

AFRICOM – an introduction

By

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Paper presented at the conference *High Expectations, but Low Funding: How do poor museums meet their targets?*. Lusaka and Livingstone, Zambia July 28 - August 2, 2002.

Origins of AFRICOM

The AFRICOM Programme was born as an outcome of the Encounters "What Museums for Africa? Heritage in the Future" organised by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in Benin, Ghana and Togo in November 1991. The aim of the meetings was to address the role and the relevance of the museum for the African continent.

Subsequently, African professionals drew up a programme addressing issues considered as priorities. AFRICOM's major objective was to develop exchanges among professionals of the continent and outside of Africa, and to consolidate regional professional networks

The Constituent Assembly of AFRICOM convened in Lusaka from 3rd to 9th October 1999 and resolved to establish AFRICOM as an autonomous organisation. At the Assembly, the organisation's Constitution and a detailed Programme of Activities 1999-2002 were drafted and approved. The Assembly also elected the Board of Directors, the President and the Treasurer, and decided that the organisation's headquarters will be established in Kenya.

As a new NGO, AFRICOM's mission is to contribute to the positive development of African societies by encouraging the role of Museums as generators of culture and as agents of cultural cohesion. It hopes to achieve this through promoting the development of museums, museum professionals and museum-related institutions in Africa. AFRICOM operates over the entire African continent according to the OAU definition of Africa, and its official languages are French and English.

AFRICOM Today

AFRICOM today is an International NGO registered by the Government of Kenya. Its headquarters are located in the capital city, Nairobi, in offices graciously offered by the National Museums of Kenya (NMK). The Secretariat is housed in a charming bungalow within the NMK headquarters complex.

The AFRICOM I & II programme saw many successful workshops, projects and publications. AFRICOM as a new organisation has spent the first years solidifying its presence as an independent organisation and building up its physical capacity to ensure sustainability.

In this 'establishment phase', AFRICOM obtained legal status as an international NGO by the Republic of Kenya (November 2000); established its administrative, legal and financial procedures for the organisation; renovated the Secretariat building and office spaces and recruited staff. AFRICOM also established and is maintaining a comprehensive database of African museums/museum professionals and related heritage organisations (currently containing over 1,450 entries). To promote the organisation, we have designed and disseminated promotional material (brochures, stickers, T-shirts), and we have created a web site: www.african-museums.org

In April 2001, AFRICOM contracted a museology expert for a UNESCO consultancy to assess the needs and requirements of establishing a Buganda Kingdom Museum in Uganda. The final report will be used by UNESCO to raise funds for the proposed museum.

In June 2002, AFRICOM – together with the National Museums of Kenya – organised a special poster exhibition "Museums of the World" held at Nairobi Museum for International Museum Day.

In August the first edition of AFRICOM's first newsletter (French/English) appeared; it has been distributed widely to all museums in Africa, AFRICOM members, donors and partners around the world. Through all these activities, AFRICOM has facilitated and shall continue to facilitate the exchange and sharing of experiences and information among African museums and related organisations.

Activities in Progress

Activities currently underway by AFRICOM include:

- Updating and publishing the Directory of Museum Professional in Africa (to be available in print, CD-ROM and on the Internet)
- Development and maintenance of the web site: www.african-museums.org
- Establishment of a membership base (currently over 185 members)
- Development of a Documentation/Information Centre
- Organisation and fundraising for AFRICOM General Assembly and Conference: Nairobi, 22-24 September 2003

Proposed Activities

In the coming years, AFRICOM hopes to undertake various activities and projects, for which it is currently fundraising, including:

- Establishment and maintenance of a 'Cultural Heritage Database'
- African Museum Professional Internship programme (2003/2004)
- Cultural Tourism conference in conjunction with ICOM (2003/2004)
- Development of a distance-learning 'Kit' for the Standardisation of Inventories of African collections

For more information about AFRICOM and its activities, please contact:

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ICME - International Committee for Museums and Collections of Ethnography

<http://icom.museum/icme>

Updated by [webmaster](#), 25.01.03