

THE BRITISH MUSEUM
INTERNATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMME 2021



PARTICIPANT REPORT
WILLIAM NSUIBAN GMAYI, GHANA
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Introduction

My name is William Nsuiban Gmayi, the Head of Communication and Public Relations at the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (GMMB). I am primarily responsible for the Board's communication strategy, public education initiatives and press issues. My professional interests are museums as agents of change, restitution, repatriation and return of illicit museum objects. I am also currently working as a research collaborator with Aarhus University of Denmark on conflictual patterns of authorship and agency in past and present narratives on slavery in Ghana. Through having the opportunity to participate in the 2021 International Training Programme (ITP) at the British Museum, I have gained new knowledge and skills in best practice relating to the various aspects of museum work. My participation in the programme inspired me a lot.

Benefits of the ITP

First of all, it was my first working experience with the British Museum in the United Kingdom. It was a rare privilege to experience behind the scenes operations of a prestigious institution such as the British Museum. I had the opportunity to engage with curators and other professionals who share similar work descriptions both at the British Museum and the partner placement at the National Museums of Northern Ireland and this was an enlightenment for me.

Also, by working with other museum professionals from fourteen (14) different countries in the 2021 cohort who shared different backgrounds, I was exposed to new cultures and perspectives which helped me develop a better appreciation for what we do in the museum. The 2021 ITP had a special feature of e-Learning sessions which were designed and created specifically for the 2021 ITP cohort from August 2 to October 22, 2021. This special feature offered us the opportunity to network with other fellow ITP-ers, prior to our on-site programme. This four weeks of tailored sessions, subject specialist groups and departmental time with curators and collections managers interspersed with visits to other museums together with other participants, developed new bonds of friendship among us. It is my hope that this translates to strong international networking for future collaborative projects focusing on common challenges, together as museum professional sharing ideas of possible solutions.



2021 ITP cohort from 14 countries



2021 ITP family with BM Director, Hartwig Fischer.

Another benefit of the ITP for me was that I was able to visit different museums and galleries in England and Belfast and this has inspired me in many ways. I learnt new display styles and techniques. I have since discussed and suggested these to my home museums. Some of these experiences from Belfast and London relating to exhibition design and display techniques have inspired me on two projects I am working on now (*Black Star and Blind Spots exhibitions*). The display techniques I learnt about would decongest some of the overcrowded showcases to enable audiences to focus more on the displayed objects and have a better understanding of them. I also

learnt storage management styles which I think would be effective in my home museum because it would decongest overcrowded racks, thereby presenting clearer and easier to navigate storage.

The National Museum of Ghana is now preparing for the reopening of the new galleries. In one of our technical discussions about the expected reopening of the National Museum, I proposed this idea through a presentation for consideration. The idea was well received since it would diversify experiences offered to schools groups. The current design was not inclusive enough and the design team is reworking some sections to make it all inclusive and accessible across our audiences.



New timelines display techniques

ITP fellows interacting with a Curator at the Fitzwilliam Museum

The Object in focus exhibition activity was also very useful as it equipped me with new knowledge and curatorial skills. During this, I had the opportunity to work with partners who shared a different professional background. It was challenging for us at the beginning but with good interpersonal communication we were able to agree on ideas. With support from our mentor, Dr. Jessica Harrison-Hall, Curator, Asia department, we were also able to get the exhibition proposal ready for the Object in focus exhibition.

Another opportunity from this visit is a possibility of a collaboration with Wellcome Historical Medicine Museum (WHMM) focusing on dispersals to Africa-based collecting institutions. I have already sent three possible project areas for collaboration to curators Helen Mears and Julie Hudson at WHMM and BM respectively for discussion. The feedback is already exciting.

Helen Mears Curator at WHMM: “I’m so excited that the Wellcome dispersals to Africa-based collecting institutions have piqued your interest. All of the projects you outline sound tremendously useful and valuable”.

Julie Hudson, Curator, Africa, Oceania and Americas Department at the BM: “I think the idea of a travelling exhibition is a really good one to bring together all the African countries with Wellcome dispersals and to explore the decision made in acquiring them, how they have been used, how they are now perceived or how they might be re-positioned”.

Prior to my participation in the ITP 2021, which was through the generous support of the Edith Murphy Foundation, I was involved in some research collaboration with Aarhus University in

Denmark on *Authoring Slavery in Ghana*. I am to curate an exhibition on Blind Spots which seeks to explore a variety of sources on how societies persistently endeavour to forget inconvenient events. The exhibition would answer this partly, and also generate a debate on the question of how society attempts to obscure problematic historical episodes. Visiting London Transport Museum's exhibition, *Legacies: London Transport's Caribbean Workforce* and Ulster Museum's exhibition in Belfast on *Collecting Troubles* has provided me with useful benchmarks in design and presentation of difficult and entangled histories with high and diverse levels of emotional investment. Though I wish I had a more intensive session with exhibition designers and also an opportunity to see the opening of *Bad Bridget* at Ulster American Folk Park in Northern Ireland.

Implementation and Changes

The specialist sessions with the departments, especially with the Collections Managers was one part of the programme that has improved my creativity in the area of storage. The Ghana National Museum is challenged with storage space; creativity and imaginations as experienced during these sessions can improve upon both access and enhanced storage in the Museum. I have already engaged with managers in our institution on this subject and it is receiving traction. There are many things that can be changed before the National Gallery is officially reopened to the public. I can directly influence the publications, media engagements (both traditional and social media). I had meetings with the design and installation teams and we are considering the introduction of '10 Must See objects' within the gallery which are to be made accessible to persons who are visually impaired. I am also currently working on a proposal for the Procurement of Integrated Collections Management System and Digital Assets Management System with associated collections management improvements for the "Surplus Dispersal" -Africa.

The Global Network

The ITP global network establishes a strong forum for professionals. As a forum of experts, it shares ideas on issues relating to cultural heritage, promotes capacity building and advances knowledge. As a fellow and being part of this global network, I am committed to skills-sharing with colleagues and to making new connections across our global network. This, I can do through writing for the ITP blog, the International Training Programme newsletter and via various exchanges with colleagues for collaborations.



I am grateful for the sponsorship from the Edith Murphy Foundation. Their generous support for my participation in the ITP 2021 has helped expand my scope and knowledge about museums in the UK. My participation in the International Training Programme 2021 has meant I have gained a family of international museum professionals and a global museum network.