

Extending the mission of archives, libraries and museums beyond the storage of knowledge: the case of Matsieng Royal Archives, Museum and Information Centre

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Abstract

King Moshoeshoe II (1938- 1996), a University of Oxford graduate had accumulated many books and documents during his lifetime as he was a well read prolific writer. Members of the royal family became worried about the safety of his collection after his death. They therefore requested some individuals with different professional skills to assist with the safekeeping of these documents. Records in Maseru and Matsieng palaces were rescued and it was decided that the suitable home for this collection should be Matsieng at the former offices of the Paramount Chief Moshoeshoe II. Matsieng Royal Archives and Museum and information Centre came into being under the care of Matsieng Royal Board of Trustees. From the inception of the project Matsieng community was involved. The community was sensitized about the establishment of the Royal Archives and Museum and the benefits that it was to reap from the project.

*The paper discusses how the Matsieng Royal Archives and Museum has extended its mission beyond the storage of knowledge by the centre being used as a community space where Matsieng community members come together to learn new skills. The centre has contributed to the creation of physical commons that benefit the public as a whole by heading towards more community development skills. The community was involved and participated when the centre was building the *bio-digester* for sewage disposal as a way of protecting mother earth and also getting rid of pit latrines which are a health hazard. The harvesting of gas as renewable energy*

for cooking, water for irrigation in order to improve the quality of vegetables production are some of the benefits of this project. Training workshops on promoting and strengthening the capacity of Matsieng community to engage in sustainable income generating microenterprises have been held in the centre. The place can also be used as a social mingling place where people can sit and relax.

Introduction

Basotho as a nation emerged during the time of King Moshoeshoe1. Moshoeshoe1 gathered together remnants of various clans and ethnic groups who were fleeing the ravages of the tribal wars of “lifaqane” waged by “Amazulu” and “Amandebele” across the sub-region of Southern Africa in the early 19th century. The chiefs who fled to Moshoeshoe1 became his subordinates and he placed them in different parts of the country to be “his eyes and ears”. Moshoeshoe 1 ruled from 1824-1870. During his reign Basotho fought a series of wars with, among others the Boer Republic of Orange Free State. Moshoeshoe1 aspired for peace and unity. When he heard from a Griqua hunter named Adam Krotz that the constant wars and disturbances which he faced will disappear if he can invite the missionaries to work among the Basotho, Moshoeshoe1 did exactly as advised.

The missionaries accepted Moshoeshoe1’s invitation and three young French missionaries belonging to Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (P.E.M.S.) arrived in Lesotho in 1833. He placed them in Makhoarane (Moriija) where they were accompanied by his two sons, namely Letsie and Molapo. During the war of 1858 between Basotho and the Boers, Letsie’s village in Makhoarane was burnt down and he went to settle at what is today known as Matsieng (Matsieng literally means the place of Letsie’s people). When Moshoeshoe1 died in 1870 he was succeeded by Letsie1, his first born son. Moshoeshoe1 ruled from Thaba-Bosiu, however when Letsie1 took over from his father he ruled from his village, Matsieng. From the time of Letsie 1 up to 1966 when Lesotho attained independence, all the Paramount chiefs ruled from Matsieng. Matsieng has therefore been the hub of chieftainship since the time of Letsie 1. In 1966, when Lesotho attained independence the offices of the King moved from Matsieng to Maseru, the capital, but the bulk of the paramount chiefs’ records remained in Matsieng.

The chieftainship and kingship have a big influence on Lesotho’s development. They have always been part of the Basotho nation and their way of life. The chiefs have always been charged with the responsibility of administering and unifying the nation. As a result, records such as those pertaining to chieftainship and succession matters, court proceedings and judgements, traditional marriage system, inheritance and disputes have been created and used in the offices of the paramount chief in Matsieng.

The Royal Archives and Museum has been created to manage these records, however it has extended its mission beyond that as will be shown in sections below.

The birth of Matsieng Royal Archives, Museum and Information Centre

Paramount Chief Constatine Bereng Seeiso became His Majesty King Moshoeshoe II in 1966 when Lesotho attained independence. He graduated from the University of Oxford in philosophy, politics, economics and law. He was a well-read prolific writer and a leader of international standing. He accumulated many books and documents during his lifetime. He made a landmark statement in 1982 at United Nations Security Council during the aftermath of the massacre of forty Basotho and South African refugees in which he condemned the apartheid regime. After his death in 1996 his heirs became worried about the safety and accessibility of his collection. This was when researchers became interested in this collection and wanted to have access to some of his documents. His heirs felt that this unique collection belongs to the nation and as such should be made accessible to the nation as a whole but in a controlled and organized manner to ensure its permanent preservation.

In 2006 experts and professionals in fields related to Anthropology, Culture, history, librarianship, archives, museums and architecture agreed to assist the royal family with the establishment of the royal archives at the invitation of the royal family. The volunteers started working on modalities on how to assist the Royal Family. They surveyed records and documents of His Majesty King Moshoeshoe II which were in the royal palace offices in Maseru. Records were listed, boxed and kept together in one office. The volunteers then went to inspect the records of the Paramount chiefs (1870- 1966) which were in Matsieng. Here it was discovered that the records were kept under appalling conditions and faced with the risk of permanent damage. Some of the records were kept in the building with a leaking roof and during the heavy rains of December 2008 the roof collapsed leaving records exposed to more hazardous climatic conditions such as rain, dust and sunlight. At the advice of the Royal Archives Board of Trustees records were moved from Matsieng to a place of safety in Roma, specifically at the National University of Lesotho so as to rescue them from the dangers that they were facing.

In the meantime the offices in Matsieng which were used by the late Queen Regent, ‘Mantsebo Seeiso (1941-1960) and Paramount Chief Bereng Seeiso (later His Majesty King Moshoeshoe II) (1960-1966) were identified as suitable and ideal accommodation to house the royal archives and museum. As it can be seen from the foregoing Matsieng is associated with Basotho kingship and chieftainship.

The offices needed some renovations. In November 2012 with the financial assistance from W.K. Kellogg the renovations and rehabilitations were completed and the Matsieng Royal Archives and Museum Building was launched. The documents and records which were kept at the National University of Lesotho for safekeeping have since been repatriated to Matsieng.

Matsieng Royal Archives and Museum was registered as a non-governmental organization in March 2008. It is managed by the Matsieng Royal Archives Board of Trustees on behalf of the Royal Family. Members of the board of Trustees are volunteers who comprise of professionals in different fields.

The main objectives of the Royal Archives and Museum are:

- To collect and preserve all material of whatever description relating to and constituting the history of chieftainship in Lesotho
- To process, classify, catalogue, index and describe the available collection of archival materials with a view to making them accessible to all beneficiaries in Lesotho and in the Diaspora
- To identify, collect, process and make accessible all museum pieces and artifacts having a bearing on the history of the royal family
- To preserve systematically and in a usable manner, the pre- and post – independence Royal Family records as found in Matsieng and other places
- To develop means of formally augmenting the present collection with free deposits of copies being generated by relevant sources locally, regionally and internationally
- To create jobs and sustainable incomes for the people of Matsieng and thus add value to their way of living.

On inception the Royal Archives was conceived as a community centre. That is the community was to perceive the centre as their own and not only as a place belonging to the royal family and researchers. The village headman and Matsieng community as a whole were informed about the centre when it got was established. They were given an idea on the benefits that would be available from the establishment of this centre and how they can collaborate with the Board of Trustees. One of the main objectives of this project was to improve the image of the wardship of Matsieng by improving the lives of Matsieng community and addressing some of the social challenges and ills that prevail there. The nearby schools and churches were to take part in this project.

Matsieng Royal Archives extends its mission beyond storage of knowledge

Matsieng Royal Archives was established to collect, preserve and make accessible records and documents on the royal family and chieftainship in Lesotho however it has extended its mission beyond that.

One of the goals of the establishment of Matsieng Royal Archives and Museum was to address some of the social challenges and ills that prevail in Matsieng through the creation of micro enterprises and reception centres and thus add value to the Matsieng village. Therefore Matsieng Royal Archives and Museum was conceived as a community based development project.

The project extends its mission beyond the storage of knowledge by:

1. Creation of physical commons

The Royal Archives Board of Trustees organized skills training workshops for Matsieng community. This was one way of making Mastieng community to appreciate and embrace the centre as their own place where they can come together to learn and discuss developmental issues.

Through the headman, the Matsieng community was invited and participated in a number of public gatherings (**pitso**) at the centre. Holding **pitsos** at the centre is one way of demonstrating to the community that the centre is for their use. At the first meeting the discussions were centered around the following:

- Introduction of the staff of the Royal Archives and Museum to the community
- Existing developmental projects and societies in Matsieng
- The needs of Matsieng community.

It was discovered that in Matsieng a number of projects, societies and cooperatives have been formed such as:

- Tumisang Lerato Society- Agricultural projects
- Tsohang ka mafube co-oporative society-piggery project
- Mabeoana club- sewing and making traditional outfits

However some of these projects were not working well due to the following reasons:

- Lack of trust among members
- Lack of interest
- Lack of markets for their products

The aim of this meeting was to see how the existing projects and societies can be improved so that they can be more beneficial to the community.

The personnel of the centre organized training workshops with the aim of resuscitating some of the projects. After assessing the needs of the community a consultant from Basotho Enterprises Development Corporation (BEDCO) was engaged to train the community on the following:

- Entrepreneurship traits
- How to choose an appropriate business
- Assessing business opportunities
- Product development

The centre is used as a training centre for Matsieng community where people can learn new skills or improve on the skills that they already have. The aim of the training workshops was to promote and strengthen the capacity of Matsieng community to engage in sustainable income generating microenterprises. During these workshops the community was trained in the following:

Beekeeping and Honey Harvesting

Drying fruits (peaches) using food dryers

Making traditional handicrafts such as brooms, Basotho hats (mokorotlo) traditional mats and other products using animal skin, grass, wood etc.

The centre has organized exhibitions for finished products at the centre as a way of helping the community to advertise and market their products.

Community of Space

The centre as a place is shared amongst members of the community. It is a gathering place which is accessible and open to the public. It connects people hence the community is encouraged to hold their **pitsos** there. This enables the community to interact both formally and informally.

As a community of space the centre has a library. The library was created with Matsieng youth in mind due to scarcity of public and school libraries in the country. Using the library will help promote reading culture and improve the reading skills of Matsieng youth. This is one way of keeping youths from streets and mischief.

There is a community hall near the centre which was built in 1946 by the Basutoland National Treasury (BNT) for recreation purposes and use by the community. This historic hall is dilapidated and needs rehabilitation. The Royal Archives Board of Trustees is planning to rehabilitate the hall so that it is usable. The hall can be used for entertainment and educational purposes such as hosting concerts, seminars and public lecturers.

As a way of promoting Basotho culture the hall can be used by traditional music groups for rehearsals. Matsieng women have got a well-established mokhibo group.

2. Construction of Bio-digester for Sewage Disposal

During the first meeting between the personnel of the Royal Archives and Matsieng Community, one of the challenges faced by the community was lack of toilets in some household. Even at the Royal Archives lack of proper sanitation was identified as a major weakness and problem. Pit latrines are in use in the public service providers sites near the Royal Archives. These are the local court and the offices of the Principal Chief of Matsieng. There are also old pit latrines near the centre which have been abandoned when they got full. This creates unsafe environment for the health and well being of Matsieng community.

The Royal Archives and Museum with financial assistance from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Global Environment Facility through the Small Grants Programme decided to build a bio digester for sewage disposal. The objective of this project was to provide a proper sanitation which does not contaminate the ground water, allows the harvesting of renewable energy and produce water for irrigation from the generated waste, protect and care for the environment by engaging eco-friendly means of sewage disposal. It was assumed that having this project at the royal archives will remove the stigma associated with human waste and change the mindset of the community. They are likely to emulate the royal archives and build these types of toilets in their homes. Matsieng community was involved in this project from its inception and was regarded as category A stakeholders being beneficiaries of the project. The community worked together with the Board of Trustee. The consultative meetings in the form of **pitsos** were held to inform the community about the project and solicit their views. They were made aware that their participation and involvement in the project was essential. As part of community participation the villagers assisted with digging the pits, they did this on voluntary basis.

Benefits of the project;

- The project has contributed in a meaningful way towards the protection of the environment
- The project has introduced good sanitation practices in Matsieng
- Production of gas as renewable energy for cooking
- Provides water for irrigation to improve the quality of vegetable production
- Getting rid of pit latrines which are a health and environmental hazards
- Acquisition of knowledge about the system and its contribution towards the environmental conservation by Matsieng community
- Creates awareness and demonstrate environmentally friendly waste management systems and renewable clean energy technologies.

The project has resulted in the construction of the modern and clean ablution blocks. The toilets at the centre are opened to the general public. People who come for public service in Matsieng are free to use the toilets. One of the advantages of this facility is that the more the toilets are used the more the benefits are reaped. There is more production of gas for cooking and more water for irrigation to improve the quality of crops.

Social Mingling place

The centre can be used as a social mingling place where members of the community can sit and relax. It is a meeting place for young and old. There is also a kitchenette which can be used to make coffee and people can sit outside and socialize over a cup of coffee.

Photocopying and Printing

One of the essential services which the centre is giving to Matsieng community and people who come for public services in Matsieng is photocopying and printing. In the past the nearest place where this service could be found was Morija which is about seven kilometers away. The introduction of this service has saved people money and travelling time.

Conclusions

One of the aims of the project is to make a difference in the lives of the community of Matsieng. It is to restore the image of Matsieng as a royal village associated with Lesotho chieftainship and kingship. It is assisting the community to participate in income generating micro enterprises thus contributing to poverty alleviation. It is central to community life.

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