MUSEUMS AND PLURALISTIC SOCIETIES: DEALING WITH DIFFERENCES IN THE SOCIETIES WE LIVE IN AND INTERACT WITH – A CASE STUDY OF THE MUSEUM AND HOUSE OF CULTURE, DAR ES SALAAM, TANZANIA

Lucina D. Shayo, Education Officer, Museum and House of Culture Dar es Salaam Tanzania

Abstract
The population in Tanzania is more than thirty-four million people of more than one-hundred-and-twenty ethnic groups living in different cultures. The museums in Tanzania play a great role in the maintenance of peace and harmony in society by organizing different programmes to bring the community and the larger society close to each other.

The Museum and House of Culture, Dar es Salaam, has almost completed the transition of changes from just a museum to the Museum and House of Culture, a status that allows more community participation, inspiration, learning and enjoyment in the museum.

The museums in Tanzania have enabled the Tanzanians to learn each other’s cultures and to build cultural tolerance, which has led to more peaceful societies. Through the programmes organized by the museums, women as marginalized communities, and children and youth have used the museum as their place to raise their voices, becoming more creative and building their economic capacity.

The intention of this paper is to share with you and other colleagues (who might read this paper later) the experience from The Museum and House of Culture, Dar es Salaam. It will discuss the programme known as “Maskini Almasi,” meaning “Poor Diamond.” It is a programme in which children used the museum to stage their problems from home, from transport to schools and from in schools. The paper will also explore issues related to women and their preparation to visit museums. The inclusion of HIV/AIDS education offered by the museum is also discussed in the paper, as it is one of the phenomena that have major cultural implications.

Introduction
Museums as we all know are institutions in the service of society, which collect, conserve, research, exhibit and communicate material evidence of the people and their environment, for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment.

Tanzania has about thirteen museums but only five are under the umbrella of the National Museum of Tanzania: Museum and House of Culture, Dar es Salaam, which is in the headquarters of the National Museum of Tanzania; The Village Museum, also in Dar es Salaam about eight kilometers from the city center, which depicts the traditional lifestyle of the rural Tanzanians; The Arusha Declaration Museum in the northern part of the country, which addresses the political economy history of Tanzania; The Natural History Museum, also in Arusha; and the Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere Museum in Butiama, which features the history and work of the first President of Tanzania and the Father of the Nation.
The National Museums in Tanzania organize special programmes that cater to society. The Village Museum used to organize a very special programme famously known as the ethnic days programme. Once a year this museum would select one of the ethnic groups, who would have a festival in the museum and exhibit their cultural and material values for other Tanzanians to appreciate, learn and enjoy. It used to be a very useful tool for strengthening love, peace and unity among the communities.

Arusha Museums normally organize an Art and Craft Fair, which is a platform for exhibiting art from various ethnic groups with different physical abilities and disabilities. Arusha is a gateway to the northern tourist region, which is the most popular tourist destination. The artists from different corners of the country converge at these museums, where one finds the Makonde carvers from the southern part of Tanzania working with Maasai bead artists from the northern part of Tanzania, and viewers and buyers from different parts of the world enjoying the art. All these groups are linked by the art and craft fair.

This paper is a testimony of an experience gained by the Museum and House of Culture in dealing with differences in societies in which we live and interact. The situation in the museum in Tanzania does not dwell on tribal conflicts because we do not have any.

The Museum and House of Culture fulfills its vision and mission by addressing of the contemporary burning issues of society. The vision is to promote an outward looking society with a strong sense of value and pride, responsible in its dynamic use and access of heritage and culture. The mission of the Museum and House of Culture is to become a platform for stakeholders’ partnerships and networking, creating and promoting cultural experiences, material expression, attractive and interactive programmes and dialogue, for the development of present and future generations. Therefore, working with you today is implementing the mission of our museum.

The Museum and House of Culture is a general museum that depicts the evolution of man and his environment, the history of Tanzania and the East African coast, and biology and ethnography. It is therefore a multidisciplinary museum that attracts wide audiences of women, men, children, professionals, academicians and students.

**Pluralism in Tanzania Societies**

Tanzania is a country of more than 123 ethnic groups. All these groups are different in their traditional cultures and religions.
The Museum and House of Culture has been organizing different programs to enable all people in the society to enjoy the existence of the museum, such as traveling exhibitions when the museum education crew takes the museum to the community, and involving internal and external stake holders in its activity programmes, asking them to share with the museum what they have and what the museum could do for them.

There are different activities that we perform as outreach education programmes. Since 2000 we have been involved in the International Trade Fair. The museum shares one pavilion with the Antiquities Department. Part of the exhibition collection from the museum is taken to the trade fair where the entire public is educated about what the museum does. There have been different themes in the exhibitions: Culture for
Development, Culture for Environmental Protection, Culture for Sustainable Well-being, Culture for Peace, Love and Unity.

Another outreach education programme that we have organized is taking the museum to the community. For this, we hired a van and exhibited the evolution tree on board. We drove to the suburbs where people did not know the existence of the museum. The theme was Museum for your Roots. People, including women who do not have time to visit the museum, asked many questions. I also organized short classes on how to prepare for a tour to the museum as a housewife and a mother. The idea here was to erase the notion that museums were for the white tourists and the few elites who had money to buy expensive food and drinks in town. Wherever our truck stopped I gave this lesson so that the women could see how easy it was to tour the museum. Here, the slogan was Museum, a less expensive outing. I talked about how to prepare dry foods for the trip, how the museum is a good place for picnics, and how adults can reconcile with others through the museum experience by building cultural tolerance after seeing why certain people behave the way they do.

Lucina Shayo in the field. Apart from explaining the evolution tree she also takes the opportunity to teach about “preparing the family for the museum.” Lessons are normally for women as mothers and wives, but the men are also listening attentively.
Artists are also involved in the extension programmes, where they engage the public who enjoy the cultural performances. This young man is blowing a flute with his two nostrils.
Lucina on the exhibition van. The banner reads “Museum and House of Culture-Dar es Salaam”

Calling upon the women to visit the museum so that we can both share the cultural and natural resources of our country. This was in the International Women’s Day Festival, March 8, 2008

(Photo by Lucina D. Shayo)
Maskini Almasi

This was an activity performed by children who used the museum as a place to have their voices heard. The children explained how difficult it was because they felt the community was no longer aware of the value of the children. “Maskini” is a Kiswahili word for poor,” while “Almasi” is a Kiswahili word meaning diamond. Together they mean that society does not explore and identify the treasure of the children. It is like it does not see the value of the diamond.

Some of the problems that the children raised concern how they are abused sexually at their homes by their relatives, including their own fathers (both girls whose birth canals are abused and boys who are sodomized), and problems of transport when going to and from schools, because the bus conductors do not want them to board the buses as they pay less (1/6 of the adult fare).

Bearing in mind that the customs and values are the backbone of the society and that there are customs and values that accelerate the spread of HIV/AIDS, the museum organized a workshop that involved people living positively with HIV/AIDS. The idea was to create awareness that no one can distinguish someone with HIV/AIDS. There have been several in-house lessons which workers attend every Friday for awareness creation. In the Ethnography Hall, there is an exhibition about HIV/AIDS that reminds the visitors to abandon the cultural values that help to accelerate transmission of the disease. Some of the actions mentioned are polygamy, the custom of marrying little girls (in the Marriage Law of 1971, which is supposed to be amended, a girl of 14 years is allowed to get married with the consent of her parents), early pregnancies, genital female mutilation and inheritance of widows.

The museum has called all the policy makers to remember that HIV/AIDS is dreadful and that they should always work to fight the disease and support those living positively with HIV/AIDS.

The Museum and House of Culture has established links with the Swedish African Museum Programme, which has resulted in two new buildings (museum towers). The museum additions will provide facilities for good working conditions, as the workers will have good offices, and will provide facilities for external stakeholders who will have space for seminars, workshops, meetings, exhibitions and rehearsals, training, audio-visual exhibitions and performances, and cultural industries products. The buildings are friendlier to both advantaged and disadvantaged people. Hence, they are empowering the community economically. The buildings will have art gallery, theatre, music studio, art studio where one can find artists at work and where intangible heritage is emphasized in story telling when elders will come to narrate stories for the children, a multimedia room as an information centre, a general library, children’s library, conference rooms and a traditional cuisine restaurant.
The plan of the buildings
Conclusion
The Museum and House of Culture has been dealing with differences in the societies we live in and interact with by organizing programmes that have helped communities to foster a sense of local pride and belonging and to maintain traditional cultural values. People of all walks of life see the museum as their place to learn and interact. Socially it has been a place for people’s enjoyment. Economically it has been a place for empowerment where women, men, children and professionals are well accommodated. By working together with other people and organizations the museums is provided with more facilities, hence becoming more comfortable for everybody.

Thank you for listening to me and you are all welcome to the Museum and House of Culture, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.