



"If we do not save our heritage for our children, who will?"

Community Museums in Uganda

CCFU, 2012





Marriage bangle, Human Rights Focus Peace Museum, Gulu.

Cover (clockwise from top left): *Diviner's stick, Uganda Martyrs University Museum, Nkozi; Wooden container, Edirisa Museum, Kabale; Model hut, Cultural Assets Centre, Kibaale.*

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*Decorated gourd for protection spirit,
St Luke Museum, Kyotera.*

1 Heritage – an evolving perception

For many years, museums the world over were seen as institutions to be treated with the utmost respect, where visitors would admire in silence well-guarded objects on display. One's national heritage often found its expression in artefacts carefully presented in glass boxes, exhibited thanks to public funds or the generosity of rich patrons.

From the 1980's, conservation and the role of museums were redefined. The perception of heritage moved away from artefacts and monuments alone to include 'living museums' and the 'intangible' heritage: the body of knowledge, traditions, customs, skills, even values, that are so important in defining peoples, communities and nations, and without which the physical aspects of one's heritage are devoid of much meaning. Tourism - including cultural tourism - also emerged as a major international industry; 'heritage' became part of modern economies and increasingly driven by private sector initiatives. At the same time, the need to protect the environment and to use resources sustainably became a growing global concern.

With this evolution, punctuated by a series of UNESCO Conventions, the 'people dimension' of heritage has become more prominent, as well as the connection between heritage and development –

including in low income countries. Heritage is therefore increasingly seen as involving all sectors of society. We have moved well away from the elitist concept of a few decades ago.

These trends are reflected in Uganda, as this publication focusing on people's efforts to protect and promote their heritage, demonstrates.

In 2009, the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda, a local NGO, launched an initiative to "*Link past and future: People's museums and cultural resource centres in Uganda.*" Rather than focusing on Government museums (that are often divorced from ordinary people), this concerns community museums, whose existence is less well known, but where an attempt has been made by local organisations or individuals to connect past and future.

CCFU is keen to support these efforts, as a means to harness cultural specificity and diversity for development, and to strengthen Uganda's national cultural consciousness. This publication is meant to highlight these museums and to encourage readers to support them, especially by paying them a visit...



Model hut – Karamoja Women's Cultural Group Museum, Moroto



A passion for heritage: Festo Karwemera, Edirisa Museum, Kabale

“Before I was sent to school in 1936, my mother took me to a shrine, placed my hand on top of a pot of local beer and told me to chant the following words after her: “Now that I am going to battle, I pray that I come back successfully.” I interrupted her with a question: “Who are we talking to?” She told me not to worry, but to continue chanting after her, which I obediently did. She continued intoning. “Keep me safe from sickness and give me life”

“Many years later, when I had become a teacher, I began to think twice about my mother’s prayer to I-did-not-know-whom. If my mother was talking about me having life and being successful, she certainly could not have been praying to Satan. While the missionaries thought we worshipped Satan, I strongly feel that we were worshipping a supernatural God whom we believed in. In 1927, the colonialists and the chiefs burnt down all the shrines, claiming that they were devilish. Our behaviour changed because of the missionaries.

“I decided to build this Museum for our children and grand children, to teach the future generation about the past. I have not put anything Western in the Museum. Young people come and are taken around.



*Wooden container, Edirisa
Museum, Kabale*



2 Uganda's culture – a growing appreciation

When Uganda secured its independence in 1962, a nascent tourism industry focused on national parks. A few monuments and buildings were listed and protected. Our national museum - exhibiting 'tribal' lore and natural history - had recently moved to its current, grand premises. It was a building ahead of its time, exhibiting much confidence in the future. The value of Kasubi tombs and the Nyeru rock paintings was recognised, and a small district museum was in existence in Soroti.

As the country entered its turbulent political period, this optimism vanished. Heritage protection and tourism seemingly went into oblivion until the late 1990's. It was also a time when culture often came to be dismissed as dance and drama, or as backward and irrelevant to a 'modern' society. As somewhat said, 'culture does not bring food on the table'. The 1990's also showed that the forces of globalisation often threaten Uganda's culture: its social fabric and values seem to be evolving in ways that many do not approve of.

Today, we nevertheless find that certain forms of Uganda's culture are very resilient. These are however rarely exploited for progress. Generally, development prescriptions neglect the country's cultural dimensions and rich diversity and, as a nation, we do not give a high priority to cultural affairs. After all, we do not even have a

fully fledged Ministry of Culture! Our National Culture Policy generally remains a dormant document, with hardly any financing. And everywhere our built heritage is vanishing before our eyes, unprotected by outdated laws or ravaged, such as the Kasubi tombs fire, because of poor safety measures. The old must be replaced by the new and shiny, and there is even talk of demolishing our one and only National Museum...

But things are changing: we increasingly recognise that 'heritage' goes beyond the gorillas in Bwindi forest or our spectacular landscapes. Local languages have been re-introduced as a medium of instruction in primary schools. Tourism is increasing its contribution to the national economy. A new museum has been built in Karamoja and steps are being taken to reconstruct Kasubi tombs, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. There is a growing realisation that our heritage lies in our people – in other manifestations of our tangible heritage, as well as the wealth and diversity of our intangible heritage.

And among people who inspire this recognition are those who decided to start their own museums, to whom we now turn.





*Three-mouthed pot for
Musoke deity, St Luke
Museum, Kyotera.*

Throughout the country, a few individuals, families and communities have initiated small museums, often to depict and preserve the local cultural heritage. In most cases, these are private enterprises, stemming from the passion of one or several Ugandans. The founder is usually the person-in-charge. Owners also include local organisations and community groups. Some institutions, such as universities, have followed suit and constituted their own collections of artefacts.

The word ‘museum’ might evoke a large, imposing building but these are mostly small-scale initiatives, often in a makeshift or rented space. To date there are approximately 25 such museums in all parts of the country, sometimes along main transport routes or in main towns, sometimes in more remote areas. They are fewer in Northern and Eastern Uganda than elsewhere, because these regions have recently been affected by war and displacement. This has not only put immediate survival needs at the forefront, it has also led to a breakdown of cultural values, especially among the younger generation. By contrast, in the Central and Western regions, museums benefit from the growing tourism trade, from a relatively developed infrastructure and from the proximity of expanding urban centres.

These are self-driven initiatives by Ugandans who believe in the value of their culture and feel they have a responsibility to preserve and share it. The focus is often on ethnic culture and on

the preservation of culture for culture’s sake rather than, say, for tourism. In all cases, a great effort has been made to constitute a collection, usually without any external support, monetary or otherwise. The collections are shared with the public and differ in sizes: some contain hundreds of items of varying interest, age and rarity. Others consist of a handful of pieces. All are being developed, often by persuading local people to donate artefacts.

Museum owners have also made an effort to engage young people, for instance by inviting school children to visit their premises and enhance their appreciation of heritage. External exhibitions are also held to attract wider audiences. Attempts have been made to adopt museum ‘best practices’, such as by labelling artefacts, opening an accession register and developing a catalogue.

Challenges of course remain: collections rarely have a strong thematic focus and most of the initiators adhere to a traditional concept of museum – with the ‘living’ aspect absent. They also often have a vision connected to the immediate environment and relevance to it, and these initiatives are hardly known beyond their immediate locality. The degree of openness to the public differs and opening hours can be erratic. They often still depend on the founder for their energy and are isolated on the country’s cultural landscape. Most worryingly, they remain under-resourced skills-wise and often eke a financial existence, as they depend on the voluntary spirit of those who established them.



A Museum for local people first : Emmanuel Masereka, Bulemba Museum, Rwenzori mountains

“Bulemba museum is a cultural museum. It is also a community museum, an education centre to interpret our culture. It is a talking tool for the Bakonjo. We bring together historical items on culture, social life and on conservation for people to learn from. Our people, the Bakonjo, need to know what happened in the past and how it can help them in the future. We are trying to teach people the importance of culture and how culture should be handled in this modern world, where there are many new developments.

“We are targeting children, students, researchers and tourists. It is a tourist attraction and it involves many people around the mountains and people from the whole world, so it is important to all of us, but especially for the Bakonjo. It is mainly for the local people, so that we understand and appreciate our own culture; the tourists come second.

“Today many people have been looking at culture negatively but they are forgetting that culture can help in development because, when they come to the museum, they can use what they have learned for their personal and community development, to use it tomorrow and design the future. So we meet a community need and the Museum

is serving the people of the Rwenzori region, as well as the entire world. [The museum] is promoting good relations with the National Park authorities and the people themselves. We better understand the value of conserving our natural resources and when we work with the Park, then eco-tourism will have meaning.

“I want to tell people, particularly in the Rwenzori region, that culture is a tool in sustainable development: we used to have old men climbing the mountains for rituals and if you analyse these rituals, these are relevant to climate management, good health, and crops growing well”.



4 Contributing to national development

As the dash towards ‘modernity’ sweeps anything older in its wake, and as public and private resource focus on meeting immediate ‘basic needs’, community museums play an important role in preserving our heritage in a quickly changing environment. As long as the state does not better recognise the importance of heritage preservation, they constitute one of the few ways to ensure that our cultural roots remain available to future generations and that this important cultural right is respected.

But this contribution goes beyond preservation: because of their focus on local cultural resources and their spread throughout the country, community museums also play an important role in highlighting and legitimising Uganda’s diverse cultural resources. In making their statement, community museums therefore promote important national values of tolerance, identity and respect for diversity – a vital function in a potentially fractious country, where many different ethnic groups have to engage with each other in peace and harmony.

This is especially important for less numerous ethnic groups who



*Spear and shield, Edirisa
Museum, Kabale*



often see their identity threatened, and are powerless to influence issues affecting them. Ethnic minority groups are still little known by the general public, and the little that is known is tainted with stereotypes. Community museums and similar initiatives present an important avenue to guarantee that minorities' cultural rights are respected.

The contribution of community museums to our national prosperity is also practical: they add to employment, to ancillary services and infrastructure, and to the growing realisation that cultural tourism can generate income, just as the more traditional safaris to national parks do.

Finally, several community museums have recently established linkages with neighbouring secondary schools, encouraging students who are members of fledgling 'heritage clubs' to learn from them. This is part of their wider contribution to education at all levels – including at universities - and to their research function, providing material and facilities to researchers engaged in many fields of study.





Clockwise (from top left): Water pot, Igongo Cultural Centre, Mbarara; Karamajong baby skirt, Uganda Martyrs University Museum, Nkozi; Regalia, Nyamyaro Museum, Bunyoro Kingdom, Hoima, Twins' band, Uganda Martyrs University Museum; Royal trumpet, Nyamyaro Museum; Nine-legged royal stool, Nyamyaro Museum; Wooden comb, Cultural Research Centre, Jinja.





Isolated communities have museums too: Margaret Lomonyang from the Karamoja Women's Cultural Group Museum

"I am a founder of community museums in Karamoja. What inspired me was my interest from the first books I read, those written by the British before I was born in the 1960's. They described things I was curious about and I inquired from the elders. If at 47 I could do this, then what about my children? So I took the initiative to look for people who had some materials connected to my culture, to show them to my children and the neighbours' children.

"I was once invited for a meeting in Nairobi. We were taken to visit a museum and see the crafts Kenyan women made. I admired the women and their skills from all cultures. I found out that they started with no money and they did this by forming groups amongst themselves. So, when I returned, I decided to form groups in every district in Karamoja (...)

"Karamoja is different: the way other cultural groups are viewed is different, for example Tooro and Buganda are big cultures and they even have kingdoms. We, as the Karamojong, are really cut off and isolated and I want to push and see to it that we can also be recognised as a culture and also show

people what is done in Karamoja.

"With modernisation, culture is forgotten because you find Karamojong children might grow up in the city, without even knowing their mother tongues. There is a lot of negligence. The community museum is used to educate youth about their different tribes and cultures. We advise them, take them for cultural competitions and show them how it is done and later they get inquisitive. It's more important for us to let the young people know where we came from and where we are going: even if they are at school they should know something.

"We do not have many visitors to support us and most of the work we do is done voluntarily. But I am contented, money or not."





*Giraffe hide sandals, Karamoja Women's
Cultural Group Museum, Moroto*



Museums and business:

James Tumusiime, Founder, Chairman and Executive Director, Igongo Cultural Museum Ltd.

“We wanted to develop a community that treasures its heritage. So we started by putting up a museum where many artefacts were collected. It has brought a lot of enthusiasm within the first two years of opening from the community around the museum and beyond, and when the President decided to come officially to the museum, it was very great for us. When launching the museum, we gave it a tag line “Where the future meets the past”. Culture evolves but not to the point of ignoring its roots, we are interested in the root, the foundation of our culture, the human and creative aspect. Then we build on that for the development of society. So we are already anticipating the future.”

“We did not look at the museum in terms of profit because you need children and other people of whatever means to come and learn. But we put up facilities around it where we can charge a reasonable amount and be able to subsidise the museum. The good thing with a museum is, once you put it up, the payback period is long but you do not have a lot to pay in terms of operational costs.”

“It has been a reasonably successful business venture: reasonable in the sense that we are providing taxes to the

tourism industry. We are on the main road; our museum is a stopover for tourists, they buy food and drinks, and we are constructing a hotel. We provide other facilities such as food, hospitality services to the community around, crafts, we sell books and many other things and in the process we employ close to 70 people.”

“The more a country develops, the more its cultural industry develops - if a country is not culturally developing, there must be something wrong - because once people satisfy their basics needs of food, shelter and security, next comes self-actualisation and discovery. As the capacity of the people to spend increases, we are going to tap into that market. The new developments like hotels, gardens, leisure centres will bring more visitors who help to sustain the museum.”





(Left) Pot for smoking milk verses (right) Wooden milk container, Igongo Cultural Centre Museum, Mbarara

5 The journey of the Cross-Cultural Foundation with community museums

Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda staff first came across community museums in 2009, as they visited the country to identify initiatives that illustrated the positive role that culture can play in development work. It was also the first time that the concept of a ‘community museum’ was used in the country.

First, with support from UNESCO, and in conjunction with the Uganda Government’s Department of Museums and Monuments, a mapping exercise identified these initiatives. Thanks to radio announcements and field visits, 13 viable museums were enumerated. Owners and managers of museums then came together and underwent training in museum management; in documentation, publicity and marketing. Participants were also guided to prepare practical action plans, on the basis of which seed grants were awarded to 12 museums.

CCFU also helped the museums to publicise their existence through brochures and a roadmap locating 15 museums in the country. A monthly e-newsletter was launched to help them share





*Acholi hoe, Human Rights
Focus Peace Museum, Gulu*

information and experiences. To raise their profile and to link them to potential supporters, again with UNESCO's assistance, the Foundation organised the first ever national Community Museums Exhibition in 2010. The museums displayed unique and fascinating artefacts from across the country which attracted much attention and underlined Ugandans' growing pride in their cultural heritage.

It was on this occasion that the Government of Uganda pledged support, especially by recognising private museums in the relevant national policy framework. The exhibition also provided the participants with an opportunity to form their own association, the Uganda Community Museum Association, which is now officially registered as an NGO. The Association aims at preserving artefacts and cultures throughout the country through community museums, availing their collections to all generations, especially the youth.

As an NGO dedicated to promoting culture as essential for equitable and sustainable development, CCFU feels justified in continuing to support these exciting initiatives in the years to come.



Nkisi figure (Democratic Republic of Congo), Uganda Martyrs University Museum, Nkozi



Peace-building and connecting with the youth: James Otto, Human Rights Focus Peace Museum, Gulu

“The idea of starting a Peace Museum came from a realisation that the local communities were in despair, anxious for an immediate return of peace. So [we had] to re-activate the Acholi cultural means of resolving conflicts and building the peace.”

“The Museum gives an opportunity to access those items which Acholis used in peace building. There are 101 such items. How many of these do young people know, sometimes zero. Missing out goes hand in hand with a diminished belief. I recall that some of the youths who returned from the bush[war] and were meant to step on an egg to atone were scared. You could read fear on their faces, as if that egg was on fire. Why were they scared? They did not know! Why step on an egg? They needed to be educated. A typical Acholi strongly believes that, once a member of a household has committed an offence against a person who belongs to another household, unless such rituals are performed, that person will never live a normal life.”

“The challenges we face include funding. If we had space of our own, the museum items would be displayed in a more structured way. Presently, they are stored in a resource centre which leaves a very thin line between the role of a resource centre and the Peace Museum”.”

“I know that people, after going through years of turmoil and incarceration in camps, would prefer handouts. But if they consider peace, they will be able to sustain themselves and that is how I see the Peace Museum making a big contribution. It may not be tangible but it is there. The lesson should be: never again should we subject our community to violent conflict.”



6 Promoting our cultural heritage: a collective responsibility

The dedication of community museum initiators alerts us to the need to promote our cultural heritage as useful and relevant to our nation. Throughout the globe, people are more actively than ever seeking alternative solutions to development challenges, with cultural identity and its contribution ranking high in the search for sustainable answers. This however requires a collective effort by all of us, our communities and our Government.

Although our National Development Plan for the first time accords space to the need to nurture culture for development, there is still much to do, in heritage education, in developing our cultural heritage infrastructure and in updating the outdated legal framework.

CCFU's support to community museums over the years has underlined the vital role they can play in preserving and promoting our cultural heritage, a role that is gradually becoming recognised by policy makers and the media. And the numbers of community museums is growing. However, whereas community commitment to preserve and promote Uganda's heritage is high, these museums need to professionalize their services and must actively seek support from government, the private sector, civil society and others to fully realise their potential.

As citizens, we must demand a better recognition by government - nationally and locally - of the culture sector; but we can also support our communities' own efforts to promote our heritage. What better way to do so than visiting and encouraging our local community museum?



National Community Museum Exhibition, Kampala, 2010

in Uganda

1. African Research and Documentation Centre, Uganda Martyrs University, Nkozi, Tel. 0779664605
2. Ankore Cultural Drama Actors Museum, Isingiro, Tel. 0776121945
3. Attitude Change Museum, Wakiso, Tel. 0775246974
4. Batwa Cultural Experience Museum, Kanungu, Tel. 0774277324
5. Buganda Museum, Kampala, Tel. 0782168094
6. Bulemba Museum, Rwenzori, Kasese, Tel. 0772978982
7. Bunyoro Community Museum, Hoima, Tel. 0772686922
8. Butambala Heritage Centre of Civilisation Ssana Walukagga, Mpigi, Tel. 0712486748
9. Centre of African Christian Studies, Kampala, Tel. 0414-510373
10. Cultural Assets Centre (Uganda Rural Development and Training Programme), Kagadi, Tel. 0774227663
11. Cultural Research Centre Museum, Jinja, Tel. 0772844221
12. C.N Kikonyogo Money Museum (Bank of Uganda Museum), Kampala, Tel. 0752722453
13. Human Rights Focus-Peace Museum, Gulu, Tel. 0772649642
14. Ham Mukasa Museum, Mukono, Tel. 0712491009
15. Igongo Cultural Centre, Biharwe, Mbarara, Tel. 0774380848
16. Iteso Cultural Union Museum, Soroti, Tel. 0782540765
17. Kawere African Museum, Nsangi, Tel. 0712841181
18. Kizonzo Language and Culture, Kasese, Tel. 0772357325
19. Karamoja Women's Cultural Group Museum, Moroto, Tel. 0772901081
20. Nyamyaro Museum, Bunyoro Kingdom, Hoima, Tel. 0752580946
21. St. Luke Community Museum, Rakai, Tel. 0772957528
22. Mountains of the Moon University Museum, Fort Portal, 0775430081
23. Museum of Acholi Art and Culture, Kitgum, Tel. 0772460229
24. The Home of Edirisa Museum, Kabale, Tel. 0752558222

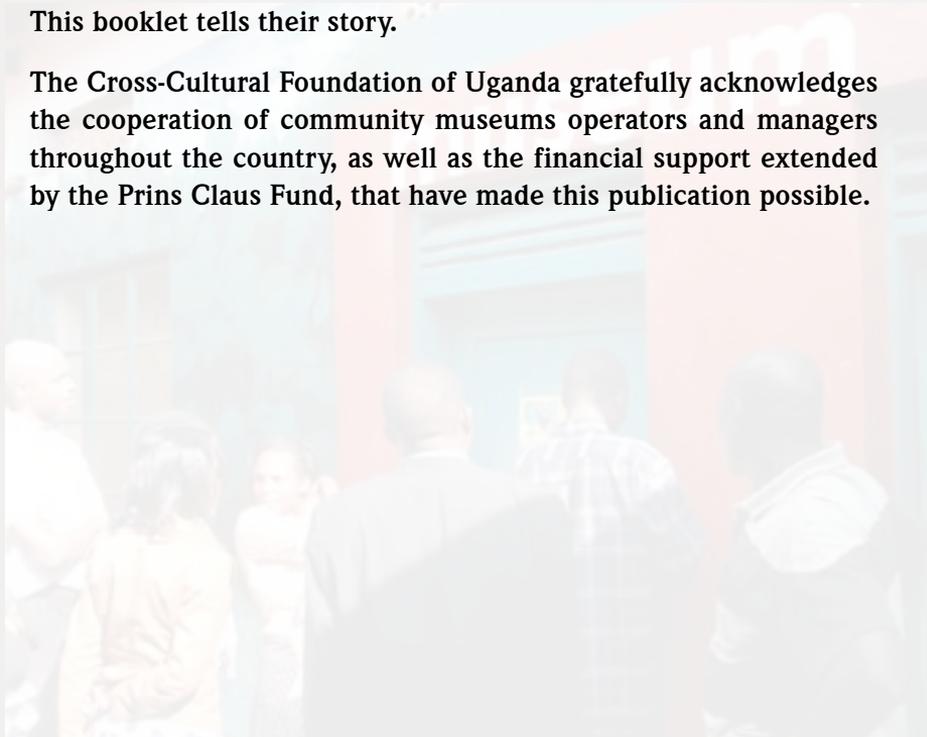


We love Uganda for her climate, the beautiful landscapes and the fascinating sights and sounds of the countryside. But the magnificent natural sites do not exist in isolation: the mountains, water falls, vegetation, birds and animals are part of the cultural and historical environment of a people who have a sacred attachment to them.

In various parts of the country, Community Museums are initiatives by individuals, families or groups who, passionate about culture and heritage, have collected artefacts, oral history, and other elements of the local culture. Community museums have made an effort to capture our vanishing heritage and to link past and future through their collections, which are accessible to schools, local residents and those from farther away.

This booklet tells their story.

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The Cross-Cultural
Foundation of Uganda