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TRAINING IN CULTURAL HERITAGE PRESERVATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF HERITAGE INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

By

YETUNDE ZAID (Ph.d)

University Library, University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria
yzaid@unilag.edu.ng

and

ABIOLA ABIOYE (Ph.d)

Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies,
University of Ibadan, Nigeria.
biolaabiye@yahoo.com

and

OLUBUKOLA OLATISE (Mrs)

Main Library University of Lagos Akoka
buktam@yahoo.com

Abstract

The preservation of cultural heritage materials is one of the daunting tasks of heritage institutions in Nigeria. The task becomes more daunting against the background of the various challenges facing heritage institutions in the country. Among these critical challenges is the shortage of human resources required to undertake the task of heritage preservation. In the early days of their existence, heritage institutions in Nigeria relied heavily on foreign institutions and international organizations for the education and training of heritage personnel. For instance, the School of Archival Studies of the National Archives of India, New Delhi served as a training centre in preservation and restoration of archival materials for staff of the National Archives of Nigeria. In addition, the regional centres established in Accra, Ghana and Dakar, Senegal with the assistance of UNESCO also met the training needs of archives personnel from English-speaking and French speaking countries in archival work. Similarly UNESCO assisted in establishing the museum training centre at Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria in 1963. The centre was later upgraded to the Institution of Archaeology and Museum Studies to provide management trainee programmes in various aspects of heritage preservation. In the library sector, heavy reliance was placed on the preservation component of the curricula of the various library schools within and outside the country where library personnel had their professional training in librarianship. The down-turn in the nation's economy in the 1980s affected every aspect of life including capacity building in heritage preservation. What then is the coping strategy and how are the heritage institutions in Nigeria, particularly libraries and archives, meeting their staff training needs in heritage

preservation? This is the focus of this paper. The specific objectives are to investigate the training needs of workers in heritage institution in Nigeria, the training programme available, aspects of heritage preservation covered the facilities in place and the obstacles encountered. Data were collected from librarians and archivists in selected Nigerian libraries and archives using participatory focus group discussion method. Based on the findings, recommendations were made towards improving the process of human resources development in cultural heritage preservation in Nigeria.

Introduction

Heritage Institutions in Nigeria are institutions responsible for the preservation of the country's heritage materials. Libraries, archives, and museums hold disparate collections in a variety of media, presenting a vast body of knowledge accumulated over the institutions' history, and the mission of these institutions is to make their collections accessible to intended users. These institutions were the manifestations of Nigerian cultural heritage, as they perfectly sum up the desire to preserve the legacy handed down to the present (and even future) generations by their ancestors, as well as the wish to maintain and select those assets which reflect the creativity and identity of a society. These institutions keep and maintain not just a lifeless ensemble of collection as are other kinds of cultural heritage such as historical buildings and archaeological diggings and so on. They represent a specific type of cultural creation and are managed in a particular style. The collection in these institutions is seen as unique, distinct and authentic. Therefore, the impact of their various activities may affect to a greater or lesser extent the institution's appeal and the number of visitors it attracts.

Efforts at preserving cultural heritage have gained new momentum throughout the world. Protecting cultural heritage is both economical and historical. However, while cultural heritage preservation has not yet become firmly rooted in the Nigerian consciousness as other matters such as sports, particularly soccer, a great number of people and organizations see cultural resources as critical to the nation's economic development. In Nigeria, the need to preserve our heritage materials was recognized by librarians, archivists and museum curators as early as the earliest institutions such as libraries, archives and museums established in the early 50's. Though these institutions have as their main objective the preservation of heritage materials, they have not been able to concretely do much because of the myriad of problems encountered particularly in the area of skilled manpower requirements for preservation and conservation work. It is only very recently that the issue has become one of truly national concern. This is supported by various surveys that have been carried out (Alegbeleye, 1999; Bankole and Abioye, 2005; Alegbeleye, 2007).

As Nigeria progresses towards a knowledge-based information society, various preservation methods are emerging. This is based on technologies that enhance the creation, management and provision of attractive cultural content and engaging interactions on a variety of platforms. Heritage institution activities may be regarded as one of production, involving input such as work, provision of buildings and equipment, together with the museum collection itself, in order to meet user's information needs. Staff working in these institutions would need to determine their users' priorities, manage their projects, mobilize their community and interpret their users' queries. To adequately provide efficient services to the community they serve, staff members need training in interpreting heritage and presenting cross-cultural experiences in an effective and meaningful way. However, absence or shortage (to say the least) of skilled manpower in preservation and conservation of heritage materials is a critical challenge confronting heritage preservation in Nigeria.

Training is the process of enhancing the skills, capabilities and knowledge of workers for doing a particular job. Training process moulds the thinking of workers and leads to quality performance. It is expected to be continuous and never ending in nature. Training is crucial for institutional development and success. It is fruitful to both management and workers of any heritage institution as the workers become more efficient and productive if well trained. According to Justrell (2010) and Brown (2012), training heritage institution workers is undertaken on three basic grounds:

1. For new workers in heritage institutions, training familiarizes them with the institution's mission, vision, rules and regulations and the working conditions.
2. Existing workers are trained to refresh and enhance their knowledge about the cultural heritage resources.
3. If any updates and amendments take place in technology, training is given to cope up with those changes.

Heritage workers, particularly those in libraries and archives need to acquire knowledge and skills in all aspects of preservation and conservation of their collections. The environment in which their collections are housed goes a long way in ensuring the stability of the materials. They, therefore require necessary training on how to achieve a stable environment for the collection. The problem of environmental hazards is particularly acute in the tropics where temperature and relative humidity are relatively high for most part of the year. The issue of paper stability is also important as a large proportion of heritage collections in Nigeria are still in paper format.

In meeting the training needs of their staff, some of these heritage institutions have adopted one approach or the other. According to Zaid and Abioye (2009), various organizations developed curriculum, created delivery framework and developed training model for staff members working in heritage institutions in Nigeria. These organizations called for affordable and effective training opportunities, increased local capacity through organizational and professional development. Notable among these organizations are the professional associations and non-governmental organizations such as UNESCO.

This paper examines the efforts of Nigerian heritage institutions in preparing their personnel for cultural heritage preservation and the coping strategy in the face of dwindling funding and shortage of other key resources essential for the preservation of heritage materials. The paper also sets out to provide an accurate reflection of discussion among key representatives in the training programme of Nigeria's heritage institutions. It is believed that this is a necessary preliminary to build consensus about future education and training on preservation of heritage collections.

Early Efforts on Training

In the early days of their existence, heritage institutions in Nigeria relied heavily on foreign institutions and international organizations for the education and training of heritage personnel. For instance, the School of Archival Studies of the National Archives of India, New Delhi served as a training centre in preservation and restoration of archival materials for staff of the National Archives of Nigeria. In addition, the regional centres established in Accra, Ghana and Dakar, Senegal with the assistance of UNESCO also met the training needs of archives personnel from English-speaking and French speaking countries in archival work. Similarly, UNESCO assisted in establishing the museum training centre at Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria in 1963. The centre was later upgraded to the Institution of Archaeology and Museum Studies to provide management trainee programmes in various aspects of heritage preservation. In the library sector, heavy reliance was placed on the preservation component of the curricula of the various library schools within and outside the country where library personnel had their professional training in librarianship. The down-turn in the nation's economy in the 1980s affected every aspect of life including capacity building in heritage preservation.

As a survival strategy, heritage institutions in Nigeria look up to international organizations, particularly those with bias for cultural heritage, as well as donor agencies for training. Training initiatives were championed by UNESCO, Ford

Foundation and others with deep interest in heritage preservation to promote capacity building among heritage institutions workers in Nigeria. The first of such initiatives was the National Conference on Preservation of Nigerian Scholarly and Literary Traditions and Arabic Manuscript Heritage organized by Arewa House in March 2007 in Kaduna with the support of the United States of America embassy in Nigeria. Other initiatives, in quick succession, included the National Conference on Heritage Preservation in Abuja in February 2008 funded by the Education Trust Fund, the Stakeholders' Forum on National Preservation Policy in Abuja in October 2008 for which the Federal Ministry of Culture and National Orientation provided the necessary financial support and the National Conference on Preservation of Documentary Heritage organized by NATCOM - UNESCO in Abuja in March 2009 with the support of the Federal Ministry of Education. The National Conference on Exploring the Ajami/ Arabic Manuscripts organized by the Arewa House in Kaduna in May 2009 in collaboration with Ford Foundation was the latest of these initiatives. Virtually all these conferences brought together professionals from all the heritage institutions in Nigeria with a view to charting a common course for the preservation of heritage materials in Nigeria.

With generous funding from these organizations, some members of staff of the various heritage institution convened to examine needs, solutions, and priorities for education and training to help support the preservation of heritage collections in libraries, archives, and museums to meet users' needs.

Methodology

Focus Group Discussion method was the instrument used to gather data for this study. The target audience was purposely chosen and comprised of staff members of National Libraries, National Archives and National Commission for Museums and Monuments, who engaged in a variety of activities with regard to cultural heritage preservation and conservation and had participated at various training programmes in the last five years (2007 - 2012). A total of ninety two (92) heritage workers participated in the Discussion.

Focus groups can be described as structured group discussions on a specific topic. The relevance of the use of the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in library and information sciences according to Golding (1997) stems from the fact that it is a principal tool for gathering data on user needs, behaviour, perceptions and opinions.

In setting up the focus groups, the step by step approaches outlined by Kitzinger (1994) and Litosseliti (2003) were applied. A number of considerations about the design and implementation of the groups were made. For instance, decisions about the number of groups, sizes, composition, the length of the group's discussion and settings were carefully taken. This was because the participants were considered to be a valuable resource, which enabled the researchers gain insight into beliefs, attitudes and motives of the themes of discussion.

Locations where group members could talk without observations by others who were not participants were also carefully chosen. In choosing these locations, it was considered whether there were places where the participants can:

- see and hear one another;
- have sufficient privacy to talk;
- have access to one another;
- be threatened or intimidated by the location

The participants have in common certain characteristics that relate to this topic. The groups are held in a permissive environment to make the participants feel comfortable and free to share their thoughts and opinions about the matter in question. The theme of the Focus group Discussion was structured into six parts that concentrated on:

- ❖ Training needs of heritage institution workers
- ❖ Type of training programmes available
- ❖ Aspects of heritage preservation covered;
- ❖ Training methods put in place
- ❖ Training facilities put in place; and
- ❖ Obstacles encountered during and after the training

Findings and Discussions

The findings of the study are discussed under the following heading:

Theme 1: Training needs of heritage institution workers

The areas where the participants suggest the most pressing needs are:

- ❖ Environmental control and stability of collections
- ❖ Paper stability and document repair
- ❖ Accelerated development of technologies for recording, storing, and retrieval of records
- ❖ Preservation challenges in the digital age;
- ❖ The expanding nature of preservation and conservation responsibilities;

- ❖ Digital preservation issues
- ❖ Funding, policy, and support for preservation;
- ❖ Conservation treatment skills;
- ❖ High-priority content for preservation education;
- ❖ Preservation tools
- ❖ Preservation and data management planning
- ❖ Strategic planning and policies
- ❖ Technical Systems
- ❖ Trusted repositories
- ❖ Diversity in the conservation and preservation professions

Theme 2: Types of training programmes available

According to the participants, the kinds of training programme available for them were:

- ❖ On-the-job;
- ❖ Off-the-job; and
- ❖ Academic discipline

Theme 3: Aspects of heritage preservation the training covered

The training programmes available for workers in Nigerian heritage institutions cover the following aspects:

- ❖ Management of cultural heritage resources under tropical climate
- ❖ Treatment of insects and other organisms that cause the disintegration of heritage materials
- ❖ General management
- ❖ Research
- ❖ Functional tasks in digital preservation/curatorial work
- ❖ Workflow planning for cultural heritage preservation
- ❖ Capacity building of technical personnel
- ❖ Adoption and use of modern technology
- ❖ Administration and finances
- ❖ Legal aspects

Theme 4: The training methods put in place

With regard to suitable training method, the training methods that the participants considered most suitable for their institution are:

- ❖ Small group workshops
- ❖ Written manuals
- ❖ Supervised one-to-one training by a senior staff member

- ❖ Online training
- ❖ Large group workshop (lectures and practical exercises)

Theme 5: The training facilities put in place

Participants expressed the view that the facilities used were the basic ones required for imparting theoretical knowledge. Relevant facilities that could enable the trainees acquire skills and hands-on experience were almost absent. Where available, equipments used were outdated.

Theme 6: Obstacles encountered during and after the training

Obstacles identified by the participants include the following:

- ❖ Poor funding or near absence of budgetary provision for preservation of heritage collections
- ❖ Absence of national preservation policy for heritage materials
- ❖ Absence of good local training facilities, particularly good conservation laboratories
- ❖ Lack of technical manpower for training in heritage preservation and conservation
- ❖ General apathy on the part of policy makers towards heritage preservation

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings revealed a broad spectrum of skills and competences relevant for staff involved in preservation of cultural heritage in Nigeria. It also suggest a great demand for training in cultural heritage preservation that arises from a severe lack of qualified staff in the field.

This study recommends that when designing training for heritage personnel, the diversity as well as the integration of practical application and the suitability of the format for working staff should also be taken into consideration. The government, as a matter of urgency, needs to formulate and put in place a comprehensive national preservation and conservation policy while taking cognizance of the peculiarity of each heritage institution. Heritage preservation should be well funded to ensure improvement in the facilities and equipment available for training of workers in heritage preservation. The time is ripe for the setting up of well-equipped conservation laboratories where heritage workers can have hands-on experience in heritage preservation.

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