AFRICOM’s Museum Professional Internship Programme

AFRICOM, in partnership with the National Museums of Kenya (NMK), ran a Museum Professional Internship Programme from September 2004 to March 2006. This programme, generously funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), was based at the AFRICOM Secretariat in Nairobi.

The AFRICOM Internship Programme brought together selected curatorial and exhibits staff from African museums to Nairobi for eight eight-week programmes, bringing to sixteen the total number of interns who attended the programme in Nairobi. AFRICOM offered full scholarships to each intern to cover expenses related to travel, accommodation, medical insurance, living expenses, and project/research activities. Participating countries included: Botswana, Ghana, South Africa, Malawi, Cameroon, Zambia, Mozambique, Tunisia, Nigeria, Eritrea, Seychelles, Senegal, Madagascar, Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Programme

Within the framework of AFRICOM’s priorities: ‘Professional Development’ and ‘Networking of Institutions and Professionals on the Continent’, the programme exposed the visiting interns to activities within the ambitious restructuring programme at the NMK, and gave them hands-on experience with the NMK’s Interactive Public Programmes Project. The Project is one of the core players in the NMK restructuring programme, which aims to develop a range of new exhibitions in the new Nairobi Museum (scheduled to open in mid-2007). While recognizing the existing and ‘formal’ training centres and programmes on the continent [EPA (École du Patrimoine Africain), CHDA (Centre for Heritage Development in Africa), WAMP (West African Museums Programme), and so on], it must be said that hands-on training and professional networking opportunities for African museum professionals have been extremely limited.

Interns spent approximately 80 per cent of their time working on projects, related to the development and design of galleries or the preparation and implementation of exhibitions, and involving all aspects of project management: financial planning, human resource planning and management, and actual implementation/exhibit design. The interns also contributed to the development of the pan-African museum organization, AFRICOM.

Applications were welcomed from all African museum professionals having a minimum of two years’ experience and a maximum age of 40 years old. Selection criteria included level of experience and studies. AFRICOM made every effort to ensure geographical and gender balances.

While the working language for the programme was predominantly English, AFRICOM did select six interns who spoke English as a second foreign language. AFRICOM is hoping to develop a similar programme with a museum in French-speaking Africa to cater for a larger number of francophone professionals in an effort to give an equal and fair coverage as well as opportunity to the whole of Africa.
Positive results

Excellent results have been achieved by the interns both while on the programme and when back in their home countries upon return. Many have implemented their knowledge in their museums, or have been accepted for further training based on their enhanced competences; some have even been subsequently promoted within their institutions. The Internship Programme has given young museum professionals valuable experience and afforded them the opportunity to work with diverse teams of museum staff in various fields of expertise (from administrative to scientific to artistic) at Nairobi, Kisumu and Fort Jesus Museums. Not only did the interns receive useful professional experience from AFRICOM, but a new understanding of the strength and benefits of professional and institutional networks.

Another important result has been the increased ownership of AFRICOM by its members. Aaron Maluwa of Malawi wrote of his experience: ‘The internship programme is one of the many important products that AFRICOM has embarked on to improve communication, and the sharing of professional skills by professionals from different museums in the region. Museum professionals also feel the ownership of AFRICOM, hence they can in turn contribute positively towards its development in many ways’.

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