

Prospects of WITED Museum of the Environment at Federal Polytechnic Nekede

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Article DOI: 10.48028/iiprds/ijarssest.v10.i1.15

Abstract

The museum is a constantly evolving idealism open to several interpretations by a wide variety of people of all professions. The reason for this divergence and sometimes interactive expression of ideas always emanate from the world view of the people where the museum locates, those who visit for one reason or the other, the government of the country and the multiplicity of actions and inactions that flow from the location of the museum. This study explored the need for the establishment of a Museum of the Environment at Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Nigeria. The study examined the background, pedigree and requirements necessary for the establishment of the museum as well as the prospects of such establishment especially the preponderance of facts about the contributions of women curators who nonetheless are the backbone of such formidable and truly egalitarian movement. It proffered explainable solutions for the sustainability of the museum in an environment as diverse in character as Federal Polytechnic Nekede.

Keywords: *Museum, Environment, Sustainability, Nature, Safety*

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Background to the Study

Museums are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which are held in trust for society. This definition which appeared in the Economic Research and Business Intelligence report for Arts Council England (2015) was agreed in consultation with Arts Council Cross Sector Museums group. The definition includes art galleries with collections of works of art as well as museums with historical collections of objects. In his fascinating Ted Talk “Weaving Narratives in Museum Galleries,” Metropolitan Museum of Art President, Thomas Campbell was quoted as saying

“Nothing replaces the authenticity of the object presented with passionate scholarship. Bringing people face-to-face with our objects is a way of bringing them face-to-face with people across time, across space, whose lives may have been different from our own but who, like us, have hopes and dreams, frustrations and achievements in their lives.”

Museums hold the cultural wealth of the nation in trust for all generations and by its function and unique position; have become the cultural conscience of the nations. Museums ensure understanding and appreciation for various groups and cultures. They promote better understanding of our collective heritage and foster dialogue, curiosity and self-reflection. Further, they serve to help future generations comprehend their history and recognize the achievements of those who came before them.

Museums are both necessary and relevant as they are the institutions charged with conserving, protecting and displaying artifacts from our past and thus preserving our rich heritage which might otherwise be lost to private collectors or to time. Quite simply, without museums we would most certainly lose the tangible links to our past. Museums are the threshold and repositories of the past. The collection, documentation, interpretation and preservation of artefacts is to a large extent the responsibility of museums all over the world as they examine artefacts, put them into their historical context, based on archaeological investigations and then display them to the members of the public. It is as thus the duty of curators to ascertain and convey these stories and put objects back into history.

Following a research project done by the Netherlands Museums Association, the value of museums for society can be expressed through five key factors: the value of collections, the educational value, the experience value, the social value and the economic value. According to Lagendijk (2011) museums are a public resource, owing their existence to private initiative and public funds. In recent years, they have also established closer ties with the market and auctions as well as building up the history and diverse perspectives of the populace. Though we are not expected to overflog the propensity of museum to change history narratives, we must nonetheless underscore the fact which postulates more emphatically that as the stewards of our public heritage, museums contribute significantly to society, which justifies their reliance on public funds. Schmitt-Tegge (2011) concluded in a terse remark that

If one lesson can be learned, it is that decision makers are not always aware of the societal and economic values museums can have.

It is in this emporium of ideas that we understand how museums generate income including those earned from investments, grants from charities and foundations, and donations. Through procurements mostly focused on local suppliers, visitor spending which is more significant for some locations than others, and place making and regeneration where museums and heritage offers have been significant elements of a development project, museums impact on the economy.

Importance of Museums

Approximately 850 million people visit American museums each year, not just for aesthetics and self-seeking but also for the impact in their lives. It has been reported that the first museum (the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford) opened in 1683 and for centuries thereafter museums have continued to play an integral role in preserving the history of our society. Exhibits tell us stories about how our nation, our communities and our cultures came to be and without them, those stories could be forgotten.

Museums serve our communities in a multitude of ways by holding collections of objects important to the world. They inspire and educate by possessing what the classroom may not such as materials and information that enrich and create an experience that is memorable. Information found in museums can also be found within a textbook in a school's library, a classroom or on the web through search engines such as Google. But, what those materials don't always effectively show are the impact that those stories had on the different places people live. According to Jill Krieg-Accrocco (2015), Curator of Anthropology and Exhibitions with the Boonshoft Museum of Discovery

“Collections within a museum are a significant resource to the community, allowing people to experience things from all over the world without ever visiting the places. To see it with your own eyes will create a lifetime memory that studying and memorizing information will not.”

Behind the scenes, museums are conducting important research on objects and artefacts in their collections. Not only do personnel at the museum conduct research, but museums may also partner with outside entities such as universities so that researchers, graduate students, and professors have the opportunity to utilize their collections. The constant research occurring in museums can tell a lot about the organisms and the time periods before we lived and walked on our city streets. The research may also tell about how the world around us works, our health, or how the things around us (our environment) came to be. The research done in museums tells the stories of all those that lived before us. Without those stories, we wouldn't be able to understand our world as we know it.

It is crucial that our society preserves the history and cultures that shaped who and where we are today. As George Santanya, writer and philosopher said, “Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it.” Museums tell powerful stories of tragedy and overcoming adversity; they drive people to evoke change at home or across borders. The progression and preservation of society depends on our museums. At the end of a tour, one does not just leave in awe of the beautiful displays and artefacts they observe; nor do they forget the lessons they learned.

Of the different categories of museums - Fine arts museums (containing all types of paintings, drawings, sculpture, architecture etc.); Historical Museums (illustrating historical events or period, and personalities, etc); Science and Technology museums (containing all the things which are representative of the evolution of history); Museum-house (located in the birthplace of a famous person); Archaeological Museum (containing all the objects related to history); General Museum (containing more than one subject and therefore also called multidisciplinary museums) and Museum of the Environment (containing all environmental information and earth life habitats) it is perhaps Museum of the Environment that stand out amongst all owing to its peculiarity and particularity about life and sustenance

Museums Across the World

Museums are places of interest and indeed very curious places because they shroud the inanimate psychology of the people. They accommodate items that are related and thoughtfully distributed through space and labelled in some way so that people know what they are looking at and searching for. Haugen, 2022 clarifies that objects in museums are valuable because they are generally accessible, allowing people to observe items in person that they might only ever see in books or in television. Museums have a reputation for being places many people feel obligated to visit.

Museums are places to think and learn. Their importance in history stems from the fact that they impact on our present structures of thought, meaning and identity as well as our future actions and anticipations. Museums perform and mobilize historic contemporary consciousness through their practices of representation, artworks, images, objects and artefacts, displays dioramas, labels and curatorial statements that are carefully choreographed to visualize and story particular understandings of the past as it “was” and the present as it “is” (Sanford, 2020).



Figure 1, 2, 3, & 4.

Clockwise: Cultural and Museum Centre Koranga (Malawi); Musee' National N'Djamena (Chad); National Museum of Mali; Historic Museum Bamoun Sultanate, Cameroon.

The first of its kind in Africa and the world, the Museum of the Environment near Lake Kivu in the western province of Rwanda was designed as an educational center with the purpose of helping people understand and safeguard their environment, and ensure integrated and durable development. It is equipped with educational displays of energy sources and environmental impact of different types of fuel sources.



Fig. 5: Museum of the Environment Rwanda
Source: <https://www.visitrwanda.com>mus> (2022)



Fig. 6: Recharge your Artistic inspiration
Source: Nay Palad Art Nest Kenya @Museumofmodernafricanart



Fig. 7: Mask 1 made with kobo Cane

Source: Poker Hefer (2016) Museumofmodernafricanart

A Museum at Federal Polytechnic Nekede

No one is any doubt that the environment is the totality of our being just as it is the mother of all creations. Environment is nature personified and come with it the divergences of disciplines and areas of tactical importance for our sustenance as humans. Thus Byju's 2020 likens the environment as the sum total of all the living and non-living elements and their effects that influence human life. The necessity of the environment is better understood when one considers the facts that it provides the supply of resources be it for production, renewable and non-renewable materials; sustenance of life by providing genetic and biodiversity and all materials essential for human life; assimilation of wastes; and enhancement of the quality of life. Since the environment is important in man's life it becomes therefore necessary that it should be protected and utilized for the overall benefit of man.

Federal Polytechnic Nekede has without doubt provided the platform upon which a museum of the environment could subsist. This is one of the foremost institutions of higher learning in Nigeria that has stood the test of time and history as a great citadel of learning.

*Nestled on the Nekede plains;
Washed by the refreshing water of Otamiri river;
Stretching her hands for service
Federal Polytechnic Nekede beckons on all.*

*Flocking from the corners of the realms;
To drink from the fountains of knowledge;*

*Working for Nigeria's glory;
Bearing the motto of Skill and Service
We stand in one accord to establish
Museum of the Environment*



Fig. 8: Federal Polytechnic Nekede

Source: Chikezie Okoronkwo 2015

Federal Polytechnic Nekede is located in the lush green rain forest vegetation zone of Imo State South East Nigeria. Established in 1978 as the College of Technology first hosted at Government Technical College premises Owerri, the institution has grown to a formidable colossus even to the extent of becoming the Most Sought-After Polytechnic (MSAP) in the country, Tetfund Centre of Excellence in ICT, and other accolades and honours. The diversity of academic courses undertaken at the institution lends credence to the multiplicity of ideas and innovations going on in the world with the institution in the forefront of change, innovation and transformation. It has linkages with universities and technological institutions across the globe and continues to make inroads and forays in more educational and life changing programs for the emancipation of man, the improvement in the quality of life and the development of the country. The establishment of a Museum of the Environment at Federal Polytechnic Nekede will be a confirmation and in strategic alignment with the vision and mission of the institution which encapsulates a gargantuan of ideals, ideas and philosophy of growth and management thereof.

Conclusion: Women, WITED and the World in Museums

Since the creation of the world women have been in the vanguard of change and innovations. Accounts in the Bible are replete with the exploits of Ruth, Rachel, Hannah, Esther, Mary, Deborah, Rahab, Tabitha, Abigail and many others. It has all along been women who continues to keep the world at its peaceful state no matter the circumstances.

The education of the family has been known to fall unto the laps of our women and mothers who act as a wife, administrator and leader of the household, manager of family income, mother and dependable ally. Women have sustained the growth of society and moulded the future of nations. It is in this direction that they have continued and will stop at nothing but to see a better and more meaningful world for all.

Women in Technical Education and Development (WITED) is a veritable platform for employability, innovation and sustainable development of the world (Najoli, 2022). It is a fact that women are seen and heard in many places and for many things but one area where women have proven their worth more than ever is in the museum industry. According to Zippia (2022) on demographics for curators and other personnel at museums in the United States, 59.6% of all curators are women while 40.4% are men. These women curators are 42.4% more likely to work in educational institutions than in private companies earning as much as their male counterparts. The establishment of a Museum of the Environment by WITED will ramp up the ladder and establish a threshold for women in the education of the world.

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