

Museum cooperation



Life, Women and Food is one of the African women's projects supported by Sida through the Swedish-African Museum Programme (SAMP). Here, Maria Masuku from Swaziland describes her country's culinary traditions at the museum in Kristianstad.

PHOTO: SAMP

Museums in countries that cooperate with Sida are multifunctional. They are centres for history research, preservers of cultural assets and places for people to get together. Sida's objectives are to promote the scope for sustainable conservation and use of the cultural heritage, and give all citizens a sense of sharing in museum activities.

In many countries, museums have become leading centres of knowledge about methods of cultural and environmental conservation. Old farming methods have, for example, proved better than many new ones for conserving natural resources in the long term. Networks for museum cooperation enable knowledge and information about how this can be preserved and disseminated.

With well-trained museum staff and activities aimed at all population groups, museums can also counteract ethnic prejudices.

Sida supports:

- Institutional cooperation between museums in Sweden and the third world. This involves exchange of experience and development of museum staff's skills.
- Building of networks.

Sida's priorities

Children and young people make up around half the population in the cooperating countries and it is therefore natural to give priority to projects aimed at them. The priority groups also include women and minorities whose culture is endangered. Clarifying what is at risk of disappearing is one of the objectives of museum support.

Project examples

District Six Museum in Cape Town, South Africa, has documented what happened when all 60,000 inhabitants of this once bustling district were compulsorily relocated by the apartheid regime in 1966. The museum has become a rendezvous that many people visit to understand and reclaim their own history. Here, people relate — sometimes for the first time — the atrocities they suffered under apartheid. To record these personal testimonies, the Museum has set up a sound archive. District Six Museum has been cooperating with Malmö City Museum since 1996.

To bring elderly women's life stories into focus, Nayuna Museum in Zambia and Skellefteå Museum in the north of Sweden collaborated in 1996. The women's child-

'To us, in the African cultures, our ancestors are ever present. They see what we do and can guide us on our way. As long as we speak to them and remember them, they live with us. Every time I have a beer I look East — that is where the ancestors are. I ask them if it's all right for me to have that beer, and to make them favourably disposed I sprinkle a little beer in their direction.'

This is how Jean-Aimé Rakotoarisoa, a museum director from Madagascar, describes his relationship with his history and traditions.

Examples of twinned museums in SAMP:

Skansen, Stockholm —
Village Museum, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
Bohuslän Museum —
Kisumu Museum, Kenya
Älvsborg County Museum — National Museum of Namibia,
Windhoek, Namibia
Modern Museum, Stockholm — Museu Nacional de Arte, Maputo, Mozambique
Natural History Museum, Stockholm — National Natural History Museum, Arusha,

hood, marriage, childbearing and work in the two countries were documented. Rag mats woven according to the Swedish tradition and grass mats made the African way served as exhibition screens. The project — *Far away and yet so alike* — was highly appreciated both in Limulunga, Zambia, and in Varuträsk near Skellefteå.

In Central America, regional museum collaboration is under way with the support of Sida through the Museum of National Antiquities. The museums are striving to raise the level of knowledge in museology and museography among employees responsible for cultural heritage. They also want to establish a database of existing Central American experts in museology and museography.

Channels of support

Sida supports, in particular, long-term programmes to develop museum activities in the cooperating countries. This support is also channelled to funds, networks and institutional collaboration. These various channels enhance the scope for reaching more people and using resources efficiently.

SAMP, the Swedish-African Museum Programme, organises collaboration. Exchange relating to working methods, research and exhibitions has developed museums' skills and boosted their revenues. The participants contribute with the museum staff's working hours, as well as premises and office materials, and in return get further training and a broader view of their own work. Some ten Swedish and ten African museums are twinned in this way.

'One main requirement a SAMP project must meet is that it may never take place in one country alone. It's supposed to involve genuine collaboration between Swedes and

Africans,' says Elisabet Olofsson, the museum programme's coordinator. Sida has supported SAMP since it was started ten years ago by the Swedish branch of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). There is exchange between Sweden and cooperating countries in Asia as well. The Historical Museum in Hanoi, Vietnam, and the museums of Malmö began cooperating in 2001.

New technology

Back in the mid-1990s, SAMP decided to make the Internet accessible to the active museums in the network. Besides facilitating contacts and networking in countries where the postal services seldom work satisfactorily, this initiative has allowed many museums to draw up computer indexes of their collections. In Namibia, for example, young people have been able to help in compiling them.

Policy

The culture cooperation aims to promote preservation and the use of cultural heritage. This can be done through support for collaboration between museums, training of museum staff and building of networks. Particularly relevant, here, are the online networks that offer information services in local languages and at a reasonable price. Priorities include ethnological and local research, and documentation of oral storytelling traditions, indigenous languages and minority cultures. This can also be achieved through activities that make use of artisans' knowhow and afford employment opportunities.

Support for the emerging regional organisations and networks has also grown.

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