The Illegal Diamond Mining Exhibition

A Vehicle for Museum Renewal and Effecting Social Change

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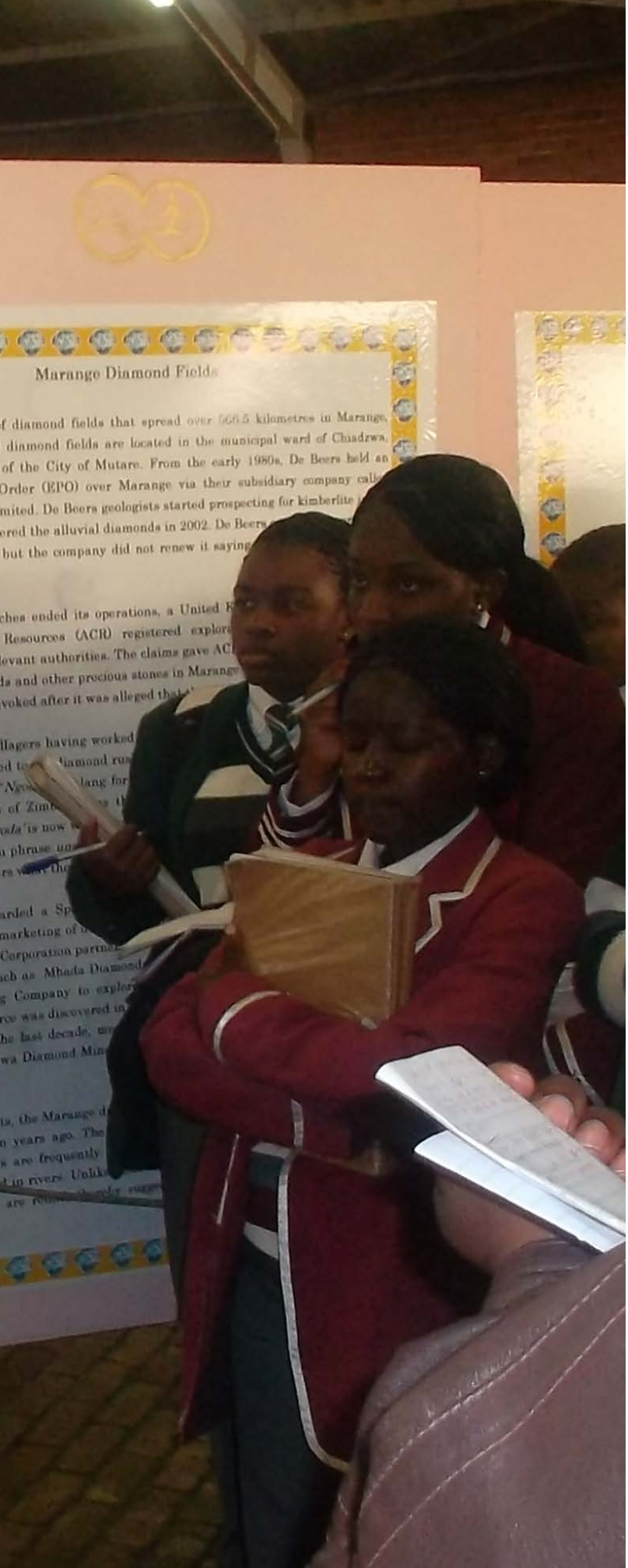

(left) A view in the exhibition during a tour by schoolchildren.

Introduction

The Mutare Museum is one of the five regional museums under the administration of National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe. All of the five museums were established as result of colonial encounters; Zimbabwe was colonized by Britain in 1890 and gained its independence in 1980. The Mutare Museum, situated in Eastern Zimbabwe, is the national collector of transport objects and antiquities.[1]

The Mutare Museum (formerly Umtali Museum) opened its doors to the public in 1964 with displays of antiquities, transportation, botany, and geology. Later, additional displays of ethnographic and archaeological objects were added. Up to the present day, these permanent exhibitions have changed little. However, temporary exhibitions have become a vehicle through which the museum is engaging with the communities on contemporary social and cultural issues.

The Mutare Museum and many other museums throughout Zimbabwe share a common history in terms of their development, in that they are byproducts of colonialism, 20th-century creations that emerged out of European imperialism.[2] It has been argued that these museums were created in specific sociopolitical contexts that sought to denigrate the local populace, diminish self-confidence, and reduce pride in their past achievements.[3] As with other national museums, exhibitions at the Mutare Museum have been stagnant and biased towards colonialism such that many aspects

1 The other museums in the country are the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences in Harare, which specializes in archaeological and ethnographic collections, the Natural Museum in Bulawayo, the Military Museum in Gweru, and the Great Zimbabwe Museum in Masvingo, which specializes in the conservation of dry stone structures.

2 Emmanuel Arinze, "African Museums: the Challenge of Change," *Museum International* 197, vol. 50, no. 1 (1998): 31.

3 Godhi Bvocho, "Multimedia, Museums and the Public: Communicating Heritage Information," *Museum Memoir No. 3* (2013): 13.

of an independent Zimbabwe are ignored, hence the growing need to change the displays or even revamp some of the ageing exhibitions.

The locals have criticized the Mutare Museum for being alien, imported, elitist, urban-based and serving colonial interests three and one-half decades after independence. However, by setting up temporary exhibitions, the museum has managed to reposition itself as a relevant community institution. Recently, we have initiated public exhibitions aimed at addressing social, cultural, economic, and educational considerations of the local community. This article explores how we used an exhibition on illegal diamond mining – the research, the design, and the production – to create a public forum, encourage dialogue, and in the process, reframe the museum and effect social change. Addressing controversial topics in history museums is something relatively new in Zimbabwe where, like other post-colonial nations, we are challenging centralized, state-led heritage management initiatives and unifying narratives that exclude communities' own needs and versions of the past.

Ngoda the Wealth Beneath Our Feet: The Diamond Mining Exhibition

The exhibition, titled *Ngoda the Wealth Beneath Our Feet*, opened in May 2012, and chronicled the history of diamond mining in Chiadzwa, Eastern Zimbabwe with a view to giving the public an in-depth understanding of the events that stimulated the discovery and subsequent invasion of the area by "illegal miners" between 2006 and 2008. The research and design for this exhibition was undertaken by a team comprised of two curators (including me), an exhibition designer, a technical officer, and a marketing officer. The regional director of the Mutare Museum was also actively involved in the entire process by giving guidance and direction.

The idea for the exhibition emerged out of recommendations by the Mutare Museum's local committee board. We were encouraged by the board to conduct ethnographic research on the story behind diamond mining in Chiadzwa that would lead to the production of an exhibition. While we had mounted exhibitions that looked at contemporary issues in

fig. 1. Rough and uncut diamonds from Chiadzwa.

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the past, none had been to the scale of the diamond mining exhibition. For example, in 1998 an HIV and AIDS temporary exhibition was launched with the aim of discouraging the societal stigmatization on those suffering from the disease. In 2010, we also hosted a witchcraft talk show, which opened a public debate on African witchcraft and tools used in its practice.

However, the diamond exhibition was the first of its kind in that it was not only educational but served as an instigator for social change. Not only did we bring into perspective the narrative of "illegal" diamond mining, we also stimulated dialogue on the social effects of the mining. We thus became the first museum in the country to comprehensively tackle an issue that was topical, and which subsequently influenced the government to look at the challenges associated with relocating the villagers from Chiadzwa who were displaced by diamond mining.

Chiadzwa is of one of the largest surface diamond mining fields in Sub-Saharan Africa (fig. 1). The alluvial diamond fields are in the municipal ward of Chiadzwa, about 60 miles southwest of the city of Mutare, Manicaland Province. The "illegal" miners (*makorokozas* in local parlance) included locals as well as youths who trickled in from all parts of the country. However, the question of legality and illegality at that time of the invasion seems to have obscured by a government position that allowed the local villagers to mine the diamonds. The diamond rush was thus the direct result of an open government policy, later overturned after chaos erupted as thousands of miners descended on the mining field.

Our exhibition followed some of the events that led to the discovery of the diamonds, the mass flocking of *makorokozas* into the fields, their activities, and the formalization of mining activities in the area by the government. In November 2008, the mining door was shut by the government, which had initially permitted the villagers to exploit the diamonds soon after their discovery. What is important to understand here is that the ruling party was faced with an election in one and half years just after the diamonds were

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discovered.[4] With a collapsing economy that had triggered massive unemployment (90% unemployment rate), mostly among the youths, the ruling government was presented with an opportunity in Chiadzwa to appease the restless population by allowing free exploitation of the recently discovered diamond fields. Thus, allowing the villagers and *makorokozas* to freely mine was a way of trying to garner votes for the upcoming presidential and general elections. However, after its re-election in July 2008 the government decided to drive the *makorokozas* out of the area under the pretext of restoration of order. By this point, the government had realized the economic potential of diamonds in the area; it was widely reported that almost 15 billion U.S. dollars' worth of potential government revenue had been lost through illegal diamond sales.[5]

During the exhibition's run, the Mutare Museum became a significant venue for debating social issues as well an actor in defining citizenship through a dialogical display that allowed the public to express their views on diamond mining. In the process, it repositioned itself. Instead of being the kind of traditional resource for streamlined public education that most history museums in Zimbabwe are, it became an arena of contemporary social interaction and dialogue. Moreover, it made a significant social impact, as the mining exhibition contributed towards the allocation of compensation of villagers displaced by the institution of formal diamond mining operations.

4 Interview with Farai Maguwu on March 15, 2013. Farai is the director of Centre for Natural Resources Governance, a non-governmental organization that lobbies for equity in natural resources access for the benefit of local communities.
5 Nathaniel Manheru, "15 billion Revenue Lost Through Illicit Diamond Dealings," *The Herald*, May 28, 2015.

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fig. 2.

A view showing the exhibition panels, display cases, and media screen.

In this article, I first provide an overview, then explore just how we addressed what is a contentious contemporary issue in Zimbabwe. In order to address the issue of "illegal" diamond mining, we consciously sought to incorporate multiple viewpoints; we also used the exhibition to stimulate new dialogues.

An Overview of the Exhibition

We mounted the exhibition on 5-1/2-foot by 4-foot upright boards that featured text panels, images, and captions organized around the exhibition's themes (fig. 2 & intro image). In addition to these, a multimedia display retold the stories of local villagers who were relocated from the diamond field to Arda Transau Farm in Odzi after the government moved in to set formal mining in the area. (Arda is a government farm located 75 miles north of Chiadzwa.) Each family was given a core house with four rooms; by the time of the ethnographic research for this exhibition, at least 300 families had been relocated.

The exhibition was divided into four thematic sections that chronicled the story:

1. In "*Ngoda* the Wealth Beneath Our Feet – The Illegal Mining Phase (2006–2008)," photographs and maps laid out the historical background of the Chiadzwa diamond fields and their invasion by "illegal" miners. Diamond mining in Chiadzwa began in 2006 when local villagers discovered the deposits. This discovery set off a diamond rush. By 2008, close to 10,000 people, mostly unemployed youths from across Zimbabwe, had descended on the mining fields (fig. 3).[6] This period was popularly known as *bvupfuwe* in local parlance, referring to the open and free mining for all without any restrictions by law enforcement agents. "*Ngoda* " then became a buzzword used by *makorokozas* (the "illegal" miners) in referring to the diamonds. It was derived from the word *ungoda chi-i*, a Shona phrase used by the traders to ask the *makorokozas* what they preferred in exchange for the diamonds. At the time, because the miners were not aware of the true value of the diamonds, there was a barter trade in which they exchanged the precious stones for commodity items such as sugar, cooking oil, mealie meal (a local staple), and rice. In November 2008, four months after the government elections, a police action code named *Operation Hakudzokwi* (No Return) was launched to stop the mining.

2. In the second section, "Formal Diamond Mining In Chiadzwa (2009 to Present Day)," text and images explored the start of a new era. With the end of "illegal" mining the government moved in to establish formal mines to harness the diamonds (fig.4). This panel depicted the formal mining technologies and essentially was designed to give the public an overview of the mining after the area was cleaned up.

3. The third section, "*Legal trade in Diamonds in Zimbabwe*," highlighted the economic benefits that Zimbabwe could potentially accrue because of the formalization of diamond mining in Chiadzwa. The revenue that would be generated from the selling of the diamonds was presented as the perfect opportunity to stabilize a collapsing economy. Zimbabwe was ranked the seventh biggest diamond-

6 Goldberg R. Chimonyo, Solomon Mungure, and Paul D. Scott, *The Social, Economic and Environmental Implications of Diamond Mining in Chiadzwa* (Mutare: Africa University, 2010), 12.

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fig. 3.

Makorokozas at the peak of illegal mining activities in Chiadzwa.

fig. 4.

The establishment of formal mining operations at Chiadzwa.

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producing nation in the world, according to the global rankings after the formal takeover.[7] This section of the exhibition was thus aimed at illustrating the economic benefits that diamond mining would bring to the country from formal mining and selling.

4. A multimedia section told the stories of villagers who were relocated from their homesteads in Chiadzwa to Arda Transau Farm in Odzi. We used audio and video narratives of the villagers, beamed through a projected wall display, to give visitors a chance to relate to the whole sequence of events, from the invasions to the formalization of mining and relocation of villagers. We purposefully used this technique to frame and reinforce identity and belief, and convey the sociocultural values of the relocated villagers, derived from their sense of place at the diamond mining area before they were moved to Arda Farm.

Our Approach – and the Impact

We repositioned the museum by embracing a new role of actively engaging the people. We highlighted the issues that undergird the mining of the diamonds through the lenses of those who were part of the story – the "illegal" miners, those who established formal mines, and the displaced and relocated villagers. To do this, we used a variety of specific research and techniques that enabled us to use multiple viewpoints in telling the story, which in turn opened up the gates for dialogue.

Analyzing News Sources We obtained much of our data for the exhibition through the analysis of news sources (which we also mined for images, which became part of the exhibition's storyline). Since the discovery of surface diamonds in Chiadzwa in 2006, there had been many newspaper and television reports on the invasion of mining fields by the *makorokozas*. To understand the different reports, we studied coverage in *The Manica Post* and various news clips from the national broadcaster, Zimbabwe Television (ZTV).[8] ZTV is a subsidiary of Zimbabwe Broadcasting Cooperation (ZBC), a state-controlled electronic media company that runs the only television station in the country together with four radio stations. Thus, the ruling government has complete control of the two news agencies.

A close analysis of these primary sources revealed the complexity of diamond mining by examining the different activities that were undertaken by *makorokozas*. In their initial reporting (when the diamonds were first discovered), the pro-government news agencies painted a picture of economic emancipation in support of activities by the "illegal" miners. However, soon after the ruling government was re-elected, the same news agencies started to vilify the makorokoza, labeling them criminals and diamond smugglers. Thus, when we analyzed the news sources, we kept an open mind about the different circumstances under which the mining was carried out: at first allowed, it was then criminalized. Furthermore, to get an objective view of the Chiadzwa story, we also considered reports from private media outlets, such as *The Daily News* and *The Standard*.[9]

Object Biographies Since tools were an important part of the story, we included them in the exhibition, not as mute artifacts but as objects that embodied and reflected certain ideas, knowledge, and skills, both for the villagers and for the *makorokozas*.[10] Various tools used during the "illegal mining" were collected from villagers and *makorokozas*, including picks, shovels, chisels, hammers, and carrying bags. We documented their biographies by recording interviews with their owners about how they were procured, used, and disposed of when the mining came to an end. The interviewed community members and *makorokozas* were thus able to give detailed biographical information of how they used these tools, and how

7 Cletus Mushanawani, "Operation Hakudzokwi; a success," *The Manica Post*, November 21, 2017, 2008.

8 *The Manica Post* is a weekly newspaper that specifically covers news in the Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe.

9 *The Daily News* and *The Standard* are two private newspapers owned by the Associated Newspaper Group.

10 Peter van Mensch and Leontine Meijer-van. Mensch, *New Trends in Museology II* (Celje: Muzej novejse zgodovine, 2015), 19.

they wanted the techno-social stories associated with them to be represented in the exhibition. Thus, textual meanings of the objects were interpreted together with human agency.[11]

Interviews Archaeologists no longer have the license to tell people their past or adjudicate upon the correct way of protecting or using heritage.[12] Thus, to obtain information on the contentious issue of relocations and the cultural destruction it caused, we carried out ethnographic interviews with the affected community members. I have argued elsewhere that upon the attainment of political independence in Zimbabwe, the indigenous population expected an about-turn in the ways in which their ethnographic collections were being presented in museums.[13] Debates focused on when they would be accorded respect, and how indigenous people would be consulted, involved, and engaged in setting up museum displays.[14] Thus, we framed and designed the diamond mining exhibition with a view of giving the community a voice in the displays, with limited curatorial intervention. By balancing curatorial formulations with community aspirations, the exhibition reflected shared voices. As museologists Peter van Mensch and Léontine Meijer-van Mensch argue, the concept of guardianship must be embraced by museums because it prioritizes shared ownership where museums and creator/user communities share responsibility in developing exhibitions.[15] Using the shared voice approach, we interviewed the villagers who were relocated from Chiadzwa by the government in paving way for the establishment of the formal mines, and allowed them to express their honest views. Their story, which was shared in the exhibition, revealed that contentious issues surrounding the relocation. People who had lived in the area for more than 70 years lost their homesteads, leaving behind their heritage in the form of graves and various local cultural practices. The issue of compensation also came out clearly, and we were told about the money they were promised by the government (which by the time we were doing research for the exhibition had not yet been paid).

An Auto-Ethnographic Approach We also used an auto-ethnographic approach in collecting data for the exhibition, which came out of my own participation in *chikorokoza* ("illegal" diamond mining). I had been involved in *chikorokoza* between 2007 and 2008, when alluvial diamond deposits were discovered. My participation in *chikorokoza* was for money, as I was among the many unemployed youth graduates who trickled into the area at the time of the invasion. My experience facilitated setting up the exhibition in a positive way, because I was aware of the social and technical practices associated with *chikorokoza*.

Observations As part of the data collection phase, our research team observed the actual mining that was instituted by the government after the *makorokozas* were chased away from the mining fields in November 2008. The exhibition research team visited and observed the technical operations at the government-established, formal mines. As part of the research, we took high-quality pictures so that we could produce a comprehensive pictorial record of the formal mining. Permission to photograph for this research was granted by the Ministry of Mine and Mineral Development, which was the authority responsible for the mining and selling of the diamonds. These photographs were juxtaposed with the *makorokoza* pictures in the final exhibition at Mutare Museum.

11 Marcia Dobres and John Robb, "Agency in archaeology; Paradigm or platitude" in *Agency in Archaeology*, ed. Marcia Dobres and John Robb (London: Routledge, 2000), 1–17.
12 Lynn Meskell, *Cosmopolitan Archaeologies* (Duke University Press, 2009), 3.
13 Njabulo Chipangura, "Rethinking the practice of collecting and displaying ethnographic objects at Mutare Museum" in *Museums and the Idea of Historical Progress*, eds. Rooksana Omar, Bongani Ndhlovu, Laura Gibson, and Shahid Vawda, (Cape Town: Iziko Museums Publications, 2014), 190.
14 Peter Ucko, "Museum and sites: cultures of the past within education – Zimbabwe some ten years on" in *The Presented Past, Heritage, Museum and Education*, ed. Brian Molyneaux (London: Routledge, 1994), 54.
15 Peter van Mensch and Leontine Meijer van-Mensch, *New Trends in Museology II* (Celje: Muzej novejse zgodovine, 2015), 20.

Using the Exhibition to Stimulate New Dialogues

Overall, the diamond mining exhibition at the Mutare Museum successfully allowed for an open dialogue between the community, the government, and civic groups. This we achieved by inviting these groups to the official opening of the exhibition. Out of the engagements, civic rights groups challenged the government to process the financial compensations for the villagers in a timely manner. The relocated villagers themselves also took this opportunity to share their grievances with Governor of the Province, who was the guest of honor at the opening ceremony. In turn, the governor assured the villagers that the government would consider the issue as a matter of urgency. The other dialogue that emerged out this exhibition was on why the government, through the Ministry of Mines, had given Chinese companies diamond mining rights at the expense of local mining consortiums.

We regard these kinds of conversations as having been stimulated by the exhibition's treatment of the illegal diamond mining story, which we had blended with the issue of relocations. Most of the dialogue emerged as the guest of honor was being taken through the exhibition by our marketing officer. The video and audio recordings, which recounted the stories of the relocations, particularly aroused deep emotions, as most villagers still felt hard done by the government. Member of both the private and state media who witnessed the dialogue that emanated from the exhibition also took the story of compensation to the front pages of their publications.[16] The result of the engagement process meant that the museum, long regarded as a repository of old and derelict objects, was now seen as the nerve center for tackling a contemporary and contentious subject.

The Exhibition's Impact

To evaluate the impact of *Ngoda the Wealth Beneath Our Feet*, we carried out interviews with visitors who were coming to the museum to see it. We also evaluated the visitor comments book to gather views on how the public was rating the exhibition.[17] Judging by the comments, and the sheer number of visits that were recorded during the duration of this exhibition (May 18, 2012 to November 31, 2012), we felt that we had managed to open a dialogue on diamond mining in Chiadzwa.[18] In the temporary exhibition's six-month run, a total of 10,000 people had viewed it. Such a figure was extraordinarily high given that the total number of visitors for the preceding year at the Mutare Museum was slightly around 2,000.[19] Apart from schoolchildren who came to see the exhibition because of its educational value, which closely interrogated some of the history and geography issues in their curriculum,[20] visitors came from the mining companies, civic organizations, and the local museum community. We felt that we had presented what Ivan Karp and Corinne Kratz call the "interrogative museum," which embraces a fundamental movement away "from exhibitions that seem to deliver a lecture – which (to spin out of the classificatory scheme) might be declarative, indicative, or even imperative in mood – to a more dialogue-based sense of asking a series of questions."[21]

And, because of its public portrayal of the contentious issues that surrounded diamond mining and the loss of cultural and land rights by villagers, this exhibition managed to generate interest that translated into action by the government. By creating dialogue around the delays in the compensation of the relocated villagers – which emerged out of the dialogue stimulated by the exhibition – just weeks after the governor officially opened *Ngoda the Wealth Beneath Our Feet*, the villagers started to receive financial compensation from the government. Each family received a relocation fee of $10,000 and was entitled to receive $1,000 for each

16 Bernard Chiketo, "The Diamond Mining Exhibition opened at the Mutare Museum," *The Daily News*, May 28, 2012.

17 The Diamond Exhibition Visitor Comments Book, the Mutare Museum, May to August 2012.

18 Interview with visitors who had just viewed the exhibition, May 23, 2012.

19 Lloyd Makonya, "Diamond Exhibition Visitors Analysis," the Mutare Museum, September 2012.

20 Interview with Ms. W. Mantiziba, a geography teacher at Mutare Girls High School, June 26, 2012.

21 Ivan Karp and Corinne Kratz, "The Interrogative Museum," in *Translating Knowledge: Global Perspectives on Museum Community*, ed. Raymond Silverman (New York: Routledge, 2015), 5.

grave that was going to be exhumed and reburied in a designated cemetery at Arda Farm (all compensation was in U.S. dollars).[22]

The other action that we regard as having been directly stimulated by this dialogue was the creation of the Community Share Ownership Trust (CSOT), formed by the Zimbabwean government and the Chinese mining companies. It emerged from the conversations that we had with civic and social groups; villagers included were not happy with the Chinese mining companies that were benefiting from their ancestral mineral resources and failing to develop the source areas.[23] In October 2012, the CSOT seeded $500,000 towards community development projects,[24] including the upgrading of roads and the construction of new schools and health facilities at Arda Transau and Chiadzwa areas.

Conclusion

Despite its success, our exhibition received its fair share of criticism from some visitors who felt that the textual descriptions on the panels were too long.[25] Most visitors would have preferred to see more pictures, especially on the "illegal diamond mining" period, and fewer narratives. Some visitors were dismayed by the absence of real diamonds in the exhibition, however this had been deliberated during the research and design phase of the exhibition, and we dropped it from the storyline because of security concerns.[26] In some ways, however, reflecting on the criticism only highlights the growing need for museums to share authority with communities when planning, researching, and designing exhibitions that have a connection with communities and issues that directly affect them.[27]

Overall, the key lesson that emerged out of our work was that an exhibition could stimulate dialogue that would have a positive impact on society. Out of this, the significance of a museum as an institution that defines citizenship came to the fore, with most people now appreciating that the Mutare Museum is more than just a collector of old objects. ▮

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22 Interview with Tawanda Mufute on April 28, 2012 at Arda Transau, the new site for the relocated villagers.
23 Interview with Sekuru Gwirindi of Banda Village in Chiadzwa, June 2, 2012.
24 "The Marange–Zimunya Community Share Ownership Trust," *The Manica Post*, May 7-14, 2013
25 Lloyd Makonya, "Diamond Exhibition Visitors Analysis," the Mutare Museum, September 2012.
26 Personal communication with Ephraim Mutsiwawo, Regional Security Officer at the Mutare Museum, April 10, 2012.
27 Laurajane Smith, *Representing Enslavement and Abolition in Museums: Ambiguous Engagements* (London: Routledge, 2011), 5.