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WHAT'S NEWS

THE ICOMOS-EPWG AFRICA MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL

Alyssa K. Barry

September means back to work, and it's shaping up to be a busy month for the heritage world, with the ICOMOS General Assembly taking place for its 21st edition in Sydney (Australia) from August 31 to September 9, 2023, and the World Heritage Committee holding its 45th session in Riyadh (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) from September 10 to 25, 2023. We look forward to reporting on these two major events in the October issue of the Newsletter, with dedicated features.

In the meantime, we invite you once again to discover our continent's heritage and its key players, this time traveling from Senegal to Mali via Cameroon. Passion remains the keyword of this 17th issue; it is at the beginning and the end of the work that motivates heritage professionals, the compass that guides them on a daily basis in their desire to do ever more, ever better, to preserve the heritage that inhabits us all.

So, I wish us all a safe journey, and above all, a happy new season full of passionate challenges!

Enjoy your reading !

5 QUESTIONS TO ALICE BIADA

Avenir G. Meikengang

1. A Cameroonian national and trained archivist, who is Alice Biada ?

First of all, I'd like to thank the young emerging professionals for the remarkable work they're doing to promote heritage as a whole, to promote heritage professionals around the world, and for all the information and good practice they're putting into the newsletter, which gives us a little more information every month. Once again, congratulations to the whole team and my encouragement for this commendable initiative to continue.

My name is Alice Biada and I come from the Far North region of Cameroon, more specifically the Mayo-Danay department. I'm Massa and I'm proud of my culture and its values. In the professional world, I am passionate about culture in general and heritage in particular. In my language, culture/cultural heritage literally means "the ancient things of our ancestors". When I was very young, I loved the stories told by my grandparents in the village around the storm lamps on our holidays with my brothers and cousins. As I grew up, I realized that these old things interested me and my dream was to contribute to their preservation. But along the way, my studies led me to work in the cultural field and today that dream has become reality. I'm a documentalist, archivist and communicator by training, and I have a master's degree in Social Sciences for Development, with a specialization in the management of development projects and programmes, and a master's degree in the management of public organizations. I'm currently doing a doctorate in historical sciences and heritage studies.

2. You spent more than 10 years in Cameroon's Department of Cultural Heritage and held the post of Deputy Director of the department before being assigned to the archives. Can you tell us about your achievements, challenges and difficulties during this time?

My current rank in the Cameroonian civil service is Senior Inspector of Documentation and I am a sworn archivist. I work at the Ministry of Arts and Culture, where I have been Deputy Director of Standards, Regulation and Archival Control for nearly 3 years.



I worked at the Department of Cultural Heritage (DPC) for eleven (11) years, where I took part in the setting up of the National Museum for three (3) years. I was in turn Head of the Department of Immovable Cultural Heritage for six (6) years and Deputy Director of Tangible Cultural Heritage for two (2) years. During my time at the DPC, I was responsible for the implementation of four UNESCO cultural conventions, namely the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property and the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. I was the focal point responsible for the effective implementation of the latter for almost six years. I coordinated the management of the country's important cultural sites for seven years (2013-2020), and revised Cameroon's Tentative List in 2017. I was a member of the team that drew up the file for the inscription of the Lake Chad cultural landscape on the World Heritage List as a transboundary site with Niger, Chad and Nigeria and responsible for the nomination on the Cameroon side. Since 2018, I have been coordinating the team in charge of preparing the dossier for the Diy-Gid-Biy Cultural Landscape of the Mandara Mountains on the World Heritage List. A member of the ICOMOS International Committee, the International Scientific Committee on Risk Preparedness (ICORP) and the Working Group for the SDGs, I am a founding member of the ICOMOS National Committee in my country.

The list is far from exhaustive, but it's important to note that these few actions could not have been achieved without the anointing of my hierarchy and without the help of a dynamic team who supported me to the end and whom I thank greatly for having placed their trust in me.

The challenges and difficulties in the professional world are enormous and cannot be avoided. My professional career has not been a smooth ride, but it has been a wonderful experience, and above all it has been an immense honor to work for my country. For me, it has been a grace to have experienced the frustrations, misunderstandings and even humiliations that have made me what I am today, stronger than ever for my heritage. Sometimes going through difficult times is a good thing, and I also think that it's the difficulties we face that forge our character and make us better at what we do. If you ignore them, you'll never accomplish your missions and you'll be frustrated. At some point, even when things are going badly, you take a little break to recharge your batteries, stay positive and never give up. Because everyone deserves to make their modest contribution to the edifice in whatever way they can. And that's what gives life meaning and makes it even more beautiful, isn't it?

3. You were the focal point for the 1972 Convention from 2015-2021. Can you tell us about the stakes, challenges and issues involved in this role?

There are challenges when you are the national focal point for the World Heritage Convention, but they become even greater when the work is done well and you really get involved. Instead of being seen as a facilitator, you become a target, because you become an advisor to the minister, you become objective, you become impartial in terms of the balance between culture and nature. This is to help the ministers concerned make the best decisions. Above all, we think that you have some advantage, given the multiple trips involved. But that shouldn't prevent you from working properly and carrying out your duties in any case.

As focal point, my role was to monitor the files on World Heritage properties; prepare the Cameroonian delegation's participation in the sessions of the various World Heritage committees and other statutory meetings; monitor the implementation of the Convention in liaison with the administrations concerned; participate as far as possible in the various meetings organized within the framework of this Convention and carry out all related missions entrusted to me by the Minister of Arts and Culture and the Minister of Forests and Fauna.

In this respect, the challenges we faced led us to take concrete and diversified action to effectively implement this Convention which everyone talks about, but which is little known in reality. It was not at all easy, but with the support of technical and financial partners such as UNESCO, the AWHF (African World Heritage Fund) and EPA (Ecole du Patrimoine Africain), we have been able to organize, in collaboration with other partners, actions that have made it possible to support the effective implementation of this Convention in its entirety in Cameroon. Thank you to all these partners who have helped us to implement this Convention.

4. You are now Deputy Director of Standards, Regulation and Archival Control at Cameroon's Ministry of Arts and Culture. What are your duties and how do you relate to the 1972 Convention?

Broadly speaking, I am responsible for drawing up government policy on the management of administrative documents and archives, and for implementing uniform scientific and technical standards in archival matters. I am also responsible for participating in the preparation of the legislative and regulatory framework for archive management and for monitoring and controlling the activities of the structures that produce archives in Cameroon.

Recently, we have been trying to work with colleagues and UNESCO's Multisectoral Regional Office for Central Africa on setting up a national 'Memory of the World' committee in Cameroon to combat collective amnesia and preserve precious archive and library collections from all over the world, with the aim of making them widely available. This programme aims to protect documentary heritage and helps experts to exchange information and mobilize resources for the preservation of and access to documentary material.

When you love what you do, it's not an appointment to another position of responsibility that changes the way you see things and prevents you from making progress on the various challenges for the good of our country. On the one hand, the coordination of certain important projects during my time at the DPC under the leadership of Professor Christophe MBIDA, former Director of Cultural Heritage and former Head of the Department of Arts and Archaeology at the University of Yaoundé I, to whom I pay a vibrant tribute and thank him infinitely for all the opportunities he has given me as Head, have enabled me to remain focused on my objectives.

Although I'm not working in this Direction, I'm continuing to work on the Convention by coordinating the project to have the Diy-Gid-Biy Cultural Landscape in the Mandara Mountains included on the World Heritage List, under the aegis of my superiors, in particular the Minister of Arts and Culture, who kindly allowed me to coordinate this project and to whom I'd like to express my infinite thanks for their confidence. On the other hand, with so many years spent at the DPC, my country has allowed me to accumulate experience and training in the field of cultural and natural heritage, and with so much passion, I couldn't just give up. I'm continuing with my passion to help, support and put my expertise at the service of the administration and communities.

Given the challenges faced by these communities in my country, particularly in the Sudano-Sahelian cultural area, in terms of recognising their heritage, protecting, monitoring, managing and promoting it in a context of insecurity, climate change or disruption, conflict and extreme poverty, I decided to set up an association called APOCEF (Act to Protect Our Culture and Environment for the Future). This association defines itself as one of the major players that contributes, through programmes and projects, to carrying out concrete actions relating to the protection and safeguarding of the environment and culture, cultural and natural heritage, the promotion of endogenous knowledge of conservation and management of heritage sites, promoting peace through traditional systems for preventing, managing and resolving conflicts over heritage, promoting the consumption of local products and local crafts, and developing and promoting the Sahel's cultural and creative industries (CCI) as a whole. It does this through local initiatives in the field of enhancing local knowledge, thereby contributing to the acquisition of new skills, the creation of sustainable jobs, the establishment of new work organizations and new methods for combating social exclusion, boosting the local economy, while helping to increase the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the all-round development of local authorities, strengthening the resilience of communities and above all contributing to improving their well-being in the face of humanitarian, ecological, security and climatic challenges.

5. What message can you give to young Africans who are following in the World Heritage footsteps?

The world of conservation in general and World Heritage in particular remains a permanent challenge at all levels, especially in this period of global economic recession. World Heritage means hours of work, a lot of reading and an excellent network with other professionals to share experiences, good practice and advice. It's also about perseverance, it's about continuous learning, it's about initiative, entrepreneurship and innovation, and above all, it's about passion. What I could ask of young people is to be present on the scene, contributing to mechanisms for protection, management, monitoring and enhancement at grassroots level, i.e. at local, regional, national and continental level, so that we can talk about World Heritage. Because heritage is created on the ground, and whatever the difficulties, taking the time to learn and understand will enable them to carry out relevant and innovative preservation actions in their respective countries for current and future generations, and with a view to helping improve the living conditions of communities. It is through these concrete and visible actions, which will have a snowball effect, that we will be talking about a genuine heritage protection policy on a national and/or international scale. And the whole world is counting on young people, who must rise up, and I hope that we are all aware of this!



SENIOR'S VOICE: ALPHA DIOP

Alyssa K. Barry



Alpha Diop © Zeynep Gul. 2023

1. From architect to vice-president of ICOMOS, who is Alpha Diop?

I think that before talking about architecture, which is just my profession, we should first talk about education, the environment and the society to which we belong, because these are the first things to influence the personality of the human beings we are. We also need to talk about basic training: before going to traditional school, I grew up in a Bamanan environment, with a lot of initiation.

We drink from two sources: the traditional source, which I've just mentioned, and the source of modern training that takes us to school. I went to a technical high school and then received a grant to train as an architect in the Soviet Union. I came back to Mali immediately after my training, but I soon realized that there was no direct link between what we had been taught and my background. I asked myself a lot of questions following this realization, and tried to understand how the old hands did things. Even if they aren't called architects, we still have traditional masons who build houses and have a lot of experience and knowledge in the field, both in the choice of building materials and in construction techniques. So I became interested in traditional local architecture, and went back to school to do a postgraduate degree. I returned to Bamako a month after finishing my thesis in construction physics at the Technical University of Vienna.

Our generation has benefited from the State's public structures, and our parents did not pay for our schooling. We were trained at the State's expense and on the people's taxes, so I consider that we owe something. When you acquire knowledge, it's good that you come back and repay part of your debt. That explains why I've always stayed in Mali.

So I came back after my thesis. I practiced my profession, and also became interested in teaching by giving architecture courses at the National School of Engineers in Bamako. The syllabus made no reference to local traditional architecture, so I introduced a specific section on traditional architecture in Mali. This encouraged me to find out about the richness of our architecture, and to understand that traditional building practitioners really do have knowledge and are ahead of us who have obtained degrees. We must try to document and archive all this knowledge so that we can use it for a long time to come.

I joined ICOMOS in 2012. After the destruction of the mausoleums in Timbuktu, I was commissioned by the National Directorate for Cultural Heritage (DNPC) and UNESCO to carry out a study and make proposals for the reconstruction of these monuments, which were already listed as World Heritage. It was at that point that I was asked to take over the presidency of ICOMOS Mali, as Dean Baba Cissé had more or less retired. Before that, I'd done a lot of work on cultural heritage in Mali, particularly on architecture-related issues, as well as projects such as museums and rehabilitation. Almost every year I went to the plastering works at the mosques in Timbuktu and Djenné.

I've also helped to make documentary films, and given several talks on Malian heritage, notably in Europe and America. I am also one of the founding members of the Order of Architects of Mali, and was its president in 2000.

2. You have served for 9 years as Vice-President of ICOMOS. What were the main things you did during this time?

I served three terms. I first spent the first term as a guest expert on the Board invited by President Gustavo Arroz, before being elected vice-president in 2017.

The first thing I set out to do was to physically attend all the meetings for as long as I could. It cost me a lot of time and money, but I wanted to do it to represent Africa. As far as I was concerned, people had to know that there was someone to represent the region. Then we had to set up national committees so that ICOMOS had the strongest presence on the African continent: there are now more than 15 national committees in Africa. We also had to make ICOMOS better known. For example, we took advantage of International Monuments and Sites Day on 18 April each year to take visible action in Mali and a few other African countries.

It was also necessary to make African expertise known, and on this subject I have rather mixed results. After the creation of the national committees, I said to myself that we had to prove that Africans have expertise, like all the other ICOMOS members from other regions. I'm not satisfied because African members are unfortunately not present in activities where we have to show that we have intellectual skills, and that we can be available to do work that won't necessarily be paid for immediately. For me, when you work on nomination files, you also raise your level of experience and expertise, and you have the chance to compete intellectually with other experts. It's up to you to show what you know and what you can contribute to cultural diversity. In this respect, we are really counting on you, the emerging professionals, to be present on the national committees, to take action that will prove your expertise as well as that of the nationals of the African region.

One of the problems I continue to deplore is the low number of African properties inscribed on the World Heritage List. We must continue to work on this, but we must also look beyond the properties inscribed on the List. We are in a situation where there are many armed conflicts and natural disasters, and heritage properties, whether inscribed or not, are under threat. We must remember that ICOMOS was founded before the 1972 Convention was signed, so we must continue to work in this direction, even if one of ICOMOS's strong points remains its partnership with UNESCO. I think this is a particularly important point for the Africa region.

I should also mention the Africa Initiative programme, through which we wanted to raise awareness among political decision-makers in the African region of the value of heritage, and make them understand that it can be a driving force for development. Unfortunately, we were unable to achieve this. We got ICOMOS to write an official letter to the Chair of the African Union Commission, but we didn't get anywhere. The aim was to meet them and see how we could work in partnership with the African Union. It is true that there is an African World Heritage Fund, but it is specific to World Heritage and does not deal with other types of heritage or inventories, which is one of the main things that Africa lacks. Training in inventorying is therefore extremely important, and this is another project that we would like to set up.

3. What place does Africa occupy within ICOMOS?

In terms of membership, Africa is under-represented, but we are present and try to bring our voice and show our difference in terms of the values and approaches we advocate. Africa, like all regions, has an important role to play in contributing to the cultural diversity of ICOMOS. We must work to maintain this diversity.

On this subject, there is a problem to be pointed out in terms of multilingualism, because contrary to what is stated in the ICOMOS texts, almost only English is used in practice. This is not a good thing, because those who do not use this language are more or less excluded from debates and their contribution is lost. We have to try to ensure that everyone can contribute to the discussions so that ICOMOS can be a whole, an integrated whole.

4. What are the main challenges facing African heritage professionals?

What I can already say is that there is too much compartmentalisation. Even within a single country, it is very difficult to see heritage professionals working together on joint projects. Heritage is a whole, whether tangible or intangible. We need to rethink the creation of networks and forums for exchange between heritage professionals, both at national level and in Africa as a whole. This is what we wanted to do with the AU, because we feel that politicians are not fully aware of the contribution that culture can make. For example, when it comes to education, all the French-speaking countries have their own curricula, and no one wants to know what the other is doing or whether there is any possibility of developing common or harmonized content, setting up a system of exchanges (teachers or students) or organizing joint working groups between African universities. With today's technology, this should not be difficult to achieve.

5. Your message for African emerging professionals?

I think the emerging professionals are very efficient and do a good job, but we need everyone to be able to work with their national committees. We need you, your ideas, your energy, your skills (particularly in terms of digital and new technologies) to move forward. We also need you to be practical, and to stay close to the field: not everything can be learned online. Don't hesitate to get in touch with communities, especially young people, as it's always good to know how they view heritage.



DID YOU KNOW ? SEYNI AWA CAMARA

Alyssa K. Barry



Seyni Awa Camara and her works © Baronian. 2021

Born around 1945 in Casamance, southern Senegal, Seyni Awa Camara (or Séni Camara) is a potter and sculptor living and working in Bignona, Casamance. She was introduced to traditional pottery by her mother at the age of 12. It was in 1989, at the 'Les magiciens de la terre' exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, that the artist gained international recognition. Seyni's statues are characterized by a multitude of children and other figures, and explore the themes of poverty, war, reconciliation, fertility and mutual aid, all of which mark Seyni's daily life. Mysticism plays an important role in her work, whether through the libations and sacrifices she performs before starting a piece, the inspiration behind her works or the genius that inhabits them.

I AM TAKING PART IN THE UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE CENTER MENTORING PROGRAM

Lalaina Rakotoarivony



Following my inclusion in the database of African heritage professionals at the World Heritage Centre's Africa Unit, my expertise in the field of heritage led the latter to consider my profile to become a mentee within UNESCO's Mentoring Programme for African World Heritage Professionals. The call for applications sparked my interest, so I applied and was selected.

First of all, it should be noted that this mentoring programme runs for 12 months, and is implemented in collaboration with the African World Heritage Fund (AWHF) and the three advisory bodies (ICOMOS, ICCROM and IUCN) in order to create opportunities for African heritage practitioners to become experts.

The reasons why I submitted my application lie in the major interest I have in World Heritage and my wish to be able to get more involved in the implementation of the activities of the World Heritage Convention in Africa, one of the overall objectives of the programme. Indeed, since my participation in the regional workshop in Senegal on "World Heritage and Higher Education Institutions in Africa" in 2018, my commitment to World Heritage has continued, to the point of being an active member of two cultural associations with a national and international heritage vocation, namely: FI.MPI.MA and PatriMundus.

I am also convinced of the role of heritage as a catalyst for sustainable development, and this mentoring programme will enable me to strengthen my capacities in this area so that I can carry out all the related actions. I'm also aware of the role and responsibilities of young people in promoting heritage, and I really hope to take advantage of this programme to be able to exchange ideas with renowned experts and establish collaborative relationships with them.

YOUTH INITIATIVE: CULTURVATEURS

Maeva Dolores Pimo

“**Culturvateurs**” is an initiative that aims to inform, educate and promote African heritage, but also to highlight and make known those young people who have decided to put themselves at the service of African heritage.

The "Culturvateurs" web page was created in November 2022 following a number of observations we made. Indeed, we realized that we don't all have the same level of information about what's being done and said about African heritage, especially the opportunities that heritage offers today. Secondly, Africa abounds in enormous tourist, cultural and natural potentialities that are seldom talked about, even though they deserve to be showcased. There is also a growing interest among young Africans in African World Heritage in general, and in their own countries in particular. These young people are project initiators, researchers, defenders and heritage activists who also deserve to be highlighted. In order to reach as many people as possible, and as a priority our target audience, Generation Z, we have chosen the Facebook and LinkedIn platforms as our distribution channels.

To better structure this project, we have represented our objective in the following 04 sections:

1. **Patri-actu** presents all the latest news on African heritage, whether cultural, natural, underwater, tangible or intangible. We also share opportunities, agendas and more. The aim of this section is to inform.
2. **Patri-mots** is the section devoted to defining heritage-related concepts.
3. **Patri-retro**, as its name suggests, takes us back in time, reminding us of important events that have advanced the image of African heritage in particular, and fostered greater impact for African culture in general.
4. **Patri-découverte** is dedicated to showcasing African World Heritage sites, as well as other unique sites and tourist attractions found on our continent that deserve to be known by all.

This initiative is currently in its infancy. We hope that it will soon become an egg ready to hatch, a project that will bring together other young Africans, much to the delight of African heritage enthusiasts.

To follow us:

- https://www.facebook.com/Culturvateurs/?paipv=0&eav=AfYZmP9lOZ3yCvhufyHaaCV0RXZD0Gwktbbe8ZH3tDDQ3xPJBH0wjE4Q2qzIAx6D8sg&_rdr
- <https://www.linkedin.com/company/culturvateurs/>

DIARY OF THE MONTH

Commonwealth Museums Association (CAM) 2024 Triennial Conference

The Commonwealth Museums Association (CMA) 2024 Triennial Conference will be held in Aotearoa New Zealand under the theme: "**The View from Here: Sustainability, Community and Knowledge Systems**". CAM invites the museum community to Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland to explore the role of museums in a demographically and environmentally changing world, and to share and discuss their unique perspectives on common experiences. Deadline for submission: 30 September 2023.

For more informations, [***click here***](#).



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LATEST OPPORTUNITIES

- **Apply for the 21st International Course on Wood Conservation Technologies - ICWCT 2024.** For more information on the procedure, [*click here*](#). Deadline: 30 September 2023.
- **The International Council on Archives (ICA) is looking for volunteers to translate its documents.** If you are interested, [*apply from here*](#).
- **UNESCO is recruiting a Head of its Records Management Section.** All the information on the call for applications is available on the [*institution's website*](#). Deadline: 21 October 2023.

MASTHEAD

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