya (National Museum Calabar), Lagos workshop 2010.

horizons and allows a different perspective on the presentation and discussion of culture and the visual arts outside the participants' home context. Work placements are also useful where particular museum practice can't be easily demonstrated or skills development requires a specialised environment (as with some aspects of conservation work). Research tasks completed during these periods have frequently provided new interpretations and enhanced understanding of objects and their related source cultures for staff in the UK as well as informing activity back in Africa.

Importantly, learning through the Programme is not simply a one-way journey. It impacts in different directions, particularly helping to develop practical skills and to build capacity in museums in Africa, but also enhancing the cultural awareness and experience of staff at the British Museum. In this way, knowledge built up by those in the Programme team has had a significant influence on exhibition development, collections interpretation and approaches to teaching about Africa. Consequently, the Africa Programme has an extremely valuable role to play in not only shaping professional expertise but also in building relationships between cultures.

Nicholas Badcott,
Africa Programme Education Manager



Issifu Mohammed (Armed Forces Museum), Olivette Barnette (National Museum Sierra Leone) and Gideon Agyare (Legon University), Kumase, 2010.

Building capacity through partnership in Sierra Leone

Over the past five years, the Africa Programme has been working with colleagues at Sierra Leone's National Museum. One of the highlights of this collaboration has been the development of new displays for the museum's permanent galleries, which opened in April 2011 as part of Sierra Leone's 50th anniversary of independence celebrations.

One of the early projects at the National Museum was a collections audit. This revealed the many strengths of the collection, with a wealth of fascinating stories coming to light in the accession registers. These are now being transferred to a computer-based collections management system as part of a wider-reaching digitisation project based at University College London (see www.sierraleoneheritage.org). Every training workshop is developed in direct response to local needs and is focused around a specific project. For example, during the collections audit, it became clear that the museum's storerooms were in need of upgrading. We therefore designed a training workshop around museum storage and preventive conservation. Together we rehabilitated a storeroom and re-housed parts of the collection following examples of good practice adapted to the local situation. Importantly, all materials and workmanship were sourced locally, reducing the cost and reliance on imported specialist materials. A similar process has been followed in other training programmes, for example,



setting up a modest digital photography studio and providing 'hands-on' training in photographing collections, or in the introduction of a computer-based collections management system, which has entailed training on a much wider range of transferrable IT skills.

Staff at the museum were keen to initiate a project to commemorate independence with a major public outcome. It was decided to develop an exhibition development and installation programme in 2010–2011, with the centrepiece being a new display of Sierra Leone's colourful masquerade traditions. In the weeks leading up to

Julius Parker preparing murals for the masquerade display, 2011.

the installation, the museum became a vibrant cultural workshop as masks and costumes were made, and accompanying ceremonies performed. A mural was created providing an appropriate backdrop to the display, and the masquerade costumes were mounted on wire-framed figures in dynamic poses reflecting the dance movements of each performer. The exhibition opened amid much singing and dancing and pouring of libations, and the displays have drawn in crowds of new visitors.

In partnership with the Africa Programme the museum is gradually being transformed. Staff confidence is high and there is a renewed pride in being associated with an institution that has collections of international significance, and with displays that excite and intrigue audiences. There is, above all, satisfaction in the knowledge that these achievements have been accomplished through their own hard work and determination.

Paul Basu, Reader in Material Culture and Museum Studies, University College London



The masquerade display at the National Museum, April 2011.

Displaying Nigerian treasures

'Thank you for the training. It has helped me to do my job better and to like my job more.' Elizabeth Okpalanzie, National Museum Lagos

Undoubtedly a recent highlight for the Africa Programme was the critically acclaimed exhibition *Kingdom of Ife: sculptures from West Africa*, on loan to the British Museum from our main partner in Nigeria, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM). The exhibition was organised jointly by the Fundación Marcelino Botín, Santander, and the Museum for African Art, New York, and opened in London in March 2010. During its four-month run it attracted more than 55,000 visitors as well as hosting special sessions for schools and community groups.

This was the first time that such a comprehensive selection of material from the medieval city-state of Ife had been seen outside Nigeria. Almost 100 sculptures made of brass, copper, terracotta and stone were drawn from the magnificent collections of Nigerian museums. Highlights included the pure copper seated figure from Tada and the group of naturalistic brass and copper heads found in Wunmonije Compound in 1938–1939. Visitors to the exhibition were met by a full-standing brass figure of an Ooni (ruler) of Ife and a breathtakingly delicate terracotta head replete with heavily



Mike Rowe and David Noden (British Museum) with Ife museum staff taking photographs for the exhibition. Nigeria, 2009.

beaded headdress, both from the site of Ita Yemoo excavated in 1957 by the British archaeologist Frank Willett. The exhibition provided an excellent opportunity to work in a collaborative manner with colleagues from the National Commission and proved of enormous benefit in offering training activities for colleagues from seven Nigerian museums. Staff from the British Museum were able to visit Lagos and Ife to develop visual and contextual material to support the exhibition. This level of access and the benefits it brought in terms of cultural engagement would not have been possible without the existing partnership with the Africa Programme.

The first stage in the preparation of the loan took place at the National Museum Lagos in October 2009 where



Edet Okon (National Museum Lagos) packing objects for the exhibition. Lagos, 2009.

a combined team worked together to pack, photograph and assess the condition of the objects. During the initial selection process seven objects were identified for major interventive conservation. The British Museum agreed to carry out this work and the Africa Programme organised work placements for NCMM conservators as part of their ongoing professional development. As well as the eight NCMM staff who acted as loan couriers during installation and de-installation, the Africa Programme sponsored four Education staff from Abuja, Lagos and Kaduna to undertake work placements between January and July 2010. These staff also visited several regional museums to gain a wider perspective into museum audiences and engagement. However, the most intensive work placement was undertaken by three staff from the Exhibitions team at Lagos Museum who worked for four weeks in January and February 2010 at the British Museum learning to make mounts before leading teams to install the Ife objects. *Kingdom of Ife* enabled NCMM staff from across the Nigerian museum network to participate in most aspects of the planning, preparation and installation of this major project. The successful delivery of the exhibition with a joint team provided a model for future collaboration and partnership.

Julie Hudson,
Africa Programme Coordinator



Olutayo Akintayo (National Museum Lagos) painting out a mount during the exhibition installation. London, 2010.

Friends united: sharing skills in Mozambique

'I'm loving my job, thanks to the British Museum!' Ademola Oshin, National Gallery of Art, Lagos

In March 2011, the Museu Nacional de Arte in Maputo, Mozambique, hosted a workshop to share skills in best museum practice. The workshop was facilitated by Heidi Cutts and Christopher Spring of the British Museum and Ademola Oshin from the National Gallery of Art in Lagos, Nigeria. The workshop provided Ademola with a marvellous opportunity to share the skills he had gained from previous Africa Programme workshops in Lagos while at the same time experiencing working practices in a different museum environment.

In 2010, along with Jonas Tembe and Aphonso Malace from the Museu Nacional de Arte, Maputo, Ademola had taken part in a conservation work placement at the British Museum, London. The Maputo workshop was a great chance for these three friends to meet again and to share their knowledge with other colleagues from Mozambique. The workshop participants came from four museums in Maputo and together visited each other's collections to better understand the challenges faced in the different institutions.

During the workshop they were able to make recommendations for practical improvements and offer ongoing assistance and advice. Ademola appreciated this supportive



Ademola Oshin (National Museum of Art, Lagos) demonstrating conservation techniques, 2011.

environment: 'the workshop afforded me the opportunity to know the problems of the different museums in Maputo and how they deal with these problems and equally I shared my problems with them as well. And I found out that these problems are similar.'

Ademola led seminars and practical sessions focused on object handling, cleaning museum objects and best practice in loan condition checking and packing. As part of the practical sessions, participants prepared two sculptures for travel to the UK, taking responsibility for condition checking, photography and packing. Ademola was keen to learn new skills as well as to impart his knowledge to others: 'the practical experience of packing the British Museum's two newly

acquired sculptures by local artists Kester and Fiel Dos Santos was the most challenging and interesting part of the workshop for me.'

The participants spoke five languages and all were used during multilingual presentations, making the workshop inclusive as well as fun: 'I had the opportunity to learn a bit of the Portuguese language and the local languages of Mozambique. I now have an idea of what Mozambique art looks like and a bit of the culture of the land' commented Ademola at the end of the workshop. Learning together about the challenges we all face as museum professionals brings a sense of partnership and encourages new friendships. As Ademola, Jonas and Aphonso have proved, distance is no obstacle in supporting each other. Workshops are about learning and sharing but just as important are the permanent friendships and networks made between people and their institutions.

Heidi Cutts, Africa Programme
Collections Assistant
Ademola Oshin, Assistant Chief
Conservation Officer, National Gallery
of Art, Lagos



Workshop team visit to the Museu Nacional de Geologia, 2011.



Participants cleaning objects during the workshop, 2011.

Conserving Ghanaian military history

'[An] old soldier never dies, however old the Colours they must always be protected and preserved.' Yakubu Seidu, Armed Forces Museum

The Armed Forces Museum (AFM) is housed in Kumase Fort, the only inland fort of its kind in Ghana. The historical importance of the building and the superb museum collections tell the history and development of the Ghana Armed Forces as well as reflecting key events in Asante history.

The Africa Programme is proud to have the AFM as a partner and very grateful for their continued support in hosting training workshops. Over the past year we have established a dedicated workshop team who have benefited from sharing their experiences and working together to learn new skills. The team is drawn from independent and national museums across Ghana and includes staff from the Armed Forces Museum, Manhyia Palace Museum and Prempeh II Jubilee Museum in Kumase, the National Museum and the National Science Museum in Accra, the Department of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Museum at the University of Ghana, Legon, and the Volta Regional Museum in Ho. Through the learning and support offered during the training workshops the team members have all been able to make a positive impact in their home institutions by passing on new skills, empowering co-workers and improving collections care. The focus for the first



in a series of textile workshops held in March last year was the redisplay of the Colours Hall at the AFM. This gallery holds perhaps the most significance for the Armed Forces as it contains the Colours of several regiments. The Colours embody the spirit and soul of a battalion or unit and display the battle honours of those who fought. 'They are human souls. They should be respected like the Asantes respect the Golden Stool.' Major (retired) M. O. Tweneboah-Kodua, Curator AFM. The textile team needed to understand the cultural and historical significance of the objects with which they were working. Brigadier General C. K. Ocran, General Officer Commanding, Northern Command, and his staff were able to impart this knowledge and to advise on correct protocol.

Nii Ayi Amu (National Science Museum) and Honour Arku (Volta Regional Museum) conserving the Infantry Regimental Colours, 2010.

Everyone in the workshop team gained experience in using simple conservation methods to clean and remount the Colours. The two-week workshop achieved exceptional results due to the professionalism and dedication of the team and the support of AFM staff. Students from local schools, and guests from cultural organisations in Kumase were invited to the AFM to celebrate the completion of the workshop. The acting GOC of Northern Command, Lieutenant Colonel Affram, spoke about the significance of the AFM to the local community. The highlight of the event was the moving performance by two Second World War veterans, Sergeant Boakye and Captain G. Opoku, who sang a lament they had composed as they left Kumase to fight in Burma in 1941. The workshop was dedicated to all those who have served in the Ghanaian Armed Forces and who continue to serve in peacekeeping missions around the world.

Heidi Cutts, Africa Programme Collections Assistant



Patricia Amo (Prempeh II Jubilee museum), teaching conservation techniques, 2010.



Officers from Northern Command, AFM curator and Africa Programme staff at AFM open day, 2010.

Preserving cultural heritage in Nairobi

'Since the renovation of the store my working environment has been transformed.' Ray Balongo, National Museums of Kenya

Following the success of the temporary loan exhibition Hazina in 2006, it was agreed that the next collaborative project between the British Museum and the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) should focus on improving the care of the collections, creating a more permanent legacy for NMK. Funding to support this project was initially provided by the UK government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport and latterly through the World Collections Programme.

The Ethnography Department (now the Department of Cultural Heritage) housed its collections in several object storage rooms spread across the main Nairobi site, most of which were in need of upgrading and reorganisation. A collections survey identified critical issues, including overcrowding, inaccessibility, damp, pests, dust and high levels of UV and visible light. The most pressing need was to replace the leaking roof to make the building watertight. This was achieved in 2007 as part of the European Union-funded Nairobi National Museum regeneration programme.

At the outset this project was conceived as an ongoing training programme and British Museum staff worked closely with colleagues at NMK to discuss the

major issues and to provide practical learning so that appropriate decisions and action could be taken at each stage of the renovation. The team drew up new plans for the existing storage areas which optimised the available space and created in addition a study, workshop and offices. These plans necessitated quite drastic demolition work to create an empty shell so that rebuilding could begin. The renovation work was delivered in phases to allow the object collections to be listed, packed and moved. A small but dedicated team supported the work throughout led by Collections Assistant Ray Balongo, who was responsible for setting the work priorities, delivering activity and liaising with colleagues at the British Museum and with Kenyan contractors. He was assisted by two casual staff, Wyclife Amudavi and Joseph Maruti, an NMK technician, Samuel Mwititi, and an NMK electrician, Anthony Mwangi. High humidity and poor air circulation had created an unpleasant and unstable environment. Air flow was increased by raising the ceiling to the full height of the roof space and fitting filtered air vents to allow controlled seasonal air circulation. The exposed roof beams echoed the newly developed galleries in the main building and increased the feeling of light and space within the store. The team applied UV film to the windows and made mosquito screens to provide protection from light, pests and dust. The floors in the storage areas were coated with non-slip paint and floor tiles were laid in the study area, offices and workshop. NMK supplied low



Dr Idle Farah, Director General NMK, opening the Cultural Heritage store, December 2010.

UV lights for the building and replaced the old wiring as well as installing extra sockets above all the work benches to improve facilities within the store.

The team used local companies to source and commission appropriate storage fittings. Soft furnishing suppliers became a major source of polyester wadding and unbleached calico which were used to create hundreds of washable pads to cushion stored objects. The project took more than two years to complete and the team faced many challenges. However, the process of rebuilding a store has brought huge benefits in terms of improved access, security and preservation of the collections.

David Noden, Collections Assistant, British Museum
Ray Balongo, Collections Assistant, National Museums of Kenya



Boarding up the ceiling, 2008.



New floor, window screens and ceiling panels, 2009.