

## **Info for Iwokrama newsletter Dec 2010**

*En-compass* is a European Commission-funded project involving communities from four countries across four continents, including China, England, Guyana and Kenya, working together to identify and safeguard threatened heritage resources. Despite its global dimensions, the project is very much a grassroots' initiative which aims ultimately to improve "access to local culture and to protect and promote cultural diversity, especially cultural heritage in imminent danger".

The project aims to develop a series of international 'building-block' exchange and training opportunities that will benefit organisations and people from the participating countries and beyond. Furthermore, the action will have two important added values by supporting the development of sustainable heritage tourism and encouraging the fight against climate change.

### **Newcastle**

The participants first met at the Newcastle workshops in October 2010 and this was a great opportunity for everyone to meet and exchange interests. During the workshop we spent an intensive week learning about the practice of Heritage, what it involves and the terminology used to describe certain elements and how these relate to each country. These discussions challenged us to look at different ways of working due to the different cultures within the group and therefore the different opinions and realise the sensitive nature of heritage that comes with it.

From discussion we have had around Heritage, what the issues are in retaining it, how to record it and how to manage it, there seemed to be similarities across each of the countries. Multiculturalism, globalisation, the introduction of the internet, meaning easier access to things that were once out of reach, technological advances, economy, funding, lack of education, rural-urban migration, politics are all reasons why heritage is starting to fade and can be evidenced in all countries.

The Newcastle workshop gave us a good starting block from which to begin our work in Kenya.

So far the team of 12 participants have travelled to and spent time researching in Mombasa, Kenya alongside host organisation Centre for Heritage Development in Africa and Guyana, South America with hosts Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development. The team is now due to spend time travelling around the island of Hainan Province, China.

During the research trip to Mombasa and Guyana the team have been privileged to spend time with the indigenous people of each country and to learn a little more about how they live their lives and how they manage to retain their traditions alongside the modern world. Through engaging in local music, dance and art we have been able to understand local intangible heritage and see the similarities that are present within our own countries cultural heritage and to find examples of endangered cultural heritage that needs preserving.



(images of cassava processing in Kenya)

***'This is great, I love to be among the elders and listen to them with great respect. I ask that they continue to do this great work. Your culture and language is your identity.....The things I see here like the cassava we have back home and many others, so coming here means a lot to me and I will remember this all my life'***

**Glendon Allicock, Guyana participant**

We interacted with local communities and existing cultural heritage projects in a number of ways. Through discussion, video, talks from guests, field trips and even participation of the arts. I would say that each of us gained a unique and valuable insight into indigenous and modern Kenya and Guyana.



(images: research trip to the kaya)

## **Kenya**

The high points for most participants were the visits to the Kaya (maybe not the climb up the hill in the mid day sun perhaps...) the visit to the Bombolulu Centre and the time spent at the Little Theatre.



Visiting the Kaya and spending time talking with the elder of the Mijikenda people allowed us to understand how they live and gave a small insight into their rituals and beliefs. We joined in with their dancing and followed their rituals of entering the kaya – sitting down outside the kaya entrance with our thoughts before entering with bare feet ....did I mention the mid day sun!! ;) Joking aside, this is a memory that I know will stay with the group for a long time.

***'The most memorable impression that I got from the visits during the two weeks was the tour to Bombolulu Work Shop. I have seen the handicapped people have been organized together to produce many handcrafts, curving and cloths. I believe that it's the best way to help the disable people to raise their Confidence and capabilities to achieve hopes and focus in their lives. It is also the best way to magnify the strength and courage of the African people'***

**Lin Kai Yao, China participant**



***'My best experience was in Bombolulu where people with disabilities, men and women have been empowered through training to earn a living instead of begging along the streets'***

**Jack Obonyo, Kenya participant**

The Little Theatre gave us a much needed chance to interact with musicians, artists and dancers as we split into groups to discuss many issues relating to Mombasa and contemporary culture, how the Little Theatre is helping artists to realise their goals and how art and culture is viewed by the outside world. Many similarities came out of the discussions in terms of opportunities and problems but it gave a chance for all of us to pass on knowledge from our own countries and look at the similarities and differences that occur in a positive light.



## **Guyana**

The workshop in Guyana was invaluable in terms of gaining an insight into Surama and how the Macushi people are self managing their own tourism business, allowing them to conserve the rainforest and their land and traditions in the way only they know how. Macushi people describe the rainforest as 'their supermarket' which perhaps will make us all think a little bit more about where we live and the choices we make. Spending time with Glendon and his family certainly made us feel like we were getting back to nature and it was a real privilege to be hosted by them.

***'Making Casava bread was a key point of the trip for me – after triumphantly flipping the bread without breaking it (an art in itself you could say, ha ha!) we were able to look back at the day's work and feel that we had contributed to the routines of the Macushi lifestyle and taken in a great deal of knowledge along the way'***

**Sam Taylor, UK participant**

During the trip we were able to spend time with the Macushi people, alongside Benita learning and watching the hammock weaving whilst talking about the traditions that surround these practices. This felt an extremely beneficial way of working as we were able to gain information whilst also trying our hands at the craft – which had we not done so would not have allowed us to see the skill and technique that goes with it. Similarly with the Casava bread making, we spent a whole day working with the three representatives from Surama and worked through the whole process from pulling out the plants from the cassava farms to actually cooking the cassava bread and farine....and eating it of course!!

### **Concluding comments**

During these two workshops we have gained an enormous amount of knowledge and feel that each country team has gone away with a more informed point from which to continue the research into identifying examples of endangered intangible cultural heritage. I think that the resulting exhibition will be one of diversity and interest to many people.

Of course I cannot end this piece without mentioning the en-compass team being stranded in the rainforest due to the bus breaking down.....by the way Kate saw it again on her way back and guess what? It had broken down again!!! From Jack being frightened of the Jaguar....and pretty much everything else actually, to Kate serenading us with the violin.....oh yes and the delight tunes from Nadia's phone...from The Lion King wasn't it?!....a peaceful night's sleep was had by all...not!!! I think the welcome breakfast the next morning when we were saved will never be forgotten. Yum Yum!! Thanks Glendon!!

**Next stop Hainan province on 16<sup>th</sup> January.....**

**Sam Taylor, UK participant**