

## COMMUNITY ARTS CENTRES: LESSONS FROM NAMIBIA

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Namibia lies on the west coast of the Southern Subcontinent of Africa. To the north is Angola. Botswana is to the east and South Africa is on the southern border. The capital of Windhoek is in the centre of this

sparsely populated country. In Windhoek is the township of Katutura. Life in the township can be harsh and unhealthy but there is, amongst the people, a strong creative spirit that manifests itself craft work, music, dance, and drama. The idea of setting up Community Arts Centres in this context is founded on the idea of promoting this creative output in such a way as to provide sustainable livelihoods in such underprivileged areas.



The Department of Arts and Culture established the Community Arts Centre Programme between 1996 and 2001 with the stated objectives:

- 1) To provide opportunities for artists and cultural workers to participate in the arts;
- 2) To create opportunities for employment; and
- 3) To promote the cultural enrichment of the community in general but with a focus upon youth, women, children, and the disabled in particular.

In 1996 the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology instituted a programme to establish 42 arts centres in marginalized communities. In a detailed national audit of Community Arts Centre entitled

*Towards Optimally Functioning Community Arts Centres in South Africa 2002* Gerard Hagg and Susan

Selepe drew attention to the fact that there were (to summarise their findings):

- a) Funding difficulties. Provinces are expected to provide financial support for the Centres, without additional finance from the national budget;
- b) Management, monitoring and support skills are lacking;
- c) Stakeholders do not appreciate the complex sectoral, political, social and environmental contexts in which the centres operate;
- d) There is often a mismatch between human and physical facilities available and services needed;
- e) The experience, expertise and track record of older Arts Centres that were in existence for many years prior to the DACST intervention has largely been ignored;
- f) Because of their relative remoteness from similar centres, Arts Centres tend to operate in isolation and possible partnerships have been difficult to put on the ground;
- g) Community participation is uneven; and
- h) Funding from Government is inadequate and non-governmental funding is difficult to come by.

Hagg and Selepe proposed a twelve-point strategy to render service delivery at Community Arts Centres in South Africa more effective and sustainable. This article puts the focus upon just four of these proposed interventions and discusses these in the light of an examination of the operation of the John Muafangejo Art Centre in Katutura Township, Windhoek, Namibia. The four proposals concern:

- i) The 'cluster development around the Arts Centres' concept;
- ii) Provision of management training
- iii) Development of a national database on arts centres;
- iv) The establishment of a national federation of associations of Arts Centres.

### **The John Muafangejo Art Centre (JMAC).**

This centre is named after Namibia's most famous fine artist, John Ndevasia Muafangejo (1914-88), whose works are known internationally with numerous works being housed in museums and art galleries in Europe and America. According to the details displayed below his works in the Namibian National Art Gallery, he was born in Etunda lo Nghadi in Ovamboland, Namibia. After studying at a mission school he went on to train at the College of Art, Rorke's Drift in South Africa from 1967 to 1969. Thereafter he taught art at the Evangelical Lutheran Centre for Arts in Odibo. Shortly after achieving an outstanding success with his exhibition of works at the Royal Festival Centre in London in 1988 he died of a heart attack. The John Muafangejo Art Centre was set up in 1994 to honour his achievements.

The Centre has moved a couple of times in its short history. Originally intended for the parliament gardens in Windhoek, it moved for a brief period to a space at the Eros Airport. Joseph Madisia, (now Director of the Namibian National Art Gallery) brought the centre to Katutura and housed it within the Katutura Community Art Centre that he had been tasked to set up by the ministry. In other words JMAC forms part of a larger Community Arts Centre, which makes it an example of one kind of 'cluster' approach that works very well in practise. Madisia was highly impressed by a group of artists that he encountered when he visited America. They had set up a studio in Fort Worth, Texas in which each artist had a work space plus spare studio spaces for visiting artists from other countries who have acquired peculiar expertise in a specific medium, that the rest of the community of artists could learn from. The important aspect of the exercise was that the studio was financially self-sustaining because they all paid rent for studio space in the form of a membership fee which entitled the artist not only to work in a studio space but to participate in exhibitions and to benefit from the bulk purchase price of artist's materials purchased by the studio on their behalf. This concept was not received well by the Board of Directors and

Madisia believes this was because of a perceived potential threat to the board. If a large paying membership were attracted to the Centre they would want to exercise their democratic rights by having a voice at the annual AGM. Put quite simply the Board could then be voted out of office. Other ideas that he wished to introduce included the selling of copyright to twelve of the artist's works to a calendar company. This would serve two purposes. Firstly the artist would receive royalties on the published material but secondly, and possibly more importantly, the ordinary man in the street who would not be able to afford an original work, would be exposed to the work of this particular artist (or a group of artists) by viewing the calendar frequently throughout the year. Postcards in curio shops could also be explored. I asked whether this commercialisation of art works was not akin to the production of 'airport art'? Madisia countered the objection by inviting me to make a comparison between this and the making of compact discs for commercial distribution by musicians. In a sense their original work was when they played live on stage but the recordings were reproductions. These and similar ideas were not taken up because Madisia moved on to devote himself to the promotion of the National Art Gallery. He is now pursuing the idea of a mobile exhibition system to take art to remote communities. The idea is to tour exhibitions of artists work together with the artists who would then engage with these communities, run children's art workshops etc. A further function of the mobile exhibitions would be to video artists at work in the different regions so that a cross-fertilization of skills and techniques could occur. This was necessary because artists and craft workers tend, at the moment to be bound by local resources. In the Walvisbay area, for example, there is metalwork which you won't find in some other regions. In the North there is more work being produced using fibre. In the South the old traditional methods of hand-tanning skins still survives and this could be shared nationally. Sharing of skills would enlarge the scope for artistic expression. Video's could be screened of potters working in the Caprivi or wood-carvers working in the Okavango and so on.

The person who took over as Artistic Director of the JMAC is a former pupil of Madisia who taught him at the Franco-Namibian Cultural Centre which is a stone's throw away from the National Art Gallery.

- Community Arts Centres: Lessons from Namibia.

*John Muafangejo*

*Art Centre*

- *Ndasuunje Shikongeni a.k.a. Papa - Pan-Africanist Philosophical Artist.*
- *Rasta and Afrocentric mystic.*



His name is Ndasuunje Shikongeni, otherwise known as Papa, which stands for Pan-Africanist Philosophical Artist. His version of the history of JMAC differs from that of Madisia. Papa maintains that this was started in 1988 when John Muafangejo was still alive and that it was started in the building in front of the current centre. Be that as it may, Papa seems to be taking forward some of the original ideas but also making a unique contribution in his own inimitable way. Cardboard print making with off-cuts of cardboard is his speciality. It appears to be a technique unique to the Centre.

Two structures in the immediate vicinity could be developed to supplement the existing facilities. There is the old Elderado cinema.



This has been derelict for some time but it could be renovated for use as a multi-purpose venue for:

- a modern and traditional dance training centre;
- a drama rehearsal venue;
- a band rehearsal venue.

A second building is a block of offices and medium-sized meeting rooms that could be converted into an Arts and Craft training Centre for:

- leatherwork;
- beadwork;
- jewellery making;
- weaving;
- sewing;

- pottery;
- printing ;
- photography
- sculpture etc.



If all of this could be achieved then the art's centre concept could be extended to encompass the notion of an Arts Precinct together with flea market in the car park and craft shops in the adjacent shopping area.

Collaboration with the tourist organisations would be essential in order to bring visitors to such precincts.

A Federation of Community Arts Precincts would then make sense.

Community Arts Centres have, logically, been established in the heart of deprived communities. Whilst this is admirable, this inevitably results in problems for the marketing of visual or performance art 'products' from such centres that are off the tourist routes, remote from the kind of shopping centres or civic centres (that by dint of the apartheid past are situated in former 'White' city centres) that could provide a commercial outlet for the artefacts. Major distribution problems are the result. Whilst JMAC in Katutura is on the outskirts of Windhoek it is still reasonably accessible. In consequence, many of the artefacts from this centre appear in curio centres, commercial art galleries and in the well-established and



very central flea market in the heart of Windhoek. A flea market should remain as an essential part of a South African Arts Precinct concept. Donor agencies from abroad also acquire works for corporate or state art collections. From Namibia we can also learn the value of attracting fellowships.

#### The Fellowship concept

In essence this involves attracting funding from cultural attaches, embassies, government agencies, registered Foundations, major commercial institutions etc. to enable an individual artist to live and work at an appropriate centre such as JMAC. The individual receives a monthly stipend for a period of two years (on average) which would be sufficient for the artist to cover accommodation, transport, subsistence, and cost of materials. In addition further funding can be applied for to facilitate attendance at workshops or conferences. The exact amount of funding is negotiated between the artist and the agency awarding the fellowship.

In return the awarding body acquires one major work undertaken by the artist each year. This work will then be placed in a major holding abroad (which adds to the kudos of the artist and, at the same time enriches the particular collection). In an African context the way this works on the ground is that the artist finds that the stipend is quite generous and this enables this individual to support another artist working in the same environment in the African spirit of Ubuntu (communality). This particular version of the Fellowship concept is therefore of great benefit to the promotion of the arts at community level. To my understanding this version has not been explored in a South African context but to my mind it should be.

#### The current situation.

Visiting Community Arts Centres, Civic Centres and Craft Centres in South Africa today produces a dull sense of stasis, inactivity, and a sense of regret at major missed opportunities for the advancement of the Arts and crafts to the benefit of communities in great need of opportunities for financial sustainability and personal growth. Community Arts Centres could be the answer to these pressing needs but this can only be achieved if narrow sectarian, religious, political, clan, and warlord interests can be set aside for the good of the people.

Bibliography

HAGG.G. & S. SELEPE . 2002. *Towards optimally functioning community arts centres in South Africa: proposed strategy for empowering community arts centres*. Pretoria: HSRC.

HAGG. G. 2010. The state and community arts centres in a society in transformation: the South African case. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. 13(2): 163-184.

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The following is the description of the content of PowerPoint slides.

**SLIDE 1: MAP OF NAMIBIA**

Namibia lies on the west coast of the Southern Subcontinent of Africa. To the north is Angola. Botswana is to the east and South Africa is on the southern border. The capital of Windhoek is in the centre of this sparsely populated country. In Windhoek is the township of Katutura. Whilst some areas of townships can be quite liveable

**SLIDE 2: Better part of a township.**

other areas are much poorer

**SLIDE 3: Poorer part of a township.**

and in the inevitable squatter camps that grow up due to lack of formal housing life can be harsh and unhealthy

**SLIDE 4: Squatter camp in a township.**

but there is, amongst the people, a strong creative spirit that manifests itself in craft work, music, dance, and drama. The idea of setting up Community Arts Centres in this context is founded on the idea of promoting this creative output in such a way as to provide sustainable livelihoods in such underprivileged areas.

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In 1996 the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology instituted a programme to establish 42 arts centres in marginalized communities. In a detailed national audit of Community Arts Centre entitled *Towards Optimally Functioning Community Arts Centres in South Africa 2002* Gerard Hagg and Susan Selepe drew attention to the fact that there were many limitations from the remoteness of the centres to management problems.

Hagg and Selepe proposed a twelve-point strategy to render service delivery at Community Arts Centres in South Africa more effective and sustainable. This article puts the focus upon just four of these proposed interventions and discusses these in the light of an examination of the operation of the John Muafangejo Art Centre in Katutura Township, Windhoek, Namibia. The four proposals concern:

- a) The 'cluster development around the Arts Centres' concept;
- ii) Provision of management training

- iii) Development of a national database on arts centres; and
- iv) The establishment of links to Foundation funding.

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threat to the board. If a large paying membership were attracted to the Centre they would want to exercise their democratic rights by having a voice at the annual AGM. Put quite simply the Board could then be voted out of office. Other ideas that he wished to introduce included the selling of copyright to twelve of the artist's works to a calendar company. This would serve two purposes. Firstly the artist would receive royalties on the published material but secondly, and possibly more importantly, the ordinary man in the street who would not be able to afford an original work, would be exposed to the work of this particular artist (or a group of artists) by viewing the calendar frequently throughout the year. Postcards in curio shops could also be explored. I asked whether this commercialisation of art works was not akin to the production of 'airport art'? Madisia countered the objection by inviting me to make a comparison between this and the making of compact discs for commercial distribution by musicians. In a sense their original work was when they played live on stage but the recordings were reproductions. These and similar ideas were not taken up because Madisia moved on to devote himself to the promotion of the National Art Gallery. He is now pursuing the idea of a mobile exhibition system to take art to remote communities. The idea is to tour exhibitions of artists work together with the artists who would then engage with these communities, run children's art workshops etc. A further function of the mobile exhibitions would be to video artists at work in the different regions so that a cross-fertilization of skills and techniques could occur. This was necessary because artists and craft workers tend, at the moment to be bound by local resources. In the Walvisbay area, for example, there is metalwork which you won't find in some other regions. In the North there is more work being produced using fibre. In the South the old traditional methods of hand-tanning skins still survives and this could be shared nationally. Sharing of skills would

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**SLIDE 5: Ndasuunje Shikongeni (PAPA).**

His name is Ndasuunje Shikongeni, otherwise known as Papa, which stands for Pan-Africanist Philosophical Artist. Papa seems to be taking forward some of the original ideas but also making a unique contribution in his own inimitable way. Cardboard print making with off-cuts of cardboard is his speciality. It appears to be a technique unique to the Centre.

**SLIDE 6: *Shepherd Repatriation***

On offer at the Centre, apart from this cardboard printmaking, is ceramics, life drawing, basic drawing, basket weaving, wood sculpture, glass work using recycled glass with bottles collected from the rubbish dump, ceramic sculpture, textile printing, linocuts, embroidery and mural painting. They also mount regular exhibitions of their work.

**SLIDE 7: *Newness***

Financial sustainability has been achieved through the obtaining of annual grants from HIVOS (Humanistisch Instituut voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking), the Embassy of Finland, the Franco-Namibian Cultural Centre, and The Namibian Ministry of Youth Service, Sport and Culture, Africaonline etc. The success in fundraising rests on the fact that the administration adheres to

acceptable standards of institutional organisation and financial accountability. JMAC is a registered Section 21 Company (an incorporated association not for gain) and it is governed by a Board of Directors and a Management Committee that meets on a monthly basis. This includes the Centre Director (*ex-officio*), a Chief Accountant and internal auditor from the Ministry of Education, a qualified Business Administrator and five practising artists, one of whom is a Curator. In terms of record keeping and financial reporting they have been applauded by their donor community as being exemplary. Bookkeeping is provided by Pearson Industrial Holdings and an annual Statement of Income and Expenditure that serves at their AG.M. is audited by Grant Thornton Neuhaus. A full report accompanies the Annual Financial Audit. The lesson in all of this for South Africa and elsewhere is that the ability to attract whatever private sector funding and foreign donor funding is available (and in the current world economic climate this is dwindling at a fast rate), depends upon impeccable credentials with regard to financial and administrative accountability. If Community Arts Centres are to flourish in South Africa and achieve their objectives, absolute reliance on funding from the Department of Arts and Culture alone will remain a constraint. All things considered it would seem to be an urgent necessity to provide on-going training to managers of Community Arts Centres in Arts Centre Management in all its aspects. With the frequent turn-over of management and administrative staff, this training should be a pre-requisite for appointment. What also emerges, however, from the Namibian experience is that another key to the success of Centres is a strong, dedicated, well-informed, efficient, charismatic Director or Manager who can inspire others to help achieve a realisation of creative and innovative ideas and interventions in the promotion of the Arts and Craft.

Amongst the greatest successes for JMAC has been the Glass Recycling and Design project, the Mural Art workshop and the creation of a Basketry and pottery making DVD and booklet. The DVD will help to preserve unique skills and craft methods for future generations. Papa has been an ardent advocate of the Mural Arts Workshop which involved youth officers and Artists from several regions of Namibia who returned to their regions to conduct workshops on how to express awareness of HIV/AIDS not only through visual arts but also through drama and poetry. Papa is also concerned to create murals in dreary hospital wards and in Clinics. These and other projects undertaken in Namibia could be explored for application in South African Community Arts Centres in an extension of existing programmes.

In South Africa and in SADC the idea of a data base for Community Arts Centres is vital for two reasons. Firstly regional or cluster groupings of centres operating in a collaborative way could be facilitated through the awareness of what centres exist and where these are situated. The setting up of the Department of Arts and Culture Data Base of Community Arts Centres is a major step forward in this regard. Unfortunately it is not extensive or comprehensive and it is also now out of date. Of course the major problem here is that the information will change from time to time and a constant process of updating is required. This process has not been put in place.

Secondly sub-continental cooperation in the form of a Federation of Community Arts Centre Managements involving all such centres in SADC can only be achieved if such databases are in existence.

With regard to the 'Cluster' concept and how this could potentially play out in practice in the South African context, I turn for an example to the only DAC funded Community Arts Centre in the Vaal Triangle region, the Mphatlalatsane Theatre. It is therefore not feasible to think of



clustering with other arts centres because these are too far away and there is no effective regular communication between Centres. However, the concept of clustering could be re-visited in the form the creation of Arts precincts that would seek to cluster together separate buildings dedicated to the promotion of different art and craft forms.

The Mphatlalatsane Theatre is well-utilized by the community for:

- Political meetings;
- Council functions;
- Church services/prayer meetings;
- Funeral services;
- Commemorative gatherings;
- Dance competitions;
- Choir competitions;
- Talent shows;
- Jazz bands;
- Dance groups; and
- Mayoral dinners.

### **SLIDE 8: Mphatlalatsane Theatre**

But ironically almost no drama is presented in this venue (despite the fact that it is a drama theatre in design complete with Fly tower and an orchestra pit that has been filled in as it was never used). It has not been set up to cater for the needs of Fine Art or craft work. In the immediate environment however is a reasonable sized car park, a disused cinema and two-storey block of offices and seminar rooms. Taken all-in-all the total environment would lend itself to an Arts Precinct Development possibility.

Two structures in the immediate vicinity could be developed to supplement the existing facilities.

There is the old Elderado Cinema.

**SLIDE 9: *Eldorado Cinema (derelict).***

This has been derelict for some time but it could be renovated for use as a multi-purpose venue for modern and traditional dance, drama and music training..

A second building is a block of offices and medium-sized meeting rooms that could be converted into an Arts and Craft training Centre for a wide range of craft work including:

- leatherwork;
- beadwork;
- jewellery making;
- weaving;
- sewing;
- pottery;
- printing ;
- photography
- sculpture etc.

**SLIDE 10: *Two-storey block of offices and work spaces.***

If all of this could be achieved then the art's centre concept could be extended to encompass the notion of an Arts Precinct together with flea market in the car park and craft shops in the adjacent shopping area.

Collaboration with the tourist organisations would be essential in order to bring visitors to such precincts. A Federation of Community Arts Precincts would then make sense.

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*Shepherd Repatriation, Newness and Spiritual blessing* are images created by Ndosunye Shikongeni, used with kind permission of the artist.

