

Exploring Traditional Methods of Conserving Ethnographic Objects: Reviving Our Ancestors' Skills

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It has been nearly a year since I last wrote a blog for the International Training Programme (ITP), and returning to this space feels both exciting and meaningful. I would first like to express my sincere gratitude to the ITP for selecting our project and giving us the opportunity to collaborate, exchange knowledge, and most importantly, engage directly with community members in our respective countries.

As the ITP celebrates its 20th anniversary, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations and wishes for many more years of making a meaningful impact across the museum and cultural sector. I am grateful to be part of a programme that continues to connect, empower, and inspire museum professionals around the world.



Together with my colleagues, Junior Bigira, Assistant Curator at the King's Palace Museum in Rwanda, and Beatrice Bamigbade (ITP Fellow 2022) and Kolawole Samson Adeyera (ITP Fellow 2023), Chief Conservators at the National Museum of Unity, Aleshinloye, Ibadan, Nigeria; we are undertaking a collaborative research project titled *"Exploring Traditional Methods of Conserving Ethnographic Objects: Reviving Our Ancestors' Skills."*

This initiative aims to rediscover, document, and learn from traditional knowledge systems that have long sustained the care and preservation of cultural heritage across our communities.

In many of our institutions, conservation practices have been shaped predominantly by modern, often Western methodologies. This is partly due to the limited number of training programs across the African continent that center conservation education on local knowledge systems. Yet long before these formal approaches were introduced, our communities had already developed rich and effective methods of caring for and preserving cultural heritage. This locally grounded knowledge, carefully passed down from one generation to the next, carries stories, wisdom, and practices that remain deeply relevant today.

Our project emerges from this context, seeking to bridge the gap between these worlds. By exploring traditional conservation techniques—rooted in indigenous materials, deep environmental knowledge, and lived cultural practices—we aim to uncover approaches that can meaningfully inform and enrich contemporary museum work. In doing so, we are not only preserving objects but also reconnecting with ways of knowing that have long sustained our heritage.



Another highlight of this journey has been the opportunity to connect with a team working on a closely related project titled *“Building Sustainable Conservation Capacity in Kenya and Nigeria.”* This initiative is led by Ogechukwu Elizabeth Okpalanozie, Assistant Director of Conservation at the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM, ITP 2023), alongside Rodah Kalondu Lange, Curator and Conservator at the National Museums of Kenya (NMK, ITP 2023), and Lillian Amwanda Ochieng, Curator and Conservator at NMK (ITP 2024).

This meaningful connection, facilitated by the ITP, particularly Amelia, gave our team the opportunity to participate in a webinar, gain new perspectives on conservation, and strengthen knowledge exchange and collaboration across our projects.

We have already begun the research phase, engaging with communities, elders, and practitioners who still hold this invaluable knowledge. Through conversations, field visits, and documentation, we are uncovering methods that speak not only to preservation but also to identity, sustainability, and respect for cultural context, reminding us that conservation is not just a technical process, but also a cultural and human one.



As we move forward, we hope that this project will contribute to a broader conversation about inclusive and context-sensitive conservation practices in museums and heritage institutions. Reviving our ancestors' skills is not about looking back with nostalgia, but about bringing forward knowledge that remains relevant and valuable today.

I am truly glad to be sharing this journey again through the ITP platform, and I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the continued support and opportunities provided by the ITP and its sponsors. This grant has made it possible for us to collaborate, begin our research, and grow together throughout this ongoing journey, and for that, we are deeply grateful.