

## International Training Programme

*The Road to Reconciliation*

*ITP Collaborative Award*

*A collaborative workshop and community exhibition in Uganda*



*Final report by Abiti Nelson (Uganda, ITP Fellow 2013)*

## Introduction

This was a collaborative International Training Programme (ITP) legacy project awarded through an open, competitive process to Nelson Abiti (Uganda, ITP Fellow 2013) in 2017 for his project 'The road to reconciliation: a collaborative workshop and community exhibition in Uganda'. The main goal of the project was to develop a community exhibition with South Sudanese refugees living in the northern region of Uganda. The project team were Nelson Abiti, (Uganda, ITP 2013) and Jackline Nyiracyiza Besigye (Uganda, ITP 2013) from Uganda National Museum in collaboration with ITP alumni partners; Wendland Chole Kiziili from Kitale Museum (Kenya, ITP 2013), Hadeer Belal, from the Coptic Museum (Egypt, ITP 2013) and Shadia Abdrabo from the Sudan National Museum (Sudan, ITP 2006). The UK partner was John Giblin (former Head of the Africa Section at the British Museum). The project was funded by the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust. The delivery of the final report was delayed by the ongoing pandemic.

The goals of the project were:

- To support and build on Uganda National Museum's work that aimed to promote peace and reconciliation with displaced communities in northern Uganda.
- To strengthen the network with the British Museum's International Training Programme (ITP) by encouraging ITP alumni to network and engage.
- To consider community work as a healing project through cultural heritage.

The project was also a follow-up of lessons learnt during the *Room 3* (now *Object in focus*) exercise undertaken as an ITP fellow at the British Museum in 2013. It was also the implementation of a plan from the exhibition workshop held at the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ITP conference, *Creating museums of world stories*, held in Mumbai, India, 2015. The exhibition project's aim was to engage younger people aged between 14-17 years old by moving collections closer to the community.



*ITP Fellows, Museum staff and Community Representatives at Uganda Museum*



## **Roles of the ITP Alumni**

The ITP partners played a major role in preparing the project proposal documents and planning for its implementation within the community. The ITP team managed the travel risks to ensure the safety of participants. This was achieved through online discussions, including the community exhibition workshop in Kampala. We also developed a collaborative exhibition concept and story line (themes, messages). We identified the key partners and defined the work plans, roles/tasks, actions and reports.

We prepared budgets, purchases and reports. We also developed exhibition materials and developed a mock-up exhibition. The team also facilitated the community workshop and exhibition and the evaluation of the workshop. We wrote up our personal experiences into ITP blog posts [see Appendix 1].



*John Giblin, Kampala community workshop*

UK Partner John Giblin provided advice and participated in facilitating the Kampala community workshop.

## **Implementing the Project**

### *Preparatory planning meeting and collaborative community workshop*

The initial phase of the project started with a preparatory planning meeting organised by the ITP alumni (Egypt, Kenya, and Uganda) and BM staff (John Giblin). The preparatory planning meeting and community workshop at Uganda National Museum were held from 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> February 2018. On the first day, we orientated the ITP fellows and then toured the Uganda Museum Exhibition, guided by Abiti Nelson. The ITP alumni held planning meetings for the workshop, reviewing the project objectives, timelines, budgets, and the goals of the workshop. After the review of this preparatory meeting, the team then scheduled the community workshop programme for the next two days on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> February.

The preparatory meeting attained the goal of the project by engaging the community. It helped in discussing activities and issues of the community that were not considered in the initial project proposal, including input from ITP alumni that drew on their experiences in other international contexts. We were able to define the roles of each partner in the project and identify each of the ITP alumni roles in the workshops.



*Shadia Abdrabo presenting*

The ITP partners facilitated the community workshop. They presented and discussed the issues related to their own country by focusing on exhibition themes, messages, and storylines. They also talked about their work with young people, women's groups and community stories, artworks, photos, riddles, poems and cultural dances or performances as resources for the exhibition. For example, Kizili Chole presented about the exhibition on the Pokot community at the Kitale Museum, Kenya. He identified a problem with the community of cattle

rustling that involved fights amongst the Turkana and Pokot. Kizili's project involved communities bringing artefacts from their homes, displaying and interpreting their meanings in relation to conflicts and peaceful coexistence. Shadia Abdrabo from Sudan explained about her work at Sudan National Museum as curator of Yambio Ethnographic Museum and material culture that have connections along the Nile valley. Hadeer Mohammed had a young baby at that time and she had travel advisory restrictions to Uganda. Her work was sent online and presented by Abiti that showed the Coptic Museum in Cairo's temporary exhibition project on *'Tones of Civilization'*. It was about how music can influence people and how music is a global language to connect to other cultures.

John Giblin, UK Partner and formerly from the British Museum talked about the BM International Training Programme's influence on curators from around the world for capacity building and networking. In addition to offering a training opportunity every summer, the ITP continues to offer legacy projects through workshops, exhibitions, collaborative projects with UK partner museums, and by small grants to programme partners. Through these projects, alumni are invited back to the UK or to visit other fellows to share experiences and knowledge about what they have learnt and implemented in their home countries after their ITP training.



Moses Akuma

These above sessions were dynamic and allowed questions and responses. During the workshop, the participants discussed the procedures to work with refugees which we had not foreseen in our project planning. Moses Akuma, a youth network coordinator from the West Nile region of Uganda and who travelled with a refugee participant, Rose Awate, informed us about the Yumbe district in the West Nile that had hosted the largest number of refugees. The district also signed a Peace Act in 2002. As a result, peace days are celebrated in the district. He emphasised to promote peace you must, *'Meet, learn and share, move hand in hand'*. According to Akuma, the community exhibition project would fit well with the local authorities' goal on peace. He however, advised the project team to process a permit of access to refugees especially in the settlement camps and therefore he asked the organiser



to involve UNHCR and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) Refugee Desk. Akuma also notified the team that there will be language barriers in some settlements and encouraged the involvement of the community as interpreters.

We also heard from Nono Francis, a community museum facilitator from northern Uganda Memorial Museum of National Memory and Documentation Centre, Kitgum. He said, during the workshop on the role of the Memorial Museum, that it serves as a space for survivors of civil wars to use during dialogues. He also said that the public learn about the historical injustice of past atrocities and that it integrates education, culture, remembrance, and human rights into one space. The Museum has recorded 545 videos, 100 conflict events, 8881 photos and 8165 newspaper cuttings. In his presentation he said, material objects or art collections and their associated stories are key to reconciliation.



*The workshop*

### *Participants group discussion*

After the presentations, the participants were divided into groups, each ITP alumnus was tasked to be amongst the different groups and more specifically be attentive to the discussions of the participants. We had three groups with an average number of 6 to 8 participants. Each group discussed questions and made presentations. This enabled the ITP alumni to interact, learn and network with participants. The results from the first group showed that many had learnt and were able to discuss the exhibition concept using the following ideas on dance, music and poems that are performed during conflict resolution. The second group talked about the use of food that helps in gathering communities and can be as feasting during reconciliation. The last group presented their work on a communities' approach to the ideas of conflict and the challenges. The discussions formulated the resolutions into the second phase of the project in engaging young people with community exhibitions.



*Rose Awate*

### *Testimony*

During the closure of the workshop, we had a testimony from Rose Awate about her life as refugee in Uganda.

*'I was a Sudanese who studied in Uganda. All things went good at the start. I later left for Sudan in 2012 and joined a university in Southern Sudan and my life changed. I got married and had 2 children and dropped out of school due to the war in 2013. My husband was killed and*

*when this war resumed in 2016, I left South Sudan and left my parents behind and came with the children. At the border we were received well, given some food and blankets for sleeping and this was temporary. We were then transferred to Rhino Camp, deep into the village, a place not habited by many people. What the refugee organiser's offer is to locate for you a portion of the land, then a machete without anything? It doesn't matter whether you are a man or woman; the aspect of constructing the shelter is solely your responsibility".* (Awate Rose, 7<sup>th</sup> February 2018).

This first phase of the project was collaboratively achieved, and we shared our individual reports through the ITP blogs.<sup>1</sup> These blogs were posted on the ITP WordPress and Facebook pages.

#### *Evaluation of the planning meeting and workshop*

After the completion of this workshop, an evaluation was done on the last day of the workshop. This evaluation was both written and an oral discussion. The results of the evaluation showed that the workshop was well organised by sharing international knowledge and community involvement from the start of the project. We also held a brief evaluation with ITP fellows on the organization. The evaluation was helpful for the participants to understand the British Museum ITP Programme.



*Hand hoes as musical instruments / Jackie Nyracyiza talking to elders / Refugee women displaying their art works on textile materials.*

#### **Outreach visits and community workshop in refugee settlements**

This activity aimed:

- To develop an exhibition brief and share it with partners.
- To engage a community artist to create art stories with communities arising from the community workshop.
- To prepare an exhibition kit for school children and tours to schools.
- To develop an exhibition catalogue and review online the results of the community exhibition workshop with the partners
- To prepare exhibition panels, mounts and fixtures.
- To launch the exhibition at Barlonyo Resource Centre 21<sup>st</sup> February 2019.

The engagement with the community and especially the refugees required clearance from officials. We asked for permission through the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities in which a letter for permission was granted by the Office of the Prime Minister Refugee Desk. This process took us two months to obtain clearance. We then arranged with our community coordinator to schedule workshop days in two different refugee settlements. These schedules were communicated to the communities. The ITP partners were informed of the processes through the online email communication. Although there was a potential risk to

engaging with young people, we focused on the consent of the parents towards their participation and asked for permission to record and take photos. This is the procedure the Uganda National Museum follows in undertaking community meetings.

In June 2018 we organised another collaborative workshop with the communities. Jackline Nyiracyiza and I visited the refugee settlements. This workshop with the South Sudanese refugee settlements of Ariwa and Ombeci in Arua and Yumbe districts respectively was a participatory event that enabled engagement in the making of inclusive artefacts, performances and understanding of museum work. We were warmly welcomed by a group of young women led by Awate Rose, a young woman who has been a refugee in Uganda twice and who participated in the ITP collaborative workshop at Uganda National Museum earlier in the year. She organised women's peace groups; the women made arts and crafts, jewellery, and textile bed clothes. The group of young women used arts and cultural performance as a healing process. Traditional dances were performed, including the *Acholi* dance by young girls. During meetings with the women and a few elderly men, we collected some unique artefacts such as a European Union branded jerry-can. We also purchased the women's handmade crafts such as beadworks and decorated bedcovers. These items became new collections for the Uganda National Museum.



*After the workshop, in the tent / Children perform dance in the Ariama camp, West Nile, 2018*

### **The community exhibition on reconciliation at Barlonyo**

This exhibition was an update from the earlier Uganda National Museum exhibition. It featured the *Road to Reconciliation* display messages. The community workshop in Kampala and the involvement of the South Sudanese community led to the development of the community exhibition. This exhibition was displayed in Barlonyo on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2019. The theme for the 2019 memorial was '*Looking beyond the past 15 years: Hope and future*'. The theme aimed to address issues of the past, to reflect on the past and have a peaceful society. The introduction of the exhibition written by the community was followed by the context including information about the community, historical narrative, testimony, and messages of hope. The community embraced learning through demonstrations of dances and dramas.

We did an evaluation of this exhibition in May 2019 with the women to review the displays. Some of the remarks said, '*It made them to think people outside there are mindful and come to support us*'. Another said, '*This is a symbol of peace now that war is over*'. However, one critical comment said '*the exhibition images had not contributed to reparation, a picture of cattle should have been there to instigate our compensation*'. The women also commented that the record of the deceased on the monument was wrong which has taken long time to correct.





*Exhibition launch and community at Barlonyo*

### **Celebrating International Museums Day on 13<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> May 2019 at Uganda National Museum.**

We continued to collaborate in the ITP legacy project by inviting Mrs Hadeer Mohammed from the Coptic Museum, Egypt. She spent four days in Kampala at the Uganda National Museum. She participated in three different activities, first a dialogue meeting with artists and musicians as part of our museum publics. She was one of the panellists at the public dialogue which included Dr Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza, professor and curator, Makerere University and Suzan Kerunen, singer and Sewasewa, a musician. This panel was about culture and business in musical enterprise. On the second day, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2019, Hadeer also participated in a young people's debate on cultural diversity. The aim of this debate was to seek the young people's views on culture and its presentation at the Uganda National Museum. The final day, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2019, Hadeer was among the delegates invited to open the 'Unseen Archive of Idi Amin' exhibition. The exhibition, which I co-curated, was opened by First Deputy Prime Minister of Uganda Hon. Prof. Kirunda Kivenjija. The exhibition attracted international media attention including the Times of London who published an article on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

### **Challenges**

The planning of the exhibition was delayed by the educational programmes and access for the interaction with South Sudanese refugees. Whereas the refugees are free to interact with the communities, the UNHCR policy required permits for individuals or institutions organising workshops. This activity affected our engagement with children, though we did manage to have meeting with South Sudanese women's peace club groups and other performing participants.

We also encountered a challenge to engage children in the schools. The school programmes were already fixed, and the Uganda National Museum programme allocated for the activities of the project were limited. We therefore did not achieve the objective to implement the school kit and exhibition tour to the schools. However, the new school curriculum has changed in lower secondary education. It is now pedagogical which allows for extra curriculum activities and hence we are optimistic to undertake exhibition activities with schools and seek to partner with school administrations.

We were unable to budget for the coordination of transport and exhibition costs which were much higher than we anticipated. Therefore, our plans for a travelling exhibition were hampered and we therefore had a permanent exhibition instead.

### **Project experience**

We were able to share a lot of ideas ranging from community mobilisation, fundraising, education activities and interpreting cultural materials. The project enabled us to get to know each other and to partner with local institutions and the government, Ministries, local districts, the refugee community and Barlonyo community.



Each of the ITP alumni had special skills and work experience linked to their activities with the communities. We have also kept in communication with each other to understand institutional capabilities and weaknesses.

We learnt the collaborative projects have unforeseen challenges, for example the British Museum had to complete an advisory risk assessment to enable our participants to visit Kampala. As part of this the fellows were not allowed to move away from Kampala and hence the ITP participants missed the opportunity to encounter the community experience.

### **Different observations from the project by the ITP participants**

We did not plan and budget for activities in each of the ITP alumni members action plans in their home countries. It was, therefore, Uganda that benefited to implement the activity with the communities. We also thought of visiting each partner country in Egypt, Kenya, and Sudan to better understand the various projects.

Uganda and Egypt had not collaborated much before on exhibition events and this was a great opportunity for strengthening relations. The Museum management and Ministry officials from Uganda were happy to see the curators from Uganda National Museum have networks for building capacity.

The Uganda National Museum staff need more of these opportunities to participate in the ITP programme and they were missing a lot of skills and knowledge in exhibition creation. We failed to undertake the activity of involving all the participants for the final evaluation of the project due to limited financials to transport and accommodate the ITP alumni and to organise a meeting with the community participants.



*Ariama Refugee settlement*

### **Future plans**

We plan to revisit the refugee settlements for a follow-up exhibition project with the Uganda National Museum and organise effective planning to have community/refugee exhibitions as a travelling exhibition with logistical support and transport facilitation. We would also like to share the experiences of the project in a publication.

This collaboration needed more time to partner and to reflect on the outcomes. It is important to have an opportunity to share these experiences.

### **Acknowledgments**

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I would like to also thank the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust for supporting this project and the range of trusts, foundations and individuals who support the International Training Programme each summer.

### **Cover images**

Top image: ITP fellows, Kizil Chole Abiti Nelson Shadia John Giblin and Jack Ssebuyongo during the Milk exhibition tour on Monday 5th Feb 2018

Images below left to right: Fibre ball from recycled plastics in refugee settlement / exhibition launch and community at Barlonyo / Refugee women displaying their art works on textile materials



## **Appendix 1**

### **International Training Programme blog posts**

Nelson Abiti (Uganda, ITP 2013): Road to Reconciliation update

<https://bmitpglobalnetwork.org/2019/03/19/nelson-abiti-itp-2013-uganda-road-to-reconciliation-update/>

Successful collaborative award announcement: Road to Reconciliation by Abiti, Hadeer & Kizili.

<https://bmitpglobalnetwork.org/2017/10/12/successful-collaborative-award-announcement-road-to-reconciliation-by-abiti-hadeer-kizili-itp-2013/>

Shadia Abdrabo (Sudan, ITP 2006): Road to Reconciliation update

<https://bmitpglobalnetwork.org/2018/03/27/shadia-abdrabo-itp-2006-sudan-road-to-reconciliation-update/>

Jackline Nyiracyiza Besigye (Uganda, ITP 2013): Road to Reconciliation update

<https://bmitpglobalnetwork.org/2018/03/01/jackline-nyiracyiza-besigye-itp-2013-uganda-road-to-reconciliation-update/>

Wendland Chole Kiziili (Kenya, ITP 2013): Road to Reconciliation update

<https://bmitpglobalnetwork.org/2018/03/13/wendland-chole-kiziili-itp-2013-kenya-road-to-reconciliation-update/>

Road to Reconciliation: a guide to Kampala, Uganda

<https://bmitpglobalnetwork.org/2017/12/21/road-to-reconciliation-a-guide-to-kampala-uganda/>