

From Storage to Story: Reinterpreting Kenyan Origin Artefacts Through Community Voices

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What happens when museum collections abroad are interpreted by the very communities they represent? The answer is very clear; richer stories, more accurate documentation, and stronger International Museums partnerships.

On 9 July 2026, Kabarnet Museum under National Museums of Kenya and Glasgow Museums in the United Kingdom organised for a community engagement virtual workshop supported by the British Museum International Training Programme (ITP). Using the 2026 ITP collaboration grant, selected communities in Kenya helped to reinterpret some of the artifacts housed at Glasgow Museums.

Hosted at Kabarnet Museum, the venue came alive with vibrant indigenous communities from Pokot, Nandi, Maasai and Swahili dressed in traditional attires proudly representing their cultures and creating an atmosphere rich in identity and pride. They made the hall vibrant with songs, dance, and laughter as elders and community leaders consisting of both men, women and the youth gathered to reconnect with their cultural heritage housed at Glasgow Museums.

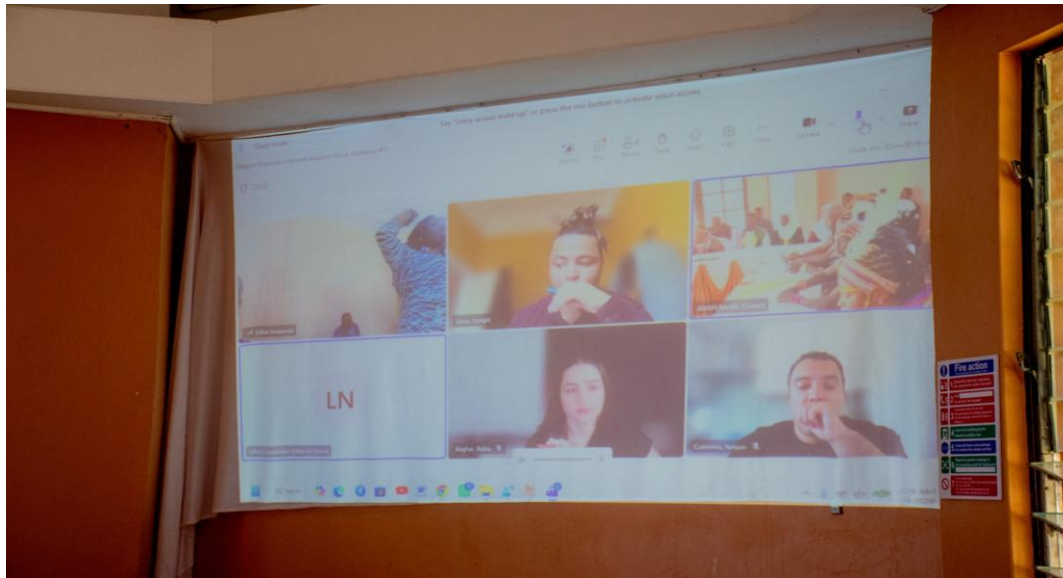


Even though the meeting was delayed slightly due to technological hitches, the community members did not lose hope and when the workshop officially started it went on with a lot of enthusiasm. The represented communities verified the local names, explained traditional uses, and shared the cultural significance of each object, which will go on to help update and correct the existing object records.

One of the most memorable moments came when the Nandi community representatives brought with them objects similar to those housed in the Glasgow Museums collections. Holding these objects in their hands, they demonstrated exactly how they were made, worn, and used within their communities. These live demonstrations provided insights that cannot be captured through photographs or catalogue records alone. Elders explained the stories behind the objects, the skills required to make them, and the occasions on which they were used, bringing museum collections to life in remarkable ways.



The workshop that was live streamed was joined by international colleagues from Glasgow Museums and National Museum of Kenya staff, creating an inspiring exchange of knowledge across continents. Joseph Tema, Curator of Global Majority Cultures at Glasgow Museums, helped give context to the objects giving names of those who collected or donated the objects to Glasgow Museums, and highlighted that all the objects were acquired during the colonial period.



The screen showing our International Partners from Glasgow Museums

Throughout the workshop it gave me affirmation that museums are not simply places where objects are stored but rather, they are spaces where communities, memories, and traditions continue to thrive. By combining indigenous knowledge with museum practice, this international partnership is building more inclusive, accurate, and community-centered collections. As we came to the close of the workshop after two hours and bid our Glasgow Museum staff goodbye through songs and dance, one message remained clear, that the true custodians of cultural heritage are the people whose stories give these objects their meaning, and their voices deserve to be at the center of museum interpretation. The workshop, which was a community research engagement, helped with the proper documentation and presentation of the Kenyan origin artifacts held by Glasgow Museums. Have we ever wondered about the role of technology in cultural heritage management? Yes, it was evident through the workshop that technology can play an important role in bridging the gap in cultural heritage management as the event was done virtually. The workshop was true testimony of ‘from storage to stories.’



From a Glasgow Museums perspective, it was particularly interesting to see just how many inaccuracies we had within our collection records. Whether it was the name or purpose of an

object, it was really interesting to hear directly from contemporary source communities about each object as they related to it.

A workshop like this brings objects to life, many of which are currently off display in our stores. Seeing members of different communities talk about the value of these objects and in some cases providing examples of how they might be used was touching. At one point Nandi community members had brought along corresponding objects and gave us a display of how they might be used. Moments like this cannot be recreated in our spaces and highlight the value of being able to work on a project like this.

One statement that stuck with me at the end was when a member of the Masaai community said that they were happy that the objects were being cared for, as contemporary examples of certain objects are being lost in source communities. This trust to care for and preserve cultural artefacts is not taken lightly and really highlighted the value of this project, not only to improve the accuracy of our records but to show source communities that their culture is being cared for, even if it is halfway across the world.