JOURNEYS OF PEACE
Heritage and Peace Building in Kenya

CPMHF curators, volunteers and representatives from the Swedish Institute, SIDA and C-Hwb at the second Journeys of Peace workshop in Nyeri.
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MUSEUMS, HERITAGE AND PEACE BUILDING IN KENYA

Too often museums and heritage are used as instruments to divide people. Heritage, history and identity are manipulated by those who seek to undermine democracy and erode conditions for peaceful coexistence based on respect and acceptance of others. This is especially true in countries where conflict has recently taken place, such as Kenya. The image that is built is of a country that is divided and unsettled. Yet there is another history that is largely unknown — and that is the long tradition of peace building between peoples and respectful sharing of diverse heritage, landscape, artefacts and values.

Journeys of Peace is a project that reclaims this hidden history and empowers individuals and communities to rediscover old and build new ways of creating better lives. The project is a collaboration between the Kenyan Community Peace Museums Heritage Foundation and the Swedish based NGO Cultural Heritage without Borders. It was funded by the Swedish Institute.
COMMUNITY PEACE MUSEUMS HERITAGE FOUNDATION (CPMHF)

CPMHF sees cultural heritage as an important resource in conflict resolution and sustainable development and through a strong network of volunteers in 15 museums, including young people and women, has worked on a number of outreach programmes that have involved some 30,000 people in 22 communities around Kenya.

CPMHF was founded in 1994 by the ethnographer Dr Sultan Somjee with a view to helping retain and sustain traditional values in areas and communities of Kenya marred by conflict and famine. The political instability of the 1990s gave rise to suspicion and hostility between the different ethnic groups, and cultural values and practices were used as tools to create further divisions. Somjee’s objective through the CPMHF was to bring peace heritage to the fore, and provide access to traditional peace materials.
JOURNEYS OF PEACE

The Journeys of Peace project makes traditional peace materials and cultures accessible to the people to whom they belong. The guiding vision of the project is to use both tangible and intangible cultural heritage to “empower and transform communities…in the realization and respect of human rights, peaceful coexistence and sustainable human development…”

Journeys of Peace has a strong bottom-up approach to conflict resolution and peace-building, with a focus on family and community. The objective of the traveling exhibition was to provide a safe forum for dialogue between generations, women and men and communities to “promote understanding, appreciation and use of cultural heritage.”

“Peace traditions are dying out…..”
Chief of the Pokot Community

“Peace is achievable”
Curator, CPMHF member museum
LEADING BY EXAMPLE

As part of the one-year project three workshops were held, two in Nairobi and one in Nyeri, at which curators and volunteers shared experiences and learning. For many it was the first time they had worked together in a structured way; for others it was the first time they had met their colleagues from other community peace museums. The workshops also resulted in curators collaborating to take the exhibition to more remote and troubled communities.

Furthermore the workshops were opportunities for training and capacity building in the use of IT and social media thereby strengthening the channels of communication within the network, and creating a platform for sustainable cooperation.

“If you don’t share your values you can’t share your future”
(workshop participant)

“Today we have gone from analogue to digital.”
(workshop participant)
OVERCOMING CHALLENGES AND CREATING STRENGTHS

The project was not without its challenges. Some areas visited were accessible only with 4-by-4 vehicles, and in others it took three days for the exhibition to reach its host community. Another challenge was creating conditions for dialogue between conflicting communities. Separation had increased feelings of suspicion and mistrust. Dates couldn’t be agreed; venues were contested.

Despite these challenges communities were encouraged to come together and talk. An estimated 4,000 people visited the exhibition at 8 venues – exceeding the original target of 3,000 visitors at 5 venues. Over 50 volunteers participated and in excess of 80 artefacts were donated to the museums. Networking increased within and between communities, and people are beginning to take an active role in resolving conflict using traditional values and practices. Consequently the culture of violence that has long plagued communities is dying and new partnerships are being formed.

Some of the objects donated to the community peace museums. These vessels were used to hold beer or milk, which was shared during the ritual of communal drinking.

“The only way to reach the village was by motorbike, so the three of us climbed on. The road was so rough that we lost our lights.”

Volunteer recounting her travels with the exhibition
EMPOWERING WOMEN

Kenyan women have a strong role within the family unit but tradition means that they are more often than not excluded from wider community and peace-building processes. The traveling exhibition has brought about a fundamental change by actively encouraging women to sit with the men and elders and participate in dialogue. The general feeling among the Journeys of Peace volunteers is that the inclusion of women will become more commonplace as traditional beliefs and discriminations continue to be challenged.

“Women are being included in the process and that is set to continue”
(workshop participant)

“Discrimination against women is diminishing.”
(workshop participant)

“Peace is all inclusive.”
(workshop participant)
BRIDGING THE GENERATIONS

A central goal of the traveling exhibition was to encourage dialogue between the elders of a community and its young people so that peace values and stories can be kept alive. The project has helped to revitalize Peace Clubs attached to several schools and colleges and to empower young people to be more active in building a safer future.

School children visit the traveling exhibition and learn about some of the objects used in traditional conflict resolution and peace-building.
“MIRACLES DO HAPPEN”

The Pokot and Samburu are neighbouring pastoral communities with shared values and traditions, but they have been torn apart by conflict for the past four decades due to frequent drought, livestock diseases and disputed grazing rights. In the two communities guns are commonplace; between 2004 and 2011 around 380 people have been killed and thousands have been displaced.

The primary aim of the traveling exhibition was to facilitate a peace and reconciliation dialogue between the two communities through identification of traditional practices and common values. The results are staggering – perhaps the most symbolic being that each community arrived at the venue carrying sticks instead of guns. Agreement was reached to continue the dialogue, women were given a voice, and the communities asked how the outcome of the exhibition could be sustained.

Following on from the exhibition the two communities have started to trade livestock at market, conflict has ceased, and there are two examples of stolen livestock being returned to their rightful owners.

“For those of you who don’t believe in miracles, I tell you they do happen.”
(Curator of the Pastoral Peace Museum describing the impact of the Journeys of Peace exhibition)

“The politicians are one or two, but the people are thousands.”
(Workshop participant)

“If there is no peace in these communities we can’t do our job. As a result of the Journeys of Peace exhibition we can now bring water to these places”
(Workshop participant from World Vision)
CULTURAL HERITAGE WITHOUT BORDERS (CHwB) sees cultural heritage as an indispensable element of human rights and democracy and a common resource belonging to all of mankind regardless of nationality or religion.

Our mission is to promote cultural heritage as both a right in itself and a resource. CHwB works with civil society and institutions at all levels to strengthen peace-building, sustainable socio-economic and democratic development and the realisation of human rights.

CHwB is neutral when it comes to conflicting parties, but not to the rights of all people to cultural heritage. CHwB is committed to equality, non-discrimination, participation, accountability and transparency.

We are an independent Swedish organisation with local offices in countries of operations supported by Sida, other bilateral funds, the EU, private foundations and grants.

CHwB’s board is appointed by ICOMOS Sweden, ICOM Sweden, The Swedish National Heritage Board and Swedish Association of Architects.