

Mental Health Promotion for Internally Displaced Persons Using Drama Therapy in Makurdi Area, North Central Nigeria

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Abstract

Trends in contemporary global arts practice have shown that experts in the field of mental health have long tapped into visual arts and music to help treat developmental disabilities and several other mental issues, including depression, anxiety, borderline personality disorder, as well as schizophrenia and bipolar spectrum. Today, therapists are finding great benefit from another art form; drama." However, the paradox in Nigeria, especially in the northern part is that drama technique as a psychotherapeutic practice does not exist in the protocol of mental health facilities. In retrospect, it is obvious that the poor status of mental health care in northern Nigeria is due mainly to lack of facilities, un-affordability and inaccessibility to health facilities. Against this backdrop of increasing mental health issues, especially post-traumatic-stress-disorder (PTSD); resulting from insurgency attacks, communal clashes, herdsman carnage, road accident and flood, which have given rise to various internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps vis-à-vis their psychological implication in the north. The need for the availability of drama therapy technique becomes highly imperative for affordable, accessible and effective mental healthcare promotion. The paper discusses the concept and practice of drama and theatre therapy techniques, and how they can be applied in psychotherapeutic sessions both at individual and group therapy levels. The improvisational approach which keys into various expressive art techniques shall be utilized. The approach is used to create believable characters out of IDPs themselves, through storytelling, songs, music, dance, etc., to enable them to get emotionally involved to establish a recall

of the experience that brought about their disadvantaged psychological condition. This leads to clinical discussions that will facilitate the way forward in making individual and collective choices and decisions that will bring about not just mental health, but holistic well-being.

Keywords: Mental health, IDPs, PTSD, Drama therapy, Healthcare, Psychotherapeutic sessions.

Introduction

The violent crisis in Nigeria and its concomitant internally displaced persons' crisis has continued unabated in various dimensions of violent attacks on pastoral communities. It is on record that "since violent attacks by the Islamist group Boko Haram started to spill over Nigeria's north-eastern frontier in 2014, Cameroon, Chad and Niger have been drawn into what has become a devastating regional conflict" (unhcr.org). In Nigeria, the daily mantra among internally displaced persons (IDPs) and vulnerable rural communities to violent attacks by Boko Haram insurgents or armed Fulani herdsmen are for protection and peace. Thus, "the challenges of protecting the displaced are compounded by the deteriorating security situation as well as socio-economic fragility, with communities...facing chronic poverty, harsh climatic conditions, recurrent epidemics, poor infrastructure and limited access to basic services" (unhcr.org). The implication of these challenges for mental health among IDPs cannot be overstressed in terms of a non-clinical, creative arts-driven approach to psychotherapy. Accordingly, the functional relationship between arts and society in general, and the particular relationship between theatre and society take for granted the continuum of synergy in the application of process drama to health issues worldwide (Aari, Ddadsetan & Sedghpour, 2009). In Nigeria and the northern region particularly, "in both rural and urban settings, theatre can be an effective means of health promotion. Projects on women's health, care for...and AIDS prevention shows the usefulness of this medium for community action programmes" (Wiener, 2015; <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8820146>).

The paradox of mental healthcare status in Nigeria as reported by the World Health Organization, WHO (2006), calls for concern in the use of the theatre approach. Omoera and Aihevba (2012) claim that mental health issues have scarcely been given attention by the relevant agencies and authorities, including the broadcast media in Nigeria. Furthermore,

the WHO (2006) posits that there is considerable neglect of mental health issues in Nigeria, especially in the northern part of the country. The existing mental health policy document in Nigeria was formulated in 1991. It was the first policy addressing mental health issues and its component include advocacy, promotion, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. Since its formulation, no revision has taken place and no formal assessment of how much it has been implemented has been conducted. Though a list of essential medicines exists, they are not always available at health centres. Hardly any desk exists in the ministries at any level for mental health issues and only four per cent of government expenditures on health is earmarked for mental health (WHO – AIM Report on Mental Health Issues in Nigeria, 2006). This report by WHO is indicative of the fact that mental healthcare and prevention of post-traumatic-stress-disorder, depression, psychosis, neurosis, schizophrenia, and other mental issues have long been obscured in Nigeria, particularly, in the northern region where causative factors of mental disorders are rampant, as a result of incessant attacks by insurgents and herdsmen, communal clashes, floods and road accidents.

In this context, the need for affordable and accessible mental care services in the northern region is imperative to the development of its contemporary society. To achieve this objective, the researcher proposes the concept and practice of drama therapy as a theatre-based therapeutic technique for affordable and accessible mental health promotion in northern Nigeria. Drawing from a conducted experiment with selected IDPs in the Makurdi area of Benue State, and available literature, the paper will discuss drama therapy approach and its effectiveness. It is hoped that this discourse on drama therapy will open a new vista in the synergy between literature and health in a generic term, and between theatre, the performing arts and mental health promotion in specific terms within the development matrix of contemporary Nigeria.

Drama Therapy

Drama Therapy has been defined as a treatment approach that provides a theatrical platform for people in therapy to express their feelings, solve problems, and achieve therapeutic goals (NADTA, 2021a). It involves the use of theatre techniques to facilitate personal growth and promote health. It is a form of expressive therapy or creative arts therapy that exists in a variety of forms which apply to individuals, couples, families, and various groups (Langley 2006; World Federation for Mental Health; <https://en.m>

wikipedia.org/wiki/drama-therapy). The variety of drama therapy forms include:

- Using play, storytelling, and fable to explore problems contained by the events of an issue affecting an individual or group.
- Acting in progressive stages to build innovative ways to connect to one's self or others.
- Role-playing for exploring life experiences through the creation of an imaginary environment.
- Creating a 'ritual' to recognize changes in life milestones.
- Wearing masks and costumes to portray self and self-image.
- Using objects and materials as a cypher to treat problematic feelings or occurrences (<http://www.nadta.org/advocacy.html>).

According to the British Association of Drama Therapists (2020), drama therapy has at its main focus the internal use of healing aspects of drama and theatre as the therapeutic process. It is a method of working and playing that uses action methods to facilitate creativity, imagination, insight and growth (British Association of Drama Therapists, 2020). Drama therapy is further conceptualized as an active, experiential approach to facilitating change. Through storytelling, projective play, purposeful improvisation, and performance, participants are invited to rehearse desired behaviours, practice being in a relationship, expand and find flexibility between life roles, and perform the change they wish to be and see in the world (North American Therapy Association, 2021b).

Drama Therapy and Acting

Based on the cathartic nature of role interpretation in the representational style of acting, "drama itself tends to promote good mental health. However, drama therapy consists of more than just acting (www.goodtherapy.org/learn...). Drama therapy consists of two elements, the dramatic and the therapeutic elements. On the one hand, the term constitutes the use of creativity using drama-based techniques. On the other hand, the therapeutic element provides for the emotional needs of the identifiable individual or group and functions within a safe and supportive environment without a directive manner of treatment. Like other forms of therapy in the visual and performing arts, drama therapy

incorporates expressive art forms and serves as a springboard for deeper, more meaningful work with participants (www.goodtherapy.org/learn...).

Drama therapists guide people in therapy through a series of intentional activities that allow them to enact scenes representative of the way they want to live their lives. Participants may see drama therapy affect changes in their behaviour, emotional state, personal growth, and skill adaptation (www.nadta.org). As earlier mentioned, participants utilizing drama therapy are often able to improve their interpersonal relationship skills through active participation in things like storytelling, role-playing, puppetry, rituals, games, improvisation and scripts (www.wfmh.com). The North American Drama Therapy Association (NADTA), which was formerly known as the National Association of Drama Therapy was established in 1979. At present, NADTA is involved in providing information, education, communication, advocacy, and accreditation for the field of drama therapy (NADTA, 2021c). The British Association of Drama Therapists (BADTh) is the professional body for drama therapists in the United Kingdom. It was established in 1977 with its main focus on the intentional use of healing aspects of drama and theatre as the therapeutic process. It operates on the methodological framework of working and playing that uses action methods to facilitate creativity, insight and growth (www.badth.org.uk).

In this part of Africa, especially Nigeria and its regions, efforts in drama therapy practice structure are yet to be established. This is a consequence of lack of theatre and drama practitioners in the area of drama therapy. Correspondingly, there is little or no literature on drama therapy. It is obvious that the practice and its theatrical works are chiefly sourced from Europe, North America and South America. Within the theatre and the performing arts, it is noticeable that the works of Bertolt Brecht and Constantine Stanislavsky greatly influenced the development of drama therapy, along with the contributions of others within the arts and social sciences. Objectively, drama therapy has the primary goal of providing people with a safe and secure experience that encourages the full expression of their emotional voice through playful, dramatic activity. The desired outcome of drama therapy is different for each participant but the fundamental model is designed to promote healing and growth through the use of role-playing and dramatic interactions (NADTA, 2021d). In practice, the process of drama therapy is focused on achieving the following set objectives:

- i. Promote positive behavioural changes.
- ii. Improve interpersonal relationship skills.
- iii. Integrate physical and emotional well-being.
- iv. Achieve personal growth and self-awareness.
- v. Improve overall quality of life
(<http://www.nadta.org/assets/documents/brochure-nadt.pdf>).

Therapy Session with IDPs in Makurdi Area

Drawing on the technique of drama therapy, a group therapy session was conducted by the researcher (and his team) in the Makurdi area, north-central Nigeria. The participants were selected from Agatu local government area (LGA) and Logo LGA respectively. Each LGA had a total of 20 adult participants consisting of 10 male and female participants in attendance. This gives a total of 40 participants for all the participating LGAs. The reason for this selection was based on cultural differences and geo-political distribution. The participants from Agatu LGA came from the Idoma-speaking area, and they come from Zone C senatorial district of Benue State. On the other hand, the participants from Logo LGA came from the Tiv-speaking area, and they came from Zone A senatorial district of Benue State. Moreover, Agatu and Logo areas are volatile conflict zones in recent times, given the incessant violent clashes between local communities and Fulani herdsmen in the areas. Violent communal conflicts and herdsmen clashes with communities in Benue State have become prevalent in recent time. The worst hit areas are Logo and Agatu communities. A significant number of lives and properties were lost in a series of violent conflicts in the domains.

The casualties are not only those who are dead; it includes those who have lost their loved ones during such mayhem. Within this population of surviving casualties are widows and children, whose breadwinners have been killed in action during attacks by insurgents. The majority of the widows and their children are now roaming the streets begging for succour. Because of increasing insurgent activities in the areas, temporary and impoverished IDP camps, which are mostly primary school premises, can no longer contain a large number of survivors from devastated communities. Their traumatic experiences, coupled with the resultant post-traumatic-stress-disorder (PTSD) are affecting a significant number of the IDPs. They are finding it difficult to go back to their communal villages and rebuild their devastated homes. The worse hit is the widow population with children to cater for. Their trauma status is

one of the emotional responses to the terrible event of an insurgent attack(s) in their communities. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical of their deteriorating well-being. It was observed during the group therapy that a long term reaction of the PTSD affected IDPs could result in unpredictable emotions, flashbacks strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea ([www.apa.org>topics>trauma](http://www.apa.org/topics/trauma)).

Discussion on IDPs' Group Therapy

The IDPs' group therapy session took place in a primary school environment on four consecutive 'weekend' days - Saturdays and Sundays. The first phase of the therapy involved participants from the Logo area. The second phase involved participants from the Agatu area. With an emphasis on improvisation technique, each group of the participating communities were involved in basic theatrical exercises under the coordination of the researcher who was assisted by selected trained facilitators from the Agatu and Logo areas respectively. Significantly, the facilitators are gatekeepers from Logo and Agatu areas that are proficient in the participants' languages and idioms were relevant linguistic factors in terms of communication during the therapy session. The improvisational technique that was used for the therapy session included a combination of storytelling, role play and cultural performances drawing on the Idoma and Tiv cultures, as they suit the participants' therapeutic contexts. The storytelling enabled the participants to explore their problems individually and collectively. Most significantly, the participants were facilitated to recall the awful situations that resulted in their being displaced from their home communities.

Subsequently, drawing on their individual and collective stories, participants were assigned roles to play interchangeably with issues raised in their stories. It must be noted that the role-playing here is not just interpreting a role for interpretation or acting's sake. Essentially, the participating individuals and groups were facilitated to connect with the realities of their lives and to collectively make choices and decisions that would remedy their individual and collective problems. The cultural performances reflected their collective identity as individuals, as a people and community. Hence, the need to return home and the preparedness to go back home became a desired goal to be achieved by the IPDs. The researcher facilitated the adoption of a popular song in the English language, which the participants learned and sang in both Idoma and Tiv dialects during the cultural performances:

Song:

Oh my home (4x)

When shall I see my home

So la so fa mi re

When shall I see my native land

I will never forget my home.

The idea in this song is to create an enabling environment for self-appraisal, self-esteem, self-presentation, self-efficacy and self-actualization in a drama therapy process which is expected to bring about not just psychosocial efficacy, but holistic well-being. In light of group drama therapy with IDPs, the British Association of Drama Therapists holds that drama therapy is the internal use of healing aspects of drama and theatre as the therapeutic process. It is a method of working and playing that uses action methods to facilitate creativity, imagination, insight and growth (British Association of Drama Therapists, 2020). It consists of two elements, the dramatic and the therapeutic. The dramatic element involves the body and mind in terms of spontaneous creativity using drama-based techniques. The therapeutic component provides for the emotional needs of the identifiable individual or group and functions in a safe and supportive setting without the instruction of treatment, as practised in conventional psychiatric units of healthcare services (D' Amico, Laalonde & Snow, 2015). It is active, experiential, and embodied. It provides an enabling environment for the mentally disordered patient(s) to tell their own stories, set goals and find solutions to problems, express feelings, and achieve insight or purgation of emotion (catharsis).

Through this drama-based clinical process, the inner experience can be actively explored intensively and extensively, as well as interpersonal relationship skills being practised and enhanced. Patient(s) acquire skills to expand the repertoire of roles that they can play in a real-life situation. Thus, patients become more flexible and spontaneous in making choices and interactions with people in life. Behavioural change, capacity building, psychological and physical incorporation, and personal development can be accomplished through drama therapy in intervention, prevention and treatment locations. The drama therapist works with individuals, couples, families, and groups. The process and technique can involve theatre exercise, improvising, storytelling, and enactment, as well as text and performance to enrich the process of creativity and healing. For purpose of capacity building, the benefit of drama therapy spans the life spectrum. Client populations may include

survivors of trauma and abuse, homeless persons, inmates of correctional facilities, persons with physical disabilities, older adults, and dysfunctional families, teens at risk, psychiatric patients, or people who wish to work on personal issues of any kind. Significantly, the benefits of drama therapy in mental health cannot be overemphasized, given that:

- The underlying intention of drama therapy is to empower individuals and groups to gain an enhanced experience of life.
- It is an effective method of reducing exclusiveness and disadvantaged position through the result of the process.
- It involves verbal and non-verbal communication in a range of dramatic/theatrical creative arts methods.
- It enables users to cope with change, deal with anxiety, come to terms with loss and develop strong supportive relationships
(<http://www.creativepsychotherapy.info/dramatherapy-and-psychodrama>).

By and large, drama therapists are both artists and clinicians and draw on their pieces of training in drama/theatre, creative arts and therapy to develop methods of engaging clients towards achieving psychological, emotional and social change. The therapy gives equal validity to body and mind within the dramatic context; stories, myths, play text, puppetry, masks and improvisation are examples of the range of artistic interventions a drama therapist may employ (British Association of Drama Therapy – www.roundaboutdramatherapy.org.uk).

Conclusion

To some extent, the article has proposed and demonstrated the effectiveness of the use of drama therapy in response to the need to ensure affordable mental healthcare for Nigerians. In this direction, the group therapy experiment with IDPs showed that the drama therapy technique in psychotherapy apart from it being affordable and accessible is creative, innovative and humanistic. Availability of drama therapy has long been in existence elsewhere around the world, especially in the United Kingdom, United States of America, China, and South America. Its practice in these places has evolved various associations of drama and creative arts therapy. And as at the time of writing document, drama therapy as a practice barely exists, let alone the existence of such associations in Nigeria. Therefore, it behoves the relevant agencies and

authorities such as the Federal Ministry of Health and its state components to realize the feasibility of this proposal for a sustainable mental healthcare campaign. To this end and in line with the World Federation for Mental Health, this paper “envisions a world in which mental health is a priority for all people; public policies and programs reflect the crucial importance of mental health in the lives of individuals” (<http://www.wfmh.com>).

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Heritage Management and Community Engagement: The Story of the National Museum, Benin City, Nigeria

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Abstract

Heritage management is essential to the preservation of a people's tangible and intangible culture. The heritage of a people may change over time or become extinct in the absence of conscious preservation, as is evident with many African cultures. Central to the preservation of heritages, is the engagement of communities in a dynamic process of continuity. The Great Benin kingdom engineered this process with the institution of the guild system, which served the royal court of the Oba (king). Although the guild is no longer practised strictly as court art today, the system is preserved as community art centres run by descendants of the ancient guild. Artisans in Benin City, play an important role as custodians of the culture and system, while the National Museum, Benin City houses some of the important relics of the Benin kingdom. This article looks at the history of the National Museum, and the structure in place for heritage preservation. It also examined the role played by Igun bronze casters who are important custodians of the arts and culture of the Benin kingdom. The study is qualitative research that relied on historical content and ethnographic methods, interviews and online publications for its data. Much of the ethnographic data was collected while the researcher was engaged in fieldwork in Benin City. His observation of the Benin guild workers, informal interviews and visits to the National Museum, Benin City are important parts of the data. Data collected were evaluated from observation assessment, text and interview analysis. The findings are presented within the general content of the essay. The study concludes that, although the National Museum, Benin City is an institutionalized heritage management organ of government, the preservation and continuity of important aspects of the tangible and intangible heritages of

the Benin kingdom is been done also by the bronze casters who have continued with the ancient culture of bronze casting. This synergy, though informal, is a significant module, which may be adopted by other museums with similar structures.

Keywords: Art, Heritage, Benin Kingdom, Community, Culture, Management, Museum.

Introduction

The National Museum, Benin City was opened to the public in 1973 following the commissioning of a new building by the government to house the collections, which have been in the palace museum for nearly three decades (Akponana in an interview with the researcher in 2018). The National Museum, Benin City is one of the museums managed by the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) in Nigeria. The federal government of Nigeria established the commission to replace the Federal Antiquities Department with Decree no. 77 of 1979. The decree was in 1990 replaced by the NCMM Act Chapter 242 of the Law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The act establishing the commission detailed its roles, functions, scope and responsibilities.

Administration

The National Museum as regulated by the NCMM has seven departments. They are - Heritage, Education and Training, Research and Publication, Admin and Supplies, Accounts and Audit, Legal Services, and Museums.

- The Heritage department is in charge of all heritage sites. Essentially, they oversee the natural heritage of the people. These include tangible heritages like wildlife parks, rivers, and other designated sites, and intangible heritages such as dances, music, songs, proverbs and all non-material culture. They identify, collate, document, maintain, interpret and store information on these on behalf of the communities and the government.
- The Education and Training department is in charge of public enlightenment, outreaches and training related to the public. They also interface with the National Museum Training School in Jos, Nigeria to train museum staff in various states of the federation.
- The Research and Publication department is responsible for ensuring that all investigative findings by museum archaeologists, ethnographers, historians and field officers are

- properly documented and featured in the museum publications. They interface with the education and training department for information dissemination.
- The Admin and Supplies department is responsible for the day-to-day running of the museum especially staff welfare and office needs. They ensure consumables are available for effective office work, handle issues of staff employment and promotion, leave and general staff needs.
 - The Accounts and Audit department is responsible for the budgetary allocation to all departments. Salaries, wages and audit of expenditure. They interface with the admin and supplies department.
 - Legal Services is responsible for all legal aspects of the museum. Litigation, Memorandum of Understanding with communities and foreign organizations, negotiations such as the recent ones for the repatriation of illegally obtained antique artworks from Nigeria, Treaties and statutes, recovery of museum properties whether landed or artworks, etc. They initiate the framework for the localization of all foreign cultural treaties entered into by Nigeria on behalf of the museums and federal government.
 - Museums. This department is in charge of the museum collections. They handle, restore and conserve collections.

General Information on the National Museum, Benin City

Administration	Public (government-owned and controlled)
Mission and Objectives of the NCMM.	To manage the collection, documentation, conservation and presentation of the national cultural properties to the public for education, enlightenment and entertainment.
Establishment	The supervisory board created by the NCMM Act.
Type of Museum	Archaeological and ethnographic museum.
Number of Staff	About 160 full-time members of staff (over 20 in management positions)
Stakeholders	They include the Oba of Benin and the Benin Traditional Council, visitors to the museum, schools, the police, friends of the museum, press.

Themes / Subject	Art and other cultural objects from the old Benin Kingdom, neighbouring states and Nigeria in general.
Main Exhibition Format	The museum uses acrylic cases and stands mainly for the display of artworks, artefacts and other ethnographic materials.
Services, Programmes and Community Activities	The museum has a reference library and archives attached to its educational unit. It is open to the public but registration is required. It welcomes scholars and other researchers to visit and use them between 9 am and 4 pm daily. Manuscripts and other items in the archive can be accessed under the supervision of a staff of the unit. Several community programmes and outreaches are using the museum and there is direct involvement with high school students, stakeholders and the public.
Website / Social Media	The museum does not have a website or social media handle. However, its collections are mentioned regularly online, and in local and foreign media.
Communication Approach and Language	The museum utilizes printed flyers, handbills and posters for promoting the exhibition and other community programmes and outreaches. The gallery display labels are written in English language (Akponana in an interview with the researcher in 2018).

Location and Collections

The location of the museum was influenced by the then Oba of Benin, HRH Akenzua 11, within the King's Square (aka Ring Road) in Benin City. It is less than a kilometre from the palace of the Oba. It is also close to the famous Igun Quarters, a UNESCO Cultural Heritage site (UNESCO, 2003) where the guild system that produced significant artefacts of the kingdom is located to date. Effectively, one can say that the museum is located within the ecosystem that produced its famous works of art. The museum is renowned for its cultural and political relevance to the people of Benin kingdom, the people of the defunct Midwest region and Nigeria in general.



Entrance to National Museum, Benin City

Photo Credit: Amy Staples

According to Akponana (in an interview with the researcher in 2018), who was Deputy Director (Heritage) of the National Museum, Benin City at the time of this study, each floor of the museum is dedicated to collections from specific geographic locations across cultural boundaries. The first floor houses some of the original artworks and cultural objects of the old Benin kingdom. They include bronze and brass works, shrine installations and many objects of Benin origin. The Benin Traditional Council donated some of these.



Royal Ancestral Altar
One of the Shrine Installations at the Museum
Photo Credit: Amy Staples



Benin bronze Pieces Repatriated from Europe
Photo Credit: Lambert Palace

The second floor has a slightly wider frame of collections. They include artefacts from cultures like the Urhobo, Esan, Etsako, Itsekiri, Ukwani, Ika, Ndokwa, Ijaw, Isoko, Akoko-Edo etc. These cultural areas spread across Edo and Delta States, which made up the former Midwest State of Nigeria.



A View of the Second-Floor Exhibition Gallery
Photo Credit: tripadvisor.com

The third floor of the museum is called the *Unity Gallery*. It is a floor dedicated to artworks from all over Nigeria. It displays many contemporary art pieces from renowned Nigerian artists. The concept of the unity gallery was conceived after the Nigerian Civil War, which lasted from 1967 to 1970. The federal government decided to use museums across Nigeria as part of its instruments of healing, reconstruction and unity (Akponana in an interview with the researcher in 2018)



Another View of the Museum Gallery
Photo Credit: tripadvisor.com

Museum Practice and Challenges

Museum practice is measured by its compliance with the definition of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the UNESCO standards for the safeguarding of tangible and intangible heritages. The National Museum, Benin City arguably falls within the definition of ICOM 2007, which is:

A non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for education, study and enjoyment.

From the foregoing, it is clear that a museum is more than a mere building that collects and keeps objects for viewers. It is rather an establishment, publicly or privately owned, where valuable artistic artefacts such as paintings, sculptures, drawings and vases, and scientific, historical and natural objects are kept and preserved, for viewers who come to appreciate and enjoy their aesthetic value and/or their educative and historical implications. It is usually in service to its community in particular, and the world in general (Omoera & Ode, forthcoming). Furthermore, the ICOM (2019) definition of the museum stresses the importance of community engagement in museum practice. It states that

museums are democratizing, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the past and the future. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.

Although the 2019 definition of ICOM generated quite some controversies, it reflects critical thinking in the future of museum practice and the concept of new museology. The second paragraph of the definition particularly, emphasises the partnership between the museum and the community. While, this may be difficult for institutionalized museums that are strong government organs, for instance, modules such as the one existing between the National Museum, Benin City and the community art centres present viable options. The merit of the system is the synergy it provides, the empowerment of the community, and the continuity and preservation of the community heritage. Whereas the museum is the structure for the preservation of important relics of the tangible heritages, the community is the *living arts centre* and connoisseur of the culture and intangible heritages of the community. This synergy puts the community at the fore as an important stakeholder of the museum; provide avenues for community engagement and empowerment in places like Nigeria where the museum is a strong arm of the government.

The National Museum, Benin City is an example of an institution under the strong influence of government and its machinery. As earlier observed, the creation of the 'Unity Gallery' on its third floor is the product of the government's social and political narrative in 1973, a few years after the Civil War in Nigeria. The museum has a civil service structure firmly under government control. Typically, the political party in power, decides who occupies the position of the director general of NCM, which is the umbrella body responsible for the administration of all museums in Nigeria. The Museum in Benin City is not equipped to exhibit the intangible collections of the people, which is vital to an understanding of the cultural chemistry of any given people represented in the collections, and one of the tenets listed in the ICOM 2007 definition of a museum. The

government structure and low funding prevent the museum from wider community engagements and initiatives that would have fostered a more inclusive practice in the museum administration. There is no structure in place for periodic external accreditation from international agencies, which is necessary to keep the museum within the ambit of best practices in collections management, archival practice, accessibility and inclusiveness. The absence of social media handles makes information about the museum and its programmes restricted to mainstream news media and print. The exhibits are not digitally supported, which makes them less accessible to people with visual impairment.

Community Engagement and Partnerships

The museum has a robust relationship with the surrounding community, although unofficial. The National Museum is located at the Kings Square, which was an extension of the palace grounds before the British invasion of 1897. Close to the King's Square are the traditional quarters of Igun and Igbesanwan where art and crafts production flourished before 1897. Bronzes are still being produced today at Igun in Benin City. It serves as a stopping point for tourists who buy Benin artworks as souvenirs after they visited the museum.



Local Artists at Igun Producing Priced Bronze Pieces for the Collection of Tourists to the National Museum
Photo Credit: Amy Staples

According to Osasuwa (in an interview with the researcher in 2017), the Oba was the greatest patron of the arts of the Benin kingdom. Artists and artisans were organized into a guild system that served the needs of the palace. Every major event in the kingdom, festivals and visits from foreign emissaries were documented in sculptural form. The system provided a continuous job for the artists and ensured the preservation of the skills along selected family lines until today. Although the scale of production may considerably have reduced following the British invasion, the industry survived. Artists and artisans are still active today producing works for a much wider audience, especially tourists and traders who resell these art works in other Nigerian cities or abroad. The furore generated by illegally obtained works of Benin art, which attracted global attention to the exceptional quality of the Benin bronzes may be partly responsible for the increase in patronage for the local arts and crafts workers. The international exposure perhaps is the most important reason why there are ready buyers for the Benin arts today in European markets and elsewhere.

Community Participation - Many tourists to the Benin Museum today, also tour the community arts centres. The museum has original antique works on display, while the community or guild centres provide experiential knowledge to tourists. The visit to the community arts centres is usually twofold – to buy art souvenirs, and to witness firsthand, the production process that has survived from antiquity. Many tourists find these twofold services provided by the arts community very enriching and worthwhile. As noted earlier, the artisans being descendants of the original families practising the guild system for several generations have become embodiments of history and knowledge of the guild. They can answer historical and knowledge-based questions about the guild and Benin art in general from tourists. The museum has the responsibility of vetting any work of art acquired by tourists and giving the necessary permit for export purposes. The vetting is to ascertain if the artworks are antique pieces, as those are prohibited from export. The museum charges a fee for this service, and it constitutes a part of their internally generated revenue.

Outreach and Community Service - The museum renders many services to the community in partnership with collaborators and stakeholders. The collaborators include members of academia, notably scholars of history,

archaeology, fine and applied arts, theatre arts, sociology and so on. The stakeholders in addition to the above are the press, high school management, art institutions, the police and security professionals, the Palace of the Oba of Benin, and 'friends of the museum.'

- The most common of its outreaches is to students in high school. Usually, in collaboration with the management of the high school concerned, the students are given lectures on the role of the museum in national development. Sometimes, students are invited to participate in quizzes and essay competitions on the role of the museum in national orientation and development. These are direct offshoots of the government's intention of developing unity and national consciousness in the hearts of high school students after the end of the Civil War in 1970.
- Children's educational programmes are organised by the education unit of the museum in collaboration with 'friends of the museum', which are a group of museum enthusiasts. Apart from storytelling and puppetry, the children are taught soft skills in arts and crafts making, drawing, hairstyling and simple paper designs, etc. They are also made to undergo a guided tour of the museum's collections.
- Art exhibitions are hosted for free at the exhibition gallery of the museum annexure. Unfortunately, this gesture has been disrupted for over 10 years now with the demolition of the museum annexure by the state government and the replacement of it with a water fountain, which regrettably does not add value to the museum.
- Television and radio talk shows are organised by the museum to raise awareness about the museum, especially on the 18th of May each year, which is regarded as 'World Museum Day.' Usually, guests are invited to the talk show where issues relating to the museum as an institution, arts or culture are discussed.
- Another periodic engagement of the museum with the public is talk on tourism and investment potentials. The museum is the custodian and administrator of all tourist sites in Edo and Delta States of Nigeria. The talk aims to woo tourists to these sites to generate income for the museum.
- The museum prints and distributes pamphlets during its programmes as another way of engaging the public. Usually, there are telephone numbers and email addresses for follow-up of

those who are interested in becoming friends with the museum or interested in any form of sponsorship or partnership.

- Bookshop and craft shop. The museum sells items such as postcards, hand-made jewellery and artworks in its bookshop and craft shop. Proceeds from these are subsidies for financing some of the other programmes of the museum.



An Ancient Benin Bronze Handed over to Nigerian Authorities
Photo Credit: jamaica-gleaner.com

Conclusion

Museums are important institutions for the preservation of culture. Cultural heritage whether tangible or intangible is a product of a community of people (Ben-Iheanacho, 2019), who are important parts of the normal functioning of the museum. The National Museum, Benin City is strategically located within the community of people whose ancestors produced some of the great pieces of the old Benin kingdom. Its location is unique as it allows viewing objects on display in one hand, and a guided tour of the art community on the other. The repatriation of objects taken from the kingdom will boost the collections of the museum, but it is also necessary to update the museum facilities to accommodate these priceless objects as they arrive back to their place of origin. While the engagement of the museum with the community is commendable, it is important to increase the museum community outreaches to encourage more collaboration of the community in the documentation and preservation of its intangible heritages.

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