
WIKIAFRICA EDUCATION WORKSHOP: STRATEGY REPORT

REPORT ON THE WIKIAFRICA EDUCATION WORKSHOP, JULY 25-26, 2023

August 2023

(Prepared by ALT Advisory)

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1. WIKIAFRICA EDUCATION – PROGRAM OVERVIEW

WikiAfrica Education (WAE) is a Moleskine Foundation program that seeks to inspire a new generation of African creative thinkers and doers by increasing the production, access, and awareness of contextually and linguistically relevant knowledge resources from Africa.

The program has two principal components: AfroCuration and the Higher Education Initiative.

1. AfroCuration is an online, physical, or hybrid event that combines a Wikipedia edit-a-thon and a cultural or linguistic workshop to train young Africans to become knowledge creators, letting them tell the world about their local culture, community, and people in their local language. Each AfroCuration event is run in partnership with an educational or cultural institution rooted in the relevant jurisdiction. These events have been hosted in several countries (notably South Africa, Mozambique, and Ghana) since their inception in 2018. For each series of events, the Moleskin Foundation establishes a high-level theme which is then adapted by partner organisations to suit local context.
2. The Higher Education Initiative, run in partnership with Fondazione Aurora, consists of digital training sessions designed to train university students (particularly in the 18 – 27 age range) who speak and write in African languages on how to produce digital content, using Wikimedia tools. These sessions are conducted by an experienced Wikimedian from one of the African Wikipedia chapters. Each session consists of two hours of engagement a week, for a total of four lectures a month.

2. WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

The WAE workshop, held on July 25th and 26th at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg, sought to bring together educational and cultural organisations with which the Moleskine Foundation has partnered in delivering AfroCuration events, as well as relevant members of the Wikipedia community, to **facilitate experience-sharing** and to begin to **develop understanding on how the AfroCuration program can be made more sustainable**, and how it can continue to develop and expand more generally.

3. PARTICIPANTS

While most participants were present in person, a few were forced to join online due to logistical challenges.

1. Moleskine Foundation
 - Adama Sanneh
 - Elena Korzhenevich
2. Cultural organisations
 - Josh Adler – African Leadership Academy
 - Nkembo Kiala – African Leadership Academy
 - Jerome Alphonse – African Leadership University
 - Reuben Phasha – Constitution Hill Trust

- Zwivhuya Ramashia – Constitution Hill Trust
 - Lerato Sefume – Constitution Hill Trust
 - Jessemusse Candida – Ethale Publishing
 - Charles Marfo (online) – Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
 - Felizardo Pedro (online) – Rovuma University
3. Wiki communities
- Jemima Antwi (online) – Twi Wikimedia UG
 - Tomas Castelo Armando – Wikimedia Mozambique
 - Shupai Mchuchu – Wikimedia South Africa
4. External partners
- Refiloe Musandiwa – All Things Blaq
 - Tharin Pillay – Alt Advisory
 - Lwando Xaso (host) – Including Society
 - Mbale Njomane – Prejudictionary
5. Creative pioneers
- Prashana Rampersad – Bridges for Music

4. WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

4.1. Outline of Proceedings

Introduction

The workshop began with a moment of inspiration, wherein Lwando Xaso led participants around South Africa's Constitutional Court and shared the story of the first judgement that the court handed down – S v Makwanyane. Xaso noted that this case marked the first time an African concept – Ubuntu – was elevated to the level of judicial principle, which had a dignifying effect. She noted that in a country as diverse as South Africa, communicating knowledge in local languages – thereby increasing its reach - is a democratic act; a sentiment that is true for Africa as a whole. Adama Sanneh further noted that at present, the future of design is entrapped in the English language, and invited participants to consider how that future might change were it translated into African languages. He emphasised that the preservation of languages should be thought of as a dynamic act, an ongoing process.

Scenario analysis

After the participants introduced themselves, Sanneh provided a scenario analysis on behalf of the Moleskine Foundation. He recounted the history of the WAE program, from its inception in 2006 as a project helmed by Moleskine's antecedent body *Lettera27*, through its efforts with the WikiAfrica Schools initiative in 2016, which trained teachers to help learners create pages at the African School for Excellence (a network of low-fee, high-achievement schools) and which revealed the power of combining knowledge-creation and activism, to its first AfroCuration

event in its current form, held in 2018. Since 2018, Moleskine has partnered with a wide array of organisations and involved x people in the creation of y articles, which have attracted z views.¹

For both Moleskine and the partners involved, these numbers represented proxies for their real goal, which was and is to immerse people in Africa in the process of knowledge-creation using the tools and methodologies of Wikipedia. This immersion in process is desirable because it produces a host of beneficial effects, including developing the research and writing capacity of African citizens, fostering creativity, producing resources for relatively marginalised languages, generating pride around ownership of knowledge, and redefining what it means to serve one's community.

The scenario analysis closed by underscoring the purpose of the workshop: to create a space for participants to collectively imagine the future of the WAE program and to understand how it can be expanded to inspire a movement of organisations and institutions to take ownership of it.

Community experiences

The South African, Mozambiquan, and Ghanaian communities each presented their experiences hosting AfroCuration events. Given the significant commonalities that emerged, challenges and opportunities are detailed collectively in section 4.2., below. This section serves to highlight foundational narrative points on each community.

For South Africa, Lwando Xaso presented on behalf of the Constitution Hill Trust, noting their excitement about AfroCuration as a “tactile tool” that could be used to engage young people on the history of the Constitution, and tracking the development of the AfroCuration events they have hosted – from online events, through an event hosted in partnership with the Afropunk Festival in 2019, where participants could earn tickets to attend the festival, to their most recent event held in March 2023, where 60 participants created 38 articles that had been viewed over 3 700 times at the time of writing.

For Mozambique, Tomas Armando presented on their experiences partnering with Rovuma University and Ethale Publishing to host AfroCuration events. They hosted four events, with the first one being online (and presenting challenges for that reason), and subsequent events being held in person, attracting more people, and retaining a core group each time. These events focused on creating content in Emakhuwa, which despite being the most widely spoken language in the country (between 6-8 million people), does not have much in the way of written resources, structure, or common grammar. AfroCuration proved to be a vital tool for reclaiming the power of national languages in maintaining a group's identity.

These four events collectively led to 777 articles being created by 130 participants, attracting over 20 000 views. Mr Armando also noted related initiatives that they have been involved in to bolster the quality and quantity of Emakhuwa material, including the Digital Landscapes project, which profiled local schools and municipalities in Emakhuwa, the AfroCine Mozambique project, which created over 40 recordings of the language that have since been uploaded to the Wikimedia Commons, and a partnership with a researcher at Lúrio University who is using the

¹ Insert precise numbers as per Adama's PowerPoint.

Emakhuwa material they have been generating to train artificial intelligence systems to translate the language.

Finally, Ghana presented on their experiences hosting an AfroCuration event, in partnership with the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi and Okoro Radio.² The event focused on redefining Africa from the perspective of authors and musicians. It was held in a hybrid format, although the presence of cameras in the room allowed for cutting between speakers, making for a more engaging experience for online participants than is typical. The event was a great success due to the extensive prior planning, pre-event workshops, and emphasis on cultural immersion. **It really underlined the importance of creating knowledge in local languages as a means of reconnecting to one's identity and as a tool for empowerment and activism.**

Case study: African Leadership Academy

Josh Adler and Nkemba Kiala presented their experiences with embedding AfroCuration into the African Leadership Academy's (ALA's) curriculum in 2022 and 2023. Adler noted his excitement around creating and bolstering stories particular to Africans, so that educators do not have to rely exclusively on Western narratives. He also noted that embedding AfroCuration within a school curriculum allows one access to the structural benefits that schools offer –an extended period to expose learners to material and encourage them to engage with it.

Given that teachers are constrained by their timetables and their syllabi, Adler emphasised the need to consider incentives. He shared that over the two years, they have piloted AfroCuration, it has taken two different forms. In the first year, it was positioned as enrichment material for their African Studies course, effectively being teacher-led and becoming a part of that course's curriculum. The next year, it was made an extracurricular activity as part of the institution's Student Enterprise Program, which simulates an economy for students to learn entrepreneurial skills, effectively becoming a student-led endeavour. The students took charge of both running and marketing the AfroCuration program.

In 2022, on the day that served as a capstone for the program, 74 articles were created by 18 participants in 8 languages. In 2023, 86 articles were created by 120 students in 10 languages, in the span of only 1.5 hours. The outgoing student team has since recruited an incoming team, who intend to increase collaboration with other schools, consider creating a dedicated AfroCuration journal to share work, and host further AfroCuration challenges.

The ALA also partnered with several organisations, including Bloomberg and Logicae Science, to facilitate the programs. Adler also discussed the tension between curriculums requiring published outputs and the rigorous standards of Wikipedia articles, which can conflict with learning outcomes.

Group discussion: Embedding WAE in the programming of engaged institutions

² Due to technical difficulties with the audio of the Ghanaian team online, this portion of the event was presented by Elena Korzhenevich.

Participants broke into three groups (two in-person, one online) to discuss how the WAE program (particularly AfroCuration, the focus of the workshop) could be embedded within the programming of the institutions in attendance. This conversation was crucial since the Moleskine Foundation no longer feels it has the capacity or the positionality to sustain the WAE program. Discussions unfolded around the below set of questions:

- What was new for the Wikipedia community in working with cultural institutions?
- How could the curriculum benefit from implementing AfroCuration?
- What are the current barriers to include WikiAfrica Education into the curriculum?
- How can we overcome these barriers?
- How can the program become more and more independent from MSKF?
- Best practices that worked.
- Build your ideal model of collaboration (how, who, how often, for whom).
- What would be the next concrete steps to implement it?

After rich and fruitful discussions, the groups presented their findings to one another. The substance of these findings is captured in sections 4.2. and 4.3. below.

Miscellaneous reflections

The workshop admitted two moments of collective reflection – a pause at the end of the first day, for people to express what had struck them, and a period at the beginning of the second day, where participants shared any thoughts they had on the previous day.

Several interesting insights surfaced in this way, including – on the first day – the importance of intergenerational relationships as a means through which African knowledge is shared, inviting considerations of how to make AfroCuration events more intergenerational in nature; and the necessity of creating safe spaces where AfroCuration participants can feel they belong. The importance of amplifying local stories that people can connect to was again emphasised. It was also noted that there is a lower barrier to entry when creating Wikipedia articles in African languages, as they are less rigorously moderated than their English counterparts. Consideration was given to what can be done with the other artefacts of the knowledge-making process, such as the creation of safe spaces or material that proves unsuitable for Wikipedia but which is still valuable, as these other outputs may well be quantifiable, and able to attract funding in their own right.

On the morning of the second day, many participants were excited about the potential of integrating AfroCuration programming into school curriculums, and about AfroCuration as a tool for activism more broadly. Discussion also returned to questions of publishing content and accrediting those who generate it, for example by offering short courses to teachers or by allowing ‘soft certification’ for social media activists; and to whether competition would be a good strategy to foster engagement. It was noted that one can frame competition in less explicitly adversarial terms, while continuing to derive its benefits.

A final point of importance was raised on the need to understand the different (albeit overlapping) goals of the WAE program and the Wikimedia Foundation more generally –

understanding how these different goals operate is crucial to understanding how they can most effectively partner together.

Towards a sustainable integration strategy

The final substantive session of the workshop returned to the question of how WAE can be made sustainable in the form of a plenary discussion, building on the insights from the previous day. Discussion here considered whether there have been other examples around the world where people have attempted to implement Wikipedia content in school curriculums, to which Adama Sanneh noted that previous attempts have been made but their success is highly contextual, and that there is no single blueprint for how best to proceed.

In general, it seemed that the way to proceed was for institutions to identify existing programs they ran that WAE could amplify, to then coordinate with local Wikipedia chapters to secure the involvement and knowledge-sharing of a senior Wikimedian, and then to understand the funding requirements of the project so that appropriate funding could be secured. Notably, Tomas Armando noted that their work in Mozambique was partially funded by rapid grants, unlike the other AfroCuration events, which were funded solely by funds regranted by the Moleskine Foundation.

In considering how to keep participants together so that discussion could continue, the idea of a 'community of practice' emerged. Alongside it was the idea championed by Jerome Alphonse of a digital platform with all necessary resources that an implementing organisation may need to embed AfroCuration into their programming. For this platform to be effective, thought needs to be given to what the operational and funding model looks like for different types of institutional partners, from educational to cultural to creative organisations. While the precise next steps necessary to formalise this community of practice – or coalition – remain to be determined, the idea of a quarterly meeting between presented participants was presented. Participants – especially those without prior experience of implementing AfroCuration events – also expressed a desire to receive reports on past events.

Discussion also considered whether WAE and AfroCuration were the right names to capture the programs at hand, with some participants feeling that WAE should be a project under the AfroCuration banner (reversing the current order) on the grounds that the AfroCuration name better captures the spirit of the overall project, and others noting that the affiliation of WAE with Wikipedia was powerful from a signalling and credibility perspective.

The possibility of incorporating WAE as an institution in itself was also raised, although it was not discussed in detail.

This session closed with Sanneh reading an overview of the WAE program captured in a previous document, to assess whether this still resonated with participants. It did, although it was suggested that the statement be iterated for different audiences, and translated broadly, to reflect the group's ambition to both liberate local specificities and unite as a pan-African group.

Workshop conclusion

The workshop closed with participants reflecting on what it would mean to make AfroCuration a truly pan-African effort, and with each participant articulating why they were drawn to the program to begin with. Common themes included the desire to overcome the dominance of English in knowledge production, appreciation for the power of community and of lateral conversations, and the importance of taking ownership of one's own narratives. Participants left energised and eager to drive WAE forward.

4.2. Challenges and Opportunities

As noted above, considerable overlap emerged in both the challenges and the opportunities for development identified by participants.

One of the biggest challenges arose from the technical difficulties of ensuring all participants in AfroCuration events had access to the technology necessary to take part, including access to the internet and to computers. In the case of the Constitution Hill Trust events, technical issues slowed down the process of participants creating Wikipedia profiles, cutting into substantive time available during the event. In general, online participation was also considered suboptimal for achieving immersion in the process of knowledge creation.

Other challenges included finding appropriate participants to engage in AfroCuration events – and deciding on who the ideal participants for these events were in the first place – and finding language quality control experts to vet the Wikipedia articles created. This latter challenge was particularly acute in Mozambique, given the dearth of Emakhuwa materials.

Virtually all participants spoke of the need for more time to build durable relationships with AfroCuration participants, both before and after the event. In particular, participants from South Africa, Mozambique, and Mauritius emphasised the need to transition from AfroCuration as a single event to AfroCuration as an institutionalised program bolted on to preexisting programs in educational or cultural institutions, such that any hosted event serves as a capstone for a larger program. In this model, participants would have an extended period to choose the article they want to create and to conduct the research necessary to create it. This could allow AfroCuration to produce articles of a higher quality, both in form and in substance, and could be more attractive to prospective funders.

The experiences of the African Leadership Academy provide a useful case study in this regard. For them, after a successful pilot (particularly in the form of the student-led model), the focus going forward is on streamlining how their teams work and on becoming more intentional about the outcomes they seek to achieve. They are also interested in exploring how they could work with government partners (such as the Gauteng Department of Education) to further formalise the WAE program, by for example setting up a program whereby teachers can become certified as WAE practitioners, as part of the upskilling they are routinely required to undertake. A focus on the incentives bearing upon different actors – for example, educational institutions, who want to avoid adding complexity to their operations, teachers, who are motivated by finance or other rewards, and education participants, who can be incentivised by symbolic rewards – can also be useful in understanding how the WAE program can be made sustainable.

To reduce the costs and increase the sustainability of the program, these events could be coordinated to align with events that institutions had already planned to hold (for example, an event for Africa Day). They could also be planned such that multiple organisations hold their AfroCuration event on the same day. Ghana suggested that future events should have an increased focus on culture. It was also noted that there is an opportunity to reframe participation as an act of community service, expanding our conception of the term.

A clear need for implementing institutions to connect and work more closely with local Wikimedia chapters was also identified, as the presence of experienced Wikimedians is essential for the sustainability of the AfroCuration program, whether through their direct involvement or through their training of others.

4.3. Next Steps

The following general next steps were agreed upon by all stakeholders, without specification on who should lead these efforts:

- Create a coalition or ‘community of practice’ so that all stakeholders can continue to stay in contact and share and coordinate resources to maximise their impact. The details of this – that is, exactly form it should take, how often it should meet, and what its precise functions should be – remain to be decided.
- Draft and circulate high-level funding and implementation models (or strategies) for each type of partnering institution – notably educational, cultural, and aligned for-profit institutions – to serve as guides for potential partners to peruse, sensitive to the differing institutional environments in which partners operate.

In addition, the following concrete next steps emerged from partners:

- African Leadership Academy – The ALA will continue to engage with AfroCuration as part of its Student Enterprise program.
- African Leadership University – Jerome Alphonse will reach out to relevant teams (such as the writing centre and those running the Student Enterprise program) at the African Leadership University and do the planning phase through September to December 2023 with the intention order launch the program in January 2024
- Bridges for Music – Prashana Rampersad will reflect on how to integrate AfroCuration into Bridges for Music’s programming, reach out to local Wikimedians to train core staff, and develop an internship program connected to the material.
- Constitution Hill Trust – The Constitution Hill Trust will evaluate how it can formalise the AfroCuration program by mapping it onto existing work (e.g. Debating competition, clubs) and assign budgeting appropriately in its programming.
- Ethale Publishing – Ethale Publishing will reflect on how they can more effectively coordinate with their local university and will consider where else they can integrate

AfroCuration into their programming (for example, in the national essay competition that they run).

- Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology – Participants from KNUT noted their enthusiasm to continue discussions on how they can integrate AfroCuration into their work. Specific strategies and areas of focus will be determined in continued collaboration with other stakeholders.
- Rovuma University – Rovuma University will seek to create an Emakhuwa Group dedicated to syndicating the standard Makhuwa and running workshops to the group members who will serve as guardians of the encyclopaedia.
- Wikimedia – Partners affiliated with Wikimedia will return to their chapters, report what was discussed, and actively look for opportunities to build and improve partnerships with implementing institutions.

Virtually all participants emphasised the need for the continued involvement of the Moleskine Foundation as they navigate this transitory period. However, while all participants agreed on the need for immediate action, no firm timelines were agreed upon by the meeting's conclusion.

There is thus a need to develop timelines by which the steps outlined above ought to be put into action, particularly for those steps that apply to all stakeholders – creating a community of practice and designing funding and implementation models for partners to follow.

ENDS