



Firoz Lalji Institute
for Africa

Safety and Storytelling Exhibition

OCTOBER 2022

Impact Report

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Background to the Exhibition

The Safety and Storytelling Exhibition was held Juba, South Sudan between 6–10 October 2022. As it was funded by the AHRC and DFID, this report reviews the design and impact of the exhibition against the SoS project goals and across various impact metrics.

The Safety and Storytelling exhibition was a five-day multi-sited event held between 6 – 12 October 2022 in Juba, South Sudan. An arts heritage exhibition, it brought together several South Sudan-focused, AHRC-supported, international projects that revolve around concepts of protection and resilience in South Sudan and its borderlands: Safety of Strangers, Tackling VAWG in Times of Conflict: Responding to Youth Voices, and Art Heritage and Resilience. The exhibition was sponsored and coordinated by the FLIA, Likikiri Collective, SOAS and the University of Portsmouth. This report recaps the design and impact of the exhibition across various impact metrics and will encourage:

- Improving and implementing changes for future exhibitions organised by the FLIA
- Cultivating a culture of learning within the FLIA
- Celebrating the achievements of research staff and collaborators



Pictured above: A student from the University of Juba viewing the photo exhibition in the Customs Campus hall.

Conceptual Framing of the Exhibition

The exhibition invited artists, researchers and visitors to reframe the concepts of "protection" and "resilience" through the display of and discussion about artistic production, heritage and creativity as alternative knowledge registers. The exhibition modalities built on decolonial movements in research and praxis by foregrounding the arts as not simply a technology of knowledge dissemination but its own form of knowledge creation. Safety and Storytelling invites us to consider how the arts can contribute to our understanding of safeguarding and survival in a fragile context, but also how protecting the arts could be essential to creating a safer society.

"In this exhibit, the notion of protection goes beyond the dominant development and humanitarian paradigms to get reinterpreted through a creative lens. Similarly, resilience is understood as and through the processes of making and 'making do'" – Dr Kara Blackmore



Pictured above: The Zande princess and another attendee viewing and discussing the photo exhibition in the Customs Campus hall.

The methods used to develop this exhibition were participatory and dialogic and include commissioned artworks, photo voice, and story circles. These methods recognise the concepts of 'protection' and 'resilience' as embedded within relationships and situated within particular contexts.

The activations that occurred over the five days of the showcase were intended to perform the researchers' methodologies by unpacking different processes of meaning-making by 1) staging the process of knowledge creation through the demonstration and discussion of making-as-knowing and 2) making explicit the myriad ways research may be interpreted in artwork. Each component of the research and its exhibition were grounded in the lived experiences of South Sudanese people.

The activations occurred between two sites: the University of Juba's Customs Campus and the Nimra Talata Youth Centre. Each activation had a different format, from story circles to panel discussions to portrait studios. Artists, makers, and researchers were able to share their knowledge and process while audience members listened and shared in the dialogue of arts and heritage across multiple languages.

Attendance

During the exhibition, the attendees were welcome to engage with multiple public events related to art heritage and protection. To get a sense of the attendance we attracted, the exhibition can be separated into two main categories:

Story circles at Nimra Talata Youth Centre:

- The story circles ran each day of the programme. The events were open to the public and centred around storytelling of creative practice. The events were led by bead workers from the traditions of Otuho, Anywaa and Murle to bring examples from their own beading traditions, threadwork, milaya and wood carving.
- Attendance was moderate, with approximately 40 guests over the course of the exhibition (some making repeat visits).
- The location was difficult to find for some. In future, it could be useful to either (a) have somewhere closer to the main venue at the University of Juba or (b) host it at a more central cultural site. One attendee suggested the Nyakoron Cultural Centre, as many people visit it daily and it is well known for cultural activities.



Pictured above (L-R): South Sudan Minister for Culture attending Nimra Talata Youth Centre with Professor Tim Allen and Natalie Carter; an element of the photo exhibition at Customs Campus, University of Juba.

Public panels and lectures at the University of Juba (Customs Campus):

- Public panels were held each evening of the programme and were open to all University of Juba students and the public. The panels engaged academics from the University of Juba, international and South Sudanese researchers, and cultural practitioners.
- Attendance was considerable, with 130 guests in attendance across the panels. Most panels were fully attended, though we anticipated greater numbers due to the affiliation with the University. In future, greater resources could be allocated to publicity in local media sources well ahead of the event.



Pictured above (L-R): Well-attended Sunday evening panel at Customs Campus, University of Juba; Professor Melissa Parker presenting to senior academics and health officials at the University of Juba.

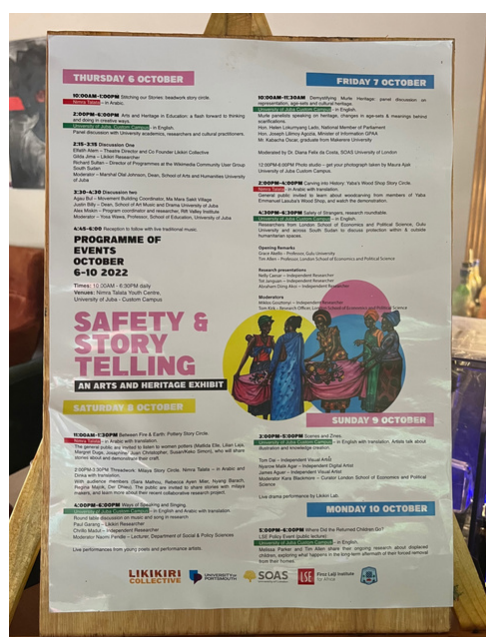
Accessibility

- Every element of the exhibition was open to the public. There was a Reading and Listening room open for the duration of the exhibition at the University of Juba's Customs Campus so attendees could access books not typically published in the country (generously brought into the country by project lead Dr Kara Blackmore).
- The design of the panels made it very accessible for attendees to engage directly with FLIA researchers and their work. Each session began with a reminder to ask questions and the length of the sessions allowed for longer periods of debate amongst panelist and attendees.



Pictured above: Members of the public and University of Juba students engaging directly with Professor Tim Allen on his research.

- Story Circle events were held in a variety of languages spoken by the South Sudanese: Arabic, Juba Arabic, English, Anywaa, Kakwa, Otuho, Pojulu, Dinka, and Murle. All public panels were held in English, possibly limiting engagement from the wider public.
- We provided eye-catching, clear and consistent signage throughout the Campus to guide attendees.



Pictured above (L-R): Huge banner outside the Customs Campus exhibition call to guide attendees; an example of the programme available to attendees online and in-person, detailing the timings of events and languages they were delivered in.

87 University of Juba students signed up to receive soft copies of the Safety of Strangers project research outputs, reflecting our commitment to maintain engagement and access after the event.

Twitter Analytics

Twitter was a useful and accessible resource for publicising the event. We maintained an active thread on event details throughout the exhibition weekend. Engagement was improved by interacting with the accounts of collaborators.

Post	Impressions	Engagements	Retweets	Likes
https://twitter.com/AfricaAtLSE/status/1575864736713170949	372	20	2	3
https://twitter.com/AfricaAtLSE/status/1578705732270448641	463	14	1	2
https://twitter.com/AfricaAtLSE/status/1579396373216366592	228	6	2	1
https://twitter.com/AfricaAtLSE/status/1577933895777099776	2306	63	10	19
https://twitter.com/AfricaAtLSE/status/1577935541273763840	575	13	2	3
https://twitter.com/AfricaAtLSE/status/1578348473803767809	310	6	0	3
https://twitter.com/AfricaAtLSE/status/1578659021115965442	280	6	1	2
https://twitter.com/AfricaAtLSE/status/1578660339658678272	532	3	0	2
https://twitter.com/AfricaAtLSE/status/1578688138423463937/analytics	373	5	1	3

Reflections from Attendees

Given the context of the exhibition, it was difficult to canvass mass responses to the exhibition via typical impact evaluation metrics (such as a survey). To gauge individuals' experiences with the exhibition, we collected feedback, reflections and key takeaways from various attendees who signalled they were willing to share their experiences. I have split reflections into four subheadings:

1. Reflections from researchers who participated in panels:

- Abraham Diing Akoi Nyuon: "My participation in SoS panel makes me learned people are eager to engage on issues that support change, bring out new ideas and approaches to tackle challenges that are affecting the communities. Equally, people have ideas but there is limited space for them to discuss such ideas. For me, SoS panel was instrumental in giving that space, people learned about issues in areas studies were conducted."
- Benjamin Dut Dut Tong: "I had a fascinating experience meeting different people of various cultural backgrounds, such as the Murle tribe who portrayed a vividly unique culture of scarification... the researchers who participated during the exhibition were very interactive as well as cooperative among themselves."

2. Reflections from attendees on specific events and the exhibition more widely:

- Adrawa Lawrence Dulu: "The art works were very beautiful and powerful in delivering messages (both painting and wood work). In South Sudan, it is very dangerous to deliver verbal or written messages on very sensitive matters that affect people in leadership, but the artwork does it safely... The panel discussion were good, the best panel discussion was the one on Murle Heritage and the One of Prof. Tim Allen."
- William Mutatiina: "In Billy's presentation, I quote him to have said that while individuals participate in their traditional dances, at a certain point, their movement patterns and rhythm, at taken up by a certain force; and at this point in time, their ancestors communicate to them.....to me this was ear - catching."
- Abraham Diing Akoi Nyoun: "FLIA workshop had provide space for engagement, share ideas during panel discussions, weekend's sessions and provide understandings of the importance of arts and heritage. It was my first time to attend arts and heritage exhibition in South Sudan something I find interesting. In a conflict ravaged and ethnic divided country, learning about arts and heritage provide a space for people to understand the beauty of arts and heritage of others people, it is something you don't often seen organized. I was surprised to learned the beauty of the society can also be embodied in arts and heritage, something I didn't know."
- Patrick Nuwagaba: "The Arts and Heritage Exhibition in Juba, October 2022 crowned by 2022. I interacted with researchers from LSE led by Professor Tim Allen and South Sudanese passionate about their young country. Stranger-safety research was most timely. Panels shared their research and eagerly interacted with the audience, taking questions, feedback, criticism and differing viewpoints."

3. Key takeaways to consider for future events:

- Adrawa Lawrence Dulu: "While the heritage was mostly about the Murle community, it was very beautiful. South Sudan is such a diverse country when it comes to Cultural heritage and the next exhibition should extend to other ethnic groups."

4. Giving thanks:

- Benjamin Dut Dut Tong: "We the general team that was embroiled in the exhibition owed thousands of thanks and appreciation to the London School of Economics and Political Science for organizing this important function where we mutually shared our experiences... not forgetting Dr Diana Felix da Costa from SOAS University of London."
- Adrawa Lawrence Dulu: "I take this opportunity to thank Prof Tim Allen and the entire LSE team who made it possible for me to attend the Arts and Heritage Exhibition in Juba."



Pictured (L): the Ways of Speaking and Singing Panel at Customs Campus, moderated by Dr Diana Felix da Costa, with speakers Paul Garang, Chrillo Madut, Benjamin Dut and Barnabas Bol.

Pictured (R): the Safety of Strangers Panel at Customs Campus with researchers from LSE, Gulu University and across South Sudan,



Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the people who worked tirelessly to make this exhibition happen: Dr Kara Blackmore, Dr Naomi Pendle, Rebecca Lorins and Dr Diana Felix da Costa.