



Museums, libraries and archives: collaborating for the preservation of heritage materials in Nigeria

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Abstract

The survival of a nation's heritage materials depends, to a large extent, on the effectiveness of its preservation programme. Heritage institutions, therefore, have as one of their core activities the preservation of their collections. The experiences in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom and some other countries have shown that this responsibility is better discharged through collaboration and networking among heritage institutions. The rapid development in digital technology and its attendant implication for access to and dissemination of information makes the need for collaboration imperative. An exploration of literature has revealed that the benefits of collaboration among heritage institutions are enormous while collaboration initiatives in developed parts of the world are well documented; little seems to be known about the initiatives in Nigeria. This study, therefore, investigates the heritage preservation collaboration initiatives of museums, libraries and archives with particular focus on the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (National Museums), the National Library and the National Archives of Nigeria. A survey research method was adopted for the study with questionnaire and interview as the research instruments. Curators, librarians and archivists from the three heritage institutions who constituted the target population were purposively sampled. The study revealed among other findings, little or no collaboration in most aspects of heritage preservation among heritage institutions in Nigeria. Based on this finding, a case was made for active collaboration with strong government involvement, particularly in the area of funding.

Introduction

Preservation of heritage materials constitutes a big challenge to heritage institutions in Africa. The challenge of heritage preservation in the tropics seems to be overwhelming due to a number of factors which include the harsh tropical environment, absence of a preservation policy and general lack of preservation awareness and appreciation of the importance and sensitivity of heritage materials. The strategic role of preservation to the survival of and long term access to heritage materials cannot be over-emphasized. It not only prevents or delay deterioration but also ensures access. “Without preservation”, according to Drijfhout (2001), “access becomes impossible and collections will decay and disintegrate”. The greatest obstacle to access is deterioration or loss of collection.

National heritage institutions like the National Library, the National Archives and the National Museums are in the forefront in the preservation of heritage materials in Nigeria. By virtue of their mandate, these institutions acquire, organize and make heritage collections available to the patrons whose interest they are set up to serve. The collections or holdings of the institutions defer in significant respect just as their core missions and responsibilities are by no means the same. There is also a remarkable difference in the way they organize and facilitate access to their collections.

National Library collections essentially comprise published materials in printed or electronic form. The National Archives’ core responsibility is the preservation of public records, whether on paper or any other medium. The National Museums is responsible for collecting, preserving and exhibiting artefacts about the nation’s history and culture. Essentially, it is established to coordinate the collection and preservation of movable and non-movable cultural heritage including historical sites and monuments. These institutions differ in their approaches to acquisition, documentation, processing and facilitating access due largely to the nature of the materials collected and the practices of their professions. Librarians, archivists and museum curators adhere to their own professional philosophy, practices, standards and ethics.

Libraries provide a catalogue to their collections and this is ultimately aimed at making the entire collections accessible and available for reference or loan in accordance with their missions and mandates. Archives prepare and provide finding aids which facilitate access to their holdings, thus making archival description a core function in the archives. The materials are, generally, for consultation and not for loan. Museums play a similar role in this respect in that they make their collections available for viewing only through exhibition and display.

Despite the divergence, there is a point of convergence for heritage institutions in Nigeria. Preservation is an area of shared concern among the institutions and it touches the very root of their existence. It is a mission that cuts across professional boundaries. In view of the fact that these institutions operate within the same physical, economic and political environment, they are faced with similar challenges in the task of preserving their collections. The need for collaboration and networking in meeting these challenges cannot, therefore, be wished away.

Challenges of Heritage Preservation in Nigeria

The underlying problems of heritage preservation have been identified in the literature. These problems are not all mutually exclusive – indeed, they overlap to some degree. Some authors lean towards one view without necessarily rejecting the others. Popoola (2003) submitted that information professionals in African society today, cannot wave aside the obvious fact that the continent stands the imminent risk of losing so much of its valuable heritage materials in consequence of ever increasing deterioration, lack of co-ordination in handling records, absence of legal policies, etc. He recommended that the only antidote to these problems is the formulation and implementation of sound preservation policies and programmes.

In Nigeria, the challenges of heritage preservation are enormous. Unfavourable tropical climate is one of such challenges. It has been asserted that preservation in the tropics is faced with typical problems of “specificity of the objects and the materials, and those arising from tropical conditions under which they are kept and maintained” (International Council on Archives, 2001). The temperature and relative humidity (RH) are not just too high but significantly and constantly fluctuate, a situation that is inimical to the health of library, archival and museum objects and materials. Besides, the tropical climate provides a conducive environment for the breeding and well-being of insects and other organisms that cause the disintegration of heritage materials. Little wonder that Africa has been described as the headquarters of termites Plumbe, (1964).

The challenge of funding of heritage preservation in Nigeria seems to be intractable going by the low priority given to the activity by the government. Most heritage institutions are grossly underfunded, a situation which has dire implication for the operations of the institutions and the survival of the heritage materials in their custody. A pathetic funding pattern of Nigerian University libraries, for instance, was given by Oladele (2008) when he noted that the initial 10% of university annual recurrent budget as allocation has been replaced by a new policy of 10% of overhead costs, a step which he rightly regarded as a classical case of policy somersault. More worrisome is the fact that a negligible percentage of allocation to heritage institutions is earmarked for preservation. As a survival strategy, heritage institutions now look up to international organizations, particularly those with bias for cultural heritage, as well as donor agencies for funding.

Absence or shortage (to say the least) of skilled manpower in preservation and conservation of heritage materials is equally a critical challenge confronting heritage preservation in Nigeria. In the early years of their existence, heritage institutions looked up to foreign institutions for the training of technical personnel required for the management of heritage materials. The regional training centres established in Accra (Ghana) and Dakar (Senegal) for archival work and Jos (Nigeria) for museum and cultural heritage management with the support of the UNESCO also assisted in human resource capacity building. Although the centre at Jos which was established in 1963 has been upgraded to the Institute of Archaeology and Museum Studies, the facilities available at the centre remain inadequate to meet the requirements of heritage preservation.

However, Alegbeleye (1999) argued that the major constraints faced by professionals in heritage institutions regarding preservation in Africa are not only due to the crushing

poverty of the continent but also to the cultural, political, economic and legal environment in which these professionals live. Amongst Alegbeleye's recommendations is the need for greater co-operation among heritage institutions to tackle these problems.

It is interesting to note that none of these authors see the absence of collaboration among heritage institutions in Nigeria as a major problem. One of the achievements of the joint IFLA/ICA Committee on Preservation and Conservation for Africa (JICPA) is the introduction of preservation and conservation curriculum for library and archival schools in Africa. In order to ensure that the effect of JICPA was uniformly felt throughout the continent, a national committee was established. One of the objectives of the committee, according to Alegbeleye (1999), is to promote collaboration among libraries, archives, museums and other organizations concerned with the preservation and conservation of heritage materials.

Statement of Problem

The core activity on preservation and conservation is geared towards ensuring that heritage materials in libraries, archives and museums are preserved in accessible form for as long as possible. Series of workshops supported by international organizations have been held on preservation in different parts of Africa. The objectives of these workshops have been to sensitize and raise awareness about preservation and to impart practical knowledge to archivists and librarians. This exercise, to some extent, has helped to counter ignorance and apathy about heritage preservation. But problems abound because the potentials of collaboration among heritage institutions in Nigeria seems not yet to be fully exploited in practical terms. Co-operation with western countries is mostly based on the presentation of Nigerian arts and crafts or Nigerian music to the western audiences, and on the transfer of knowledge on cultural institution and activities from the West. The questions here are – is collaboration among heritage institutions with the aim of preserving heritage materials a common place in Nigeria and are there benefits or drawbacks from this type of collaboration if it exists? In what areas is collaboration occurring? Can Nigeria learn from the experiences in other countries where Libraries, Archives and Museums collaboration is more prevalent? This paper addresses these questions and provides insight into the subject matter.

Literature Review

No heritage institution can afford to be an island to itself in the task of heritage preservation. At a time when yesterday's bright new fact becomes today's doubt and tomorrow's myth, no single institution has the resources and facilities to go it alone. Heritage institutions must do more than just stand guard over the nation's heritage; it must illuminate the present and help shape the future. This demands cooperation.

Collaboration comes from the Latin words "com" and "labore" which mean "to work together". It is a mutually beneficial relationship between two or more people to achieve common goals by sharing responsibility, authority and accountability for achieving results Chrislip, (2002). According to Diamont-Cohen and Sherman (2003) collaboration refers to a more involved co-operation where there is a more in-depth sharing and pooling of resources. Collaboration is emerging as the strategy of the 21st century. Martin, (2002). It is aligned

with how we are thinking about our communities as holistic environments, as social ecosystems in which we are part of an integrated whole.

Zawiyah Baba (2005) opined that, with present day digital and multimedia technology, it is possible for libraries, archives and museums to make not only a catalogue of their holding accessible, but also their collections accessible in text, images and sound should the need arise if well preserved. There is every reason for heritage institutions to work together and make this happen.

In the USA, collaboration has been encouraged by legislation to meet the increasing public demand for lifelong learning opportunities. The Institute of Museum and Library services (IMLS), a Federal grant making agency that supports non-federal, not-for profit museums, libraries and archives nation-wide was created by the Federal Museum and Library Services Act of 1996. (Ray and Choudhury, 2002). The IMLS is a driving force for change as it promotes a new culture of library-museum collaboration through policy and National Leadership Grants (NLG). Allen and Bishoff, (2002). It particularly encourages collaboration for innovative projects with a national impact which provide models of how museums and libraries in partnership can expand their services to the public. Emphasis is placed on how the community is served, how materials are preserved, how technology is used and how education is enhanced. Bell (2003). The American Association of Museums (AAM) also supports collaboration and at its 2005 Annual meeting, together with the IMLS, hosted a “Museum and Library Day” to inform institutions of best practice and spur innovation. IMLS (2005).

In the UK, the legislation and funding has been less progressive. Owen and Johnson (1999) with the result that library, archives and museum collaboration appears not to have been developed to the same extent as in the USA. The Public Libraries and Museum Act of 1964 placed a duty on local authorities to be responsible for cultural institutions. Some form of collaboration was envisioned but cooperation specifically was not spelt out in the Act. By 1999, these heritage institutions enjoyed close links because local authorities had combined the functions of arts, archives, museums and libraries. Lammy (2005).

The Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (MLAC) of the UK was officially launched in April 2000. Underwood (2003). The Museums Association (UK) encouraged by MLAs Renaissance programme has put considerable effort into analyzing the best-practice strategy for national/regional partnerships, but cross-sectoral collaboration has not featured in their discussions to the same extent. Gibson (2007).

Kati Geber, (2005) in his presentation at the Canada – US dialogue on digital cultural heritage reported that the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN) has experienced successfully leveraging research, expertise and content resources through collaborations within the museum community and across other heritage organizations in Canada and internationally, aligning their working strategies towards common goals and joining forces to reach audiences with more impact.

In Nigeria, the need to preserve our heritage materials was recognized by archivists and museum curators as early as the earliest institutions such as libraries, archives and museums established in the early 50’s. Though these institutions have as their main

objectives the preservation of heritage materials, they not been able to concretely do much in the area of preservation research. It is only very recently that the issue has become one of truly national concern. This is supported by various survey that have been carried out (Alegbeleye, 19; Bankole and Abioye, 2005; Alegbeleye, 2007).

In Nigeria, collaboration for preservation among heritage institutions have not been encouraged by legislation or policy, although the National Archives enjoys close links with the National Museums because there has been greater emphasis on the heritage and leisure functions of archives and museums with recognition of a shared common purpose as cultural heritage institutions. Regional African cooperation is mostly based on the common developmental experience and some similar characteristics of African culture. It is mostly motivated by the need to work on the emancipation of African cultures. The coordinating agency for cultural cooperation is the Federal Department of Culture.

Cooperation and collaboration with international organizations like the UN and particularly UNESCO is of special concern. Apart from the support for festivals, exhibitions, arts, etc., UNESCO pays particular attention to relevant cultural issues, such as information management, analysis and documentation, preservation and conservation of national heritage, education and training in cultural development. This is done through various workshops, conferences, and symposia for mostly professionals in museums and archives in Nigeria. It is also through these organizations that some professionals in these heritage institutions join specialized international associations and organizations.

Benefits of Collaboration

The benefits of collaboration among heritage institutions are listed by Allen and Bishoff (2002), Diamant-Cohen and Sherman (2003), Lester (2001), Brown and Pollack (2000), Yakel (2005), Geber (2005) Gibson, Morris and Cleeve (2007) and Aina (2008) as including the opportunities for:

- Finding new ways to encourage cultural heritage and preservation.
- Attracting new audiences and blurring of boundaries among libraries, archives and museums.
- Improving public perceptions of the heritage institutions.
- Fostering best practices among the institutions.
- Sharing physical resources such as space and materials.
- Sharing policies for preservation and conservation of collections.
- Sharing financial resources for clearing, utility bills security, building, staffing, ICT facilities and joint licence purchasing, etc.

- Experiencing collaborative working.
- Avoiding competitive bidding for same funding.
- Sharing expertise
- Better coordinated training programmes and sharing of training costs.
- Enriching and broadening professional traditions and expertise.
- Attracting more funding opportunities.

These benefits may provide the motivation for heritage institutions in Nigeria to work together.

Methodology

A survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprise librarians, archivists and curators in the National Library, National Archives and National Museums in Nigeria. A purposive sampling method was adopted in administering copies of the questionnaire, which was the main research instrument, on the 60 respondents drawn from the three heritage institutions. Items in the questionnaire, made up of closed and open-ended questions, include those seeking information on the nature of institutional collections/holdings, existence of a preservation programme and policy, heritage institutions collaborated with and areas of collaboration, preservation research efforts and heritage institutions collaborated with. The questionnaire also sought information on potential areas of research collaboration and approaches to promoting research collaboration among heritage institutions in Nigeria. The questionnaire was complemented with interview with key management staff of the three heritage institutions based on an interview schedule that was tailored along the research topic.

Out of sixty copies of the questionnaire sent out, forty eight were returned giving a response rate of 80% while forty six were found usable.

Findings and Discussion

The major findings of the survey are presented under the following topical headings:

Table 1 Existence of Preservation Programme

Preservation programme	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Available	34	73.9	73.9	73.9
Not available	10	21.7	21.7	95.6
No response	2	4.3	4.3	100
Total	46	100	100	

The majority of the respondents (34 or 73.9%) as shown in table 1 claimed that their institutions had a preservation programme while 10 respondents representing 21.7 of the total number of respondents claimed that no such programme existed in their institutions. Two respondents (4.3%) did not respond to this question.

The result confirms that these heritage institutions were conscious of their responsibility for the survival of heritage materials and had, therefore designed a preservation programme to help them achieve the mission.

Table 2 Existence of preservation policy

Preservation policy	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
In existence	22	47.8	47.8	47.8
Non- existent	17	37.0	37.0	84.8
No response	7	15.2	15.2	100
Total	46	100	100	

The majority of the respondents (22 or 47.8%) as indicated in table2 claimed that their institutions had a preservation policy while 17 respondents (37.0%) were recorded as claiming the non- existence of a preservation policy in their institutions. Seven respondents (15.2%) did not respond to the item.

Interview conducted, however, revealed that apart from the enabling legislations establishing them, the institutions lacked a comprehensive and well-articulated preservation policy that could take care of all aspects of heritage preservation

Heritage Institution Popularity

The results revealed that the National Library was the most popular heritage institutions in Nigeria as 73.9% of the respondents claimed to be familiar with the institution as against 26.1% who claimed otherwise. The National Museums came second with 58.7% of the respondents claiming to be familiar with it as against 41.35%. The National Archives was the least popular with 56.5% of the respondents for and 43.5\$ against the institution.

Table 3. Collaboration with Other Heritage Institutions

Collaboration	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Collaborates	18	39.1	39.1	39.1
Does not collaborates	22	47.8	47.8	86.9
No response	6	13.0	13.0	100
Total	46	100	100	

Table 3 reveals that the majority of the respondents (22 or 47.8%) claimed that there was no collaboration between their institution and other heritage institutions. On the other hand 18 respondents (39.1%) claimed that their institutions collaborated with other heritage institutions. There was no response to this aspect of the questionnaire from six respondents representing 13.0% of the total number. This finding is in line with that of Zawiyah Baba (2005) in respect of collaborative initiatives involving heritage institutions in the East Asian countries.

On areas of collaboration among heritage institutions, the findings of the survey revealed that training in preservation was foremost with 32.6%.; it was followed by sharing of technical knowledge (23.9%), formulation of preservation policy (17.4%), disaster management (15.2%) and others (10.9%)

Interview and personal knowledge of the researchers, however, revealed that there has been, in recent times, collaborative initiatives championed by the Federal Government, UNESCO, Ford Foundation and other stakeholders in heritage preservation to promote and forge a link among heritage institutions in Nigeria. The first of such initiatives was the National Conference on Preservation of Nigerian Scholarly and Literary Traditions and Arabic Manuscript Heritage organized by Arewa House in March 2007 in Kaduna with the support of the United States of American embassy in Nigeria. Other initiatives, in quick succession, included the National Conference on Heritage Preservation in Abuja in February 2008 funded by the Education Trust Fund, the Stakeholders’ Forum on National Preservation Policy in Abuja in October 2008 for which the Federal Ministry of Culture and National Orientation provided the necessary financial support and the National Conference on Preservation of Documentary Heritage organized by NATCOM – UNESCO in Abuja in March 2009 with the support of the Federal Ministry of Education. The National Conference on Exploring the Ajami/ Arabic Manuscripts organized by the Arewa House in Kaduna in May 2009 in collaboration with Ford Foundation was the latest of these initiatives. Virtually all these conferences brought together professionals from all the heritage institutions in Nigeria with a view to charting a common course for the preservation of heritage materials in Nigeria.

There was evidence of collaboration between the National Archives and the National Museums in the area of funding, as the challenge of poor funding cuts across all heritage institutions in the country. The outcome of this initiative was the setting up of a committee to carry out a need assessment of the two institutions with a view to ensuring proper funding of the institutions.

Table 4 Preservation Research Efforts

Preservation Researches	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Carries out researches	16	34.8	34.8	
Does not	27	58.7		93.5
No response	3	6.5		100
Total	46	100		

Majority of the respondents (27 or 58.7%) as shown in table 4 claimed that their institutions had not been involved in preservation research while 16 respondents (34.8%) affirmed that their institutions were involved. Three of respondents (6.5%) did not respond to the question.

The result also revealed that storage conditions constituted the main area of research. This was closely followed by material deterioration, preservation policy, funding and manpower requirements and development. The finding is not surprising as storage environment is a critical factor in the deterioration of heritage materials in Nigeria. The harsh tropical climate makes it imperative that research work be geared toward ameliorating the problem.

Table 5 Preservation Research Collaboration

Research Collaboration	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
In existence	12	26.1	26.1	26.1
Non-existent	30	65.2	65.2	91.3
No response	4	8.7	8.7	100
Total	46	100	100	

Table 5 reveals that majority of the respondents (30 or 62.5%) claimed that their institutions had no preservation research collaboration with any other heritage institution while 12 respondents (26.1%) asserted that such collaboration existed between their institutions any other heritage institutions. Four respondents (8.7%) however did not respond to this question.

Potential Areas of Research Collaboration

The survey identified the following potential areas of research collaboration:

- ❖ Standard storage environment
- ❖ Treatment of deteriorating materials
- ❖ Quality of ink for information recording
- ❖ Paper standard
- ❖ Traditional preservation method
- ❖ Digital preservation

Issues and Challenges

The survey revealed the following constraints as militating against collaboration initiatives among heritage institutions in Nigeria.

- ❖ Leadership – who will take the lead?
- ❖ Professional divergence
- ❖ Inadequate funding
- ❖ Absence of policy
- ❖ Traditional professional rivalry
- ❖ Perceived threat of collaboration
- ❖ Lack of support from stakeholders
- ❖ Very low level of ICT development and digital content creation.
- ❖ Sustainability of project.
- ❖ Lack of expertise and infrastructure for collaboration technology.

Proposals for action

Promoting collaboration among heritage institutions would involve not only financial and material resources but also skilled human resources. Therefore, the following actions should be taken to make the giant leap required for the survival of heritage materials.

- ❖ Preservation policy being a critical requirement in heritage preservation, a national preservation policy that caters for all heritage institutions in Nigeria must be formulated.
- ❖ Collaboration among heritage institutions and professionals, particularly in the area of heritage preservation can be promoted through the creation of awareness on the benefits of collaboration.
- ❖ Annual stakeholders' forum on heritage preservation should be embraced by all professionals in Nigeria heritage institutions.
- ❖ The government of Nigeria should support the establishment of organizations that could promote and encourage collaboration and networking among heritage institutions. The

good work of organizations like the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLAC) in the UK and the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN) in Canada should be replicated in Nigeria.

- ❖ There is the need to shore up government involvement in heritage preservation funding as most heritage institutions are groaning under the heavy burden of poor funding. In particular heritage research grant should be established.
- ❖ Compilation of existing research findings of successful collaboration projects from other parts of the world should be carried out by researchers with a view to replicating such projects in Nigeria.

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