

Museums tackling climate change: A Zimbabwean context

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Abstract

Climate change has from the past two decades evidently affected museum operations and collections. In Zimbabwe, high and fluctuating temperatures, heat waves, pollution, cyclones and hailstorms among other disasters have directly and indirectly posed challenges in the management of heritage. For example the National Art Gallery of Zimbabwe in Mutare has been affected by cyclone Idai that occurred in 2019. This study specifically examines the success of green measures that have been employed by national art galleries and museums in Zimbabwe as they responded to climate-change-related challenges. The study employed qualitative research and multiple case studies that included the National Art Galleries in Harare and Bulawayo, the Natural History Museum, the Batonga Community Museum and the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences and the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site. The study was undertaken from 2016 to 2019 where observations, face-to-face and social media interviews were deployed as research instruments. Further, green audits were also conducted at various regional heritage institutions. The study population included a total of 34 participants drawn from four art gallery and museum directors, six curators, five exhibition or display designers, six education officers, nine tour guides or attendants and four officers from the Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate. Although green measures still remain haphazardly implemented across museums, it is revealed that heritage institutions in Zimbabwe partly tackle climate change through educational exhibitions and use of indigenous knowledge in collections management, maintaining green buildings and water management. The study developed a pragmatic green framework that museums especially from the third world countries can employ to circumvent the problems posed by climate change.