

## **Children and Culture: A Case Study of ‘Re-living Folklore of Zambian Communities Through Storytelling’**

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### **Introduction**

The Lusaka National Museum is the latest entry into the directory of museums in Zambia. It was officially opened to the public in 1996 and its mission is to collect, preserve, research and present Zambia's national heritage for education, appreciation, and entertainment, and for future generations by means of exhibitions, educational activities and publications.

The museum has a very active education department whose vision is to make the museum a “Forum for evoking and influencing change in the community” and it has various educational programmes that it offers to the children as well as the community at large.

Cultural heritage is divided into two categories, tangible and intangible heritage, and museums in Zambia have a role of preserving both the tangible and the intangible heritage. The Lusaka National Museum is currently conducting a storytelling programme entitled Re-living folklore of Zambian Communities through Storytelling. Museums are an important cultural space for stories that are part of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity, and they should be used to safeguard this fast disappearing ancient Zambian tradition.

The programme Re-living Folklore of Zambian Communities Through Story Telling is the initiative of the Education Department of Lusaka National Museum to try and show the importance of the preservation of the intangible heritage of the Zambian people through learning about their traditions, customs and beliefs. This programme is conducted in conjunction with children in schools in Zambia, children who are not in formal school, as well as adults and the community at large. Elders are used to tell stories about customs, traditions and beliefs of the different cultures as well as about real life situations.

This paper will look at how the Lusaka National Museum is working with the community in developing public programmes for the children, and will focus on the programme Re-living folklore of Zambian Communities through storytelling, as a case study.

### **Museums in Zambia**

There are four national museums in Zambia under the National Museums Board, namely

Livingstone Museum, Lusaka Museum, C/belt museum and Motto Motto museum in Mbala Northern province. The other two private ones are Choma museum and Nayuma museum. The Lusaka National Museum, one of the four national museums, was officially opened in 1996. Though truly a developing institution, with no background of colonial inheritance like its sister institutions, the museum is striving to serve the community through the active preservation of both material and non-material culture of the people of Zambia.

### **Definition of Culture**

Culture is defined as the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterise a society or social group. It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs. The strength of culture in Zambia lies in its diversity, the features of which include national heritage sites, museums, performing arts, traditions, beliefs and ceremonies.

Zambian society comprises 73 ethnic groups, each with its own set of traditions and forms of expression that demonstrate its cultural identity.

### **Current Scenario of Children and Culture**

Museums in Africa are now focusing their attention on children and young people, carrying out research and developing programmes that greatly involve children as direct beneficiaries. Children and young people are being targeted as future custodians of heritage.

In many things that they do children are expected to appreciate and contribute to the preservation of their culture. This means involving them in all cultural issues and activities such as ceremonies, traditional dances, songs, etc. In Zambia, children participate actively in cultural activities and are considered to be major key players. Young people have fresh eyes to nurture with everything the world has to offer and “museums are the windows on our world.” Culture helps children develop.

### **Potential Use of Culture in Museums**

Lusaka National Museum has greatly embraced this development by establishing Museum Children’s Educational Programmes and a number of interactive activities at the Museum. In addition, the exhibitions in the museum also portray a typical Zambian cultural scenario both traditional and contemporary, for the children to learn and experience. The topics that are derived from these exhibitions and programmes are issues on behaviour change, skill transfer, and

knowledge transfer. Children that visit the Museum are engaged in various activities that enable them to: express themselves creatively; develop new and interactive skills; explore new interests; and have positive social experiences

### **Re-living Folklore of Zambian Communities Through Storytelling**

Storytelling is the art of portraying real or fictitious events in words, images, and sounds. Stories are told for entertainment purposes, and often to teach lessons and uphold morals. Traditionally, oral stories were passed from generation to generation, and survived solely by memory. With written media, this has become less important.

People in all times and places have told stories. In the oral tradition, storytelling includes the teller and the audience. The storyteller brings out the experience, while the audience perceives the message and creates personal mental images from the words heard and the gestures seen. In this experience, the audience becomes co-creator of the art.

In the Zambian context, traditional stories have different names and the examples in some languages are as follows:

Nthano – Nyanja

Matangu – Lozi

Utushimi – Bemba

Kwana – Tonga

Bishimpi – Kaonde

Tales are collected in order to preserve the richness of oral literature in Zambia and have played a significant role as novels have in the West. Folktales to children are more exciting and memorable than lectures and these stories are usually told around a great fire in the villages and come after a common meal.

The programme “Re-living Folklore of Zambian Communities through Storytelling” at Lusaka National Museum was conceptualised in 2006 and has already proved to be playing a very major role in preserving the fast disappearing part of the intangible heritage. More than 500 children since December 2008, when the programme started running, have participated and the schools have linked storytelling to their local language subjects. Both the schools and other institutions such as orphanages, transit homes as well as the transient homes have appreciated the importance of preserving the intangible heritage by supporting the programme.

The children enjoy stories told by elderly people and also enjoy telling stories amongst themselves. Especially in towns like Lusaka city, where children have rare opportunities to sit

with their grandparents as in the villages, this programme has helped the children to learn about traditional morals and customs.

The first part of the programme was designed for orphanages during school holidays, as we thought that children would be entertained and be taught morals and lessons. Folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, oral narrations, praise songs and symbolic expressions are also included in the activities. Elderly people were used to tell stories and these sessions were aired on National Television (ZNBC) kids programme, on the local languages section, as well as on Muvi, another television station. These stories will also be put on DVDs for the children to come and watch when they visit the museum.

In order to make the museum “a forum for evoking and influencing change in the community” the programme has continued to run at the museum, where school children come for storytelling sessions, and is done in the village section. Museum objects are also used to tell the stories. In addition, stories written by children have been collected and the children have continued writing the stories in both vernacular and English. The museum hopes to publish a children’s storybook, so that children can be able to read the stories. The major part of the programme remaining is the collection of the stories from the different parts of Zambia, in order to document the stories told by elderly people. This part has not been done due to lack of funding. The stories will be collected in the different languages, using the seven major languages.

### **Example of a story written by the children visiting the museum**

Story by Abigail Kabamba, aged 14, from Chingwele Basic school

Title: “Who should be respected”

Once upon a time there was a Bird and a Hyna. The Hyna told the Bird that they should race so that they can see who is big and who must be respected. So they both agreed. Hyna had three children to help him with the race. When the day came, the Hyna put the three children at different points of the racing road. One at the starting point, two in the middle and one at the finishing point. So at the end of the day, Hyna won the race and he was respected.

### **Challenges**

Some of the challenges faced are lack of funding for collecting stories, carrying out research and making it ongoing, in order to achieve the intended goal. Production of DVDs and books is supposed to be a follow up to this activity, but due to lack of funds the museum is unable to do so. Another challenge is that the museum being in the capital city has a problem of identifying the

elderly people who are from the villages, as most of them came to Lusaka before independence and not all of them are able to tell the traditional stories.

### **Conclusion**

Children are able to both enjoy and learn from the stories told. From the above story, we can conclude that the story was first told by an elderly person to a child, who is now able to write it. The most interesting thing from this programme is that children are able to tell and write stories in their local languages, as they inherit from elderly people. This is one way of preserving our intangible heritage, as well as promoting both the contemporary and developmental issues in the children.

### **Recommendations**

With enough funds more research should be carried out and the stories should be collected and documented so that the museum visitors are able to have access to the stories when they visit the museum. This will enhance the preservation of our intangible heritage.

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