

Empowering Ugandan museums

The Uganda National Museum in Kampala has been working with the Getty East Africa Programme over the last four years. Initially, we were involved in discussions to identify the learning priorities for museum staff and we subsequently hosted a pilot workshop in 2010. More than ten staff have now attended the collections care, education and exhibition modules over a period of three years, travelling to Kisumu to share their experiences with Kenyan colleagues. This is not the first training programme offered within East Africa but its methodology has been markedly different. Rather than relying on theoretical learning the GEAP empowers participants to make positive changes in their home stations by implementing the practical skills learnt during workshops. In a relatively short time we have witnessed a major impact.

One of our pressing issues was the inability to create an exhibition storyline. Many of our displays have remained static for 50 years and the original text was created by outsiders. Objects have also been placed into cases without any accompanying information or structure. The GEAP has encouraged staff to go into the storage facilities to select objects they are interested in and to research collections by gathering local knowledge and consulting relevant literature so that we can more accurately represent our cultural heritage. New storylines respond to the National Curriculum and in doing so bring added value and interest to our younger visitors.

Another urgent issue was light levels causing damage to objects on display. Our barkcloth collections have suffered permanent damage due to high natural and artificial light levels. We are now filtering out the damaging light by using UV film on windows and case fronts as well as on our standard fluorescent tubes. These interventions bring lasting benefit. Rather than buying expensive replacement light fittings, we have simply modified what we already have. This has enabled us to significantly improve our standards of collections care.

A key factor in the success of the programme has been in helping us to source appropriate local materials and equipment to support essential work such as preventive conservation, storage, and especially exhibitions. We are no longer reliant on expensive foreign imports or limited by wanting to directly copy the approach of Western museums. For example, we now buy local cotton cloth for use in our display and storage projects.

Teamwork has also been highlighted and staff now work collaboratively across different departments in the museum – carpenters and curators are involved in a project from the outset. This approach strengthens a small team and encourages everyone to make a contribution – staff feel



more informed about all aspects of museum work. All staff who have been trained through the GEAP have shared their learning with their colleagues so the knowledge is passed on and there is a wider benefit. This training will form the basis of induction programmes for new staff at the museum. Participants love the GEAP – they feel really motivated, enjoy their work, and have a genuine sense of their own achievement. I am optimistic that this programme will continue to inspire individuals to make improvements in our museum and that we will eventually complete the refurbishment of the ethnography gallery.

Rose Nkaale Mwanja

Commissioner for Museums and Monuments, Uganda

Documenting collections in Nigeria



In August 2014 I was invited, along with Mrs Binkat from the Institute of Archaeology and Museum Studies in Jos, to attend the first of two workshops on documentation organised by the British Museum's Africa Programme. In my role as the Acting Director of Museums at the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, I was keen to implement the knowledge and skills acquired at the workshop across the NCMM network. Our attendance at the workshop was designed to 'ensure the achievement of the documentation of our collections in all the museums in the country'.

It had been agreed that all NCMM documentation officers would be offered this training and so two separate workshops were planned to accommodate the numbers; both were hosted by the National Museum Lagos. The first workshop included participants from 20 stations, namely Port Harcourt, Abuja, Abeokuta, Lokoja, Koko, Igbo-Ukwu, Umuahia, Nok, Oron, Calabar, Owerri, Ile-Ife, Ibadan, Kaduna, Aba, Makurdi, Argungu, Oyo, Bauchi and Esie. There was a brief informal opening ceremony with short speeches from the outgoing Director of Museums, Mrs Rosemary Bodam, the Curator of Lagos Museum, Mrs Edith Ekunke, the lead resource person from the British Museum, and myself. The workshop was almost entirely practically based. It was serious work all through. A real 'workshop'. We learnt a lot of new things, and also received refresher training on things we had learnt previously but either do not implement in our museums in Nigeria or had forgotten.

The focus of the entire workshop was on the manual documentation of museum collections. The British Museum has existed for over 260 years and for the majority of that time has relied on a manual system of documentation. In African countries where there are regular power outages, a manual system is the most reliable because of the common problems associated with digitised records: computer crashes, viruses, and lack of maintenance and backup. Concentrating on the development of a robust manual

record immediately will provide a good foundation for any future digitisation programme.

Following the workshop it was agreed that the documentation processes in all the stations would be monitored. Also, the quality of the documentation will be evaluated to ensure adherence to the established standards. This will certainly pose a logistical challenge but we are committed to seeing it through. Over the next few months we will be aiming to implement several recommendations. The participants (who are mostly Heads of Documentation Units in individual stations) will organise workshops to train their own staff. This has commenced in most of the stations. The materials, equipment, and written manuals provided during the workshop are to be recorded as 'support collections' in each station to avoid their loss or misuse. Refresher workshops will be organised by NCMM on documentation at regular intervals because 'documentation is the heart of the museum'. The coordinators responsible for the workshop outcomes will be empowered with the necessary funds to carry out their duties.

The implementation of the knowledge acquired in these workshops is key to improving our documentation systems, whether manual or digital. The starting point will involve creating and updating manual records in line with ICOM/ AFRICOM standards.

I thank the Director General, NCMM, and our Africa Programme partners for this very fruitful and highly enlightening workshop. More partnerships and collaborations of this kind are desirable.

Peter A Odey
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Abuja

Above:
Standardisation
is vital in
implementing
a new
documentation
policy for NCMM.
Adedoyin Sikiru
(Ile-Ife Museum)
and Pauline
Iyanam (Kaduna
Museum) practise
measuring
techniques.

Positive outcomes

My name is Nwachukwu Ezinwanyi. I work as the Head of Documentation in the National Museum Abuja. I was privileged to participate in one of the intensive workshops on manual documentation at the National Museum Lagos in 2014.

Manual documentation has long been a problem for Nigerian Museums and we have not had a consistent standard across our network. However, having participated in the Africa Programme workshop I have broadened my knowledge in manual documentation and I am more confident in managing my collections and feel that I am now heading in the right direction.

On return to my station I have been able to give back what I learnt from the workshop to the documentation staff in Abuja. We started to work through the different procedures in a logical manner. All staff practised filling out the object entry form using the replicas we were given at the workshop, then they accessioned the collections by giving them a unique number which was either painted onto the objects or written on cloth labels and sewn onto textiles. I have also taken them through object cataloguing which involves more detailed activities such as drawing the objects, writing a physical description (using the handouts given to us), identifying the object's material and manufacture technique, and recording its measurements. We did not stop there – we have also introduced internal and external registers, loan registers, and index cards to help us to record the movement of objects.

We are now confident in procedures such as writing condition reports for objects going on loan to other museums. This involves preparing a detailed description of the object and taking photographs to illustrate its current condition. This condition report is very important because it gives both the lending and borrowing institutions a clear indication of the physical condition of the objects. Luckily for us, most of our collections are loaned so it has given us an excellent opportunity to create our own loan register. Our other objects have now been registered onto entry forms and the next stage will be to complete their accessioning.

I want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the British Museum for their initiative to train documentation staff from all over Nigeria. It has really equipped me with new and practical skills. All my colleagues in Abuja are happy and appreciate the knowledge they have acquired through me as well as the equipment and materials given to us which has aided our documentation. I believe that this partnership will continue to flourish.

Nwachukwu Ezinwanyi
National Museum Abuja

The documentation workshop at the National Museum Lagos has impacted positively on the skills of the curatorial staff at Lagos Museum. The subsequent in-house training started with much enthusiasm on the part of staff in attendance – there was great excitement generated by the content and methodology of the training. This interest also attracted other staff members from different units.

The training focused on the various aspects of documentation given during the British Museum workshop. It started with the different processes of documentation

which include methods of acquisition, essential procedures for recording objects – object entry, accessioning, marking and labelling, cataloguing and locating, measuring, recording an object's physical description, its condition, its parts and the way it has been made.

We have now started working practically on the objects: we are sewing labels onto textiles using the materials and methods we were taught. An accession register has been opened and we have recorded textiles and other objects that were found without numbers. The knowledge we have gained will take us a long way in documenting our collections to a high standard.

Edith Ekunke
National Museum Lagos



Top right:
Imebuogu Samuel
(Igbo-Ukwu
Museum) and
Ogar Ucheoma
(Umutahia
Museum) learn
new skills in
describing
museum objects
and techniques of
manufacture and
decoration.

Bottom right:
Each object
receives a unique
identity number
which is either
painted on or
sewn in place as
here by Helen
Maiyaki (Minna
Museum).

In Kenya and at the British Museum



My name is Jack Maurice Obonyo, and I am the curator of Abasuba Community Peace Museum (ACPM), located in western Kenya on Mfangano Island in Lake Victoria. My current job combines curatorial and administrative duties as well as supporting the social and cultural democratic role of the museum. ACPM is a community-based museum for the Abasuba people and is largely focused on their material culture; most notably it includes a large pictographic collection on Abasuba rock art. The museum was established according to certain socio-museological principles that promote the use of the museum space and its assets by the local community; this in turn helps them to appreciate their heritage in a participatory and inclusive manner.

The museum opened in 2000 and since 2005 we have been working closely with the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) and the Trust for African Rock Art (TARA) which is a non-governmental organisation dedicated to the conservation and preservation of rock art and associated sites in Africa. The British Museum has recently partnered with TARA to digitise its images, including those from Abasuba, and these are now becoming available on the British Museum's website.

My engagement with the British Museum's Africa Programme started when I was invited to attend a training workshop in Kisumu Museum, Kenya, focusing on collections care. I learnt about the appropriate methods of handling objects, the development of storage spaces, fittings and materials, the importance of quarantine and housekeeping procedures, environmental monitoring and control, and basic cleaning techniques. We also piloted a treatment for infested objects known as solar bagging

which has proved very useful in our museum due to the largely organic nature of many objects and their associated conservation challenges. It is important to note that our museum is the first community museum out of 20 in Kenya to be involved in such noble training.

In November 2014 I was invited to visit the British Museum to meet colleagues and exchange skills and I undertook my work placement within the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas. This visit was designed to provide me with professional training in several key aspects of museum work with an emphasis on exhibition development, and the interpretation and presentation of African collections.

Through visiting the Sainsbury African Galleries at the British Museum I learnt how Africa was presented to the public during Queen Victoria's reign and how curators are trying to deconstruct this imperial propaganda by presenting African heritage as dynamic and living by showing iconic objects such as textiles from Kenya, pottery from Nigeria and a peace tree from Mozambique. Through such stimulating displays in the galleries and the in situ training programmes for African colleagues I concluded that the Museum has shown considerable leadership in challenging the conventionality and popular memory regarding African heritage around the globe. The Museum is playing a critical role towards cultural relativity which needs to be adapted to our community museums in Kenya to ensure that we appreciate the diversity that we have in our country. The orientation part of my visit to the British Museum was an eye opener to me because it enabled me to learn how to give value to selected material cultures, prehistoric sites, historical events, traditions, customs, mythologies and memories. I learnt that the process of selection and interpretation of heritage provides crucial ingredients for the creation, revision, recreation or invention of individual or group memory that contribute towards the appreciation of any heritage.

The British Museum does not charge an entry fee (except for special exhibitions). This made me think that community museums should be places of inquiry that nourish the exchange of ideas; places to contemplate, celebrate, and share perspectives on human understanding. They should not therefore be conceived and perceived as sites of authority within the community level but they should embrace new exhibition development processes that challenge outdated hierarchical models of practice. This will help to open them up as democratic spaces which allow both the community and the museum staff to frame issues and develop ideas in exhibitions or the management of the community museum for the sake of their sustainability. By adapting the British Museum model it will also change the perception that attending a community museum might feel more like a visit to the home of authorities than the home of muses.

Through conversations and encounters with colleagues at the British Museum I have come to realise that it's important to embrace the contributions of expert knowledge within our community museums and at the same time expand our definition of 'expert' and 'expertise' to include a broader domain of experience. Community peace museums should not be a monologue but should learn how to listen, respond and share the inquiry process, and change perspectives as new ideas emerge.

Above: Jack Obonyo sheds new light on this important tobacco container from Uganda during his work placement at the British Museum.



Meeting education staff at the Museum was an eye opener for me and I learnt how they work with schools, families, young people and disabled audiences through such interesting engagement. Our museum needs to be in a position to develop spotlight live talks and to invite history teachers for discussion sessions. For the survival and continuation of educational programmes at the Abasuba Community Peace Museum it is important for us to reshape and in a sense reimagine and engage with the past and create a present through programmes that will accommodate everyone. Through such initiatives we will enable the local school from the Abasuba community to know that Homa Bay is their county, while Kenya is their country, and Suba is their history, and the world is where we all live. Such an approach will enable the ethnographic collections and the museum not only to be used as sites of presenting material culture as an intersection and negotiation of state or professional politics but as collections that are of value with regards to identity, recognition and appreciation of a given community history.



Visiting different heritage institutions has enabled me to learn that museums and heritage can be defined as spaces for social action. I realised that museums must adapt to new social needs – in essence, a return to humanism within the museum.

On behalf of the Abasuba Community Peace Museum and the entire community I want to thank the British Museum's Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas. The exchange programme has enabled me to create a new platform of critical thinking and capacity building in presenting the museum to the public. I do believe and trust that further collaboration with community museums in Kenya and around the African continent will create an opportunity for young professionals that are not available within the mainstream National Museums. These opportunities are vital if we are to reinvent our institutions. Following this visit to London the Abasuba Community Peace Museum will never be the same again.

Jack Maurice Obonyo
Abasuba Community Peace Museum, Kenya

Top: The Abasuba Community Peace Museum.

Right: African colleagues regularly share cultural knowledge with their British Museum counterparts. This information is then made widely available through the Museum's collection online.

Interaction at Karen Blixen Museum, Kenya



Karen Blixen Museum is a branch of the National Museums of Kenya located 6km west of Nairobi city centre. The museum was the house of the famous Danish author, artist, storyteller, naturalist and coffee farmer Baroness Karen Blixen. The museum presents the history of Kenya's early settlers and displays agricultural tools dating back to the 1900s. The land and gardens surrounding the museum provide a rich natural environment which is well used for the study of birds, trees, butterflies and mammals making it one of the best open air learning resource centres in Kenya. The museum is perhaps more well known internationally than locally because of the movie *Out of Africa* which draws on Karen Blixen's book of the same title.

Three of the current staff based at Karen Blixen Museum attended Getty East Africa Programme training workshops. These learning experiences have helped us to develop new activities to attract local people to the site, including school groups. The education team has created an all-inclusive and focused programme for schools drawing on available resources to enhance their interest, support their educational needs and to provide entertainment. These educational programmes are linked to the National Curriculum in response to the priorities of the teachers and the various learner groups starting from the kindergarten, to lower primary, upper primary and, finally, to secondary level.

Initially, the museum organised a workshop to familiarise primary school teachers with the museum and the available learning resources. Both private and public schools within a radius of 30km were invited to attend. During this workshop teachers were given a tour of the museum and grounds and were asked to identify key topics that were relevant to the teaching syllabus. They came up with a list of 31 topics at different locations around the museum and grounds which today form the basis of our educational programmes. The teachers were also required to advise on the best term dates for each topic. This early interaction with teachers enabled us to understand what our visitors need and when. It has made the teachers and their pupils better appreciate what the museum offers as they were involved in the development of new programmes from the initial stages. A database has also been created listing all participating schools making it easier to contact them when new programmes are running.

After attending the Getty East Africa Programme (GEAP) Education Module I in Kisumu, I learnt new ways in which I could use the museum collection in my teaching. The introduction of object-based learning was an eye opener to me. The interactive teaching techniques and activities made me open up my mind and think of the opportunities available in my own museum. I started looking at museum education from a different perspective unlike previously when most of the programmes took the form of formal lectures. I attended Education Module II in Mombasa where I learnt more about object-based activities and the opportunity to explore these in a different museum with a different collection helped to increase my knowledge and build my confidence. The idea of session development, how to come up with a theme, to link it to a site and to select relevant supporting resources helped me to think of a variety of new themes in my museum. I also considered the sustainability of programmes and making good use of what is available locally. The teaching techniques we learnt have today enabled us to develop very successful programmes. This use of new techniques and the activities has increased the opportunities for different visitors to use museum objects in their learning, thereby expanding their experiences. By allowing learners to interact with the objects we have enabled our visitors to gain a better understanding of the museum collection.

After the GEAP training, I organised an interactive 'train the trainer' session for all the museum guides and curatorial staff to share the new approach focusing on object-based learning for school groups and other visitors. This also coincided with the reinstallation of a new exhibition in the museum where all the rooms were rearranged based on different themes. With the use of techniques learnt from GEAP it was easy to train the guides. Today, all visitors to the museum are guided using this new approach and the thematic arrangement is working well.

Test programmes for each learner category were selected from the recommendations provided by teachers at the workshop. The first programmes we designed were houses, traditional industries, coffee, pollination, adaptations, and storytelling. Once these had been developed into education sessions the schools were informed about the new programmes through outreach, email and text messages

(SMS). The sessions draw on many of the techniques learnt at the GEAP training workshops such as observation, engagement, discovery and interaction. A wide range of activities are developed for each programme depending on the level of the learners to ensure that they understand the theme, enjoy the session and achieve the set objectives. The students learn in groups and each group is assigned various activities which they are required to present to the larger group. Teachers also advocate group work as it is interactive and all the students are able to participate and explore for themselves. The most popular activities to date have been word/object match, measuring games, role play, songs, poems, crosswords, storytelling, puzzles, feely bags, mystery objects and museum trails. During each programme the teachers are asked to carry out their own assessment of the session and to give comments. This has helped us a lot for we are able to understand the areas we have covered well and identify where there is need for further improvement. These comments are always considered before delivering the next session.

have helped me to develop interactive programmes which I am now confident in delivering. There has been an increase in group bookings for our programmes and more visits by school groups to the museum. Guiding skills for other museum visits have also improved. This is evident from comments in the visitors' book, by email, in our suggestion box, on Trip Advisor, as well as on the museum's Facebook page and through our Twitter account.

Rhoda Lange

Karen Blixen Museum

Along with my colleagues at the Karen Blixen Museum I have appreciated the collaboration of the British Museum's Africa Programme and the National Museums of Kenya in supporting me to attend the GEAP training. As this was my first training in museum education the skills I have acquired



Top left: Primary school students investigate the environment in the grounds of Karen Blixen Museum.

Top right: Students try out object match cards and other interactive learning tools at a schools session at Karen Blixen.

Bottom: Students at the KAG Olympic Centre, Nairobi, learn to weave using palm fibre during an outreach session. (l-r): Joseph Odhambo, Collins Omondi, Brian Gishana, David Moyer.



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