# Return to the Source – Namibia (RTS) – AEPC Grant Application

## Organisational Profile

The Museums Association of Namibia (MAN) is the lead applicant and heritage anchor for the *Return to the Source – Namibia (RTS)* project. Established in 1990, MAN is a registered non-profit, non-governmental organization with over 30 years of experience in heritage preservation and museum development across Namibia. MAN serves as the umbrella body for all museums and heritage institutions in the country, guided by its mission of “making Namibian museums matter.” Over the decades, the organization has implemented numerous projects to safeguard both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, often in partnership with international bodies. Notably, MAN has a strong track record managing grant-funded initiatives – including past collaborations supported by the EU and UNESCO – demonstrating robust administrative, financial, and logistical capacity.

As a national heritage NGO, MAN brings deep expertise and credibility to RTS. The organization has been at the forefront of community-based heritage work, from establishing regional cultural centers to curating mobile exhibitions that bring history to rural communities. MAN actively champions marginalized and underrepresented histories in Namibia. For example, it recently supported an exhibition on colonial-era resistance that shed light on the very narratives the RTS project will expand upon. This legacy of promoting untold stories positions MAN as an ideal lead for a project focused on Ovaherero genocide memory.

MAN’s operational capacity is well-established. It maintains a permanent secretariat in Windhoek with experienced staff and is governed by a board of heritage professionals and community representatives. For RTS, MAN will dedicate a part-time Project Coordinator to oversee day-to-day management, based at its office. The organization’s financial officer will supervise grant funds, ensuring compliance with all AEPC requirements. Having successfully managed multi-year, multi-partner projects in the past, MAN has the systems in place for transparent accounting, reporting, and evaluation. MAN clearly meets all AEPC eligibility criteria.

In its role as lead, MAN will ensure that the project remains grounded in heritage best practices and that community relationships are handled with respect. MAN’s nationwide network is a major asset for RTS’s outreach: through its member museums and cultural associations, it can disseminate calls for participants and later help share the project’s outputs. Additionally, MAN’s partnerships with government bodies (such as the National Museum and National Archives) and local communities will facilitate access to heritage resources and advice. For instance, MAN can draw on its contacts in the Ovitoto area (where Okandjira is located) to engage traditional authorities and elders as project advisors.

By leading the RTS Narrative Cluster, MAN is expanding its own mission to a regional scale. This project aligns perfectly with MAN’s core objectives of education, cultural preservation, and community engagement. MAN’s commitment to inclusion and diversity – exemplified by striving for gender balance in its programs and improving accessibility in Namibian museums – will be carried into the RTS project. In sum, the Museums Association of Namibia provides the necessary institutional stability, heritage expertise, and operational readiness to successfully implement *Return to the Source – Namibia* in line with AEPC’s standards.

## Heritage Description

**Heritage Narrative and Significance:** *Return to the Source – Namibia (RTS)* centers on an underrepresented but profoundly significant chapter of Southern African heritage: the 1904–1908 Ovaherero and Nama genocide and its living legacy. Over a century ago, German colonial forces in German South West Africa (now Namibia) carried out what is widely regarded as the first genocide of the 20th century, decimating the Ovaherero and Nama peoples. This cataclysmic event has left enduring scars on the land and its people. Survivors of the genocide – and subsequent generations – dispersed across Namibia and into neighboring Botswana and South Africa, carrying with them silenced stories of loss, survival, and resilience. One such story is anchored in the village of **Okandjira** in the Ovitoto region of central Namibia. Okandjira witnessed a major battle in 1904, where local Herero fighters (including, according to oral history, a number of women who took up arms alongside men) resisted German troops. In the aftermath, the village became a place of refuge for surviving families.

Today, Okandjira and its surrounding landscape serve as a *living archive* of this history – an open-air repository of memory. Scattered across the area are unmarked graves of ancestors and sites like the legendary “poisoned well” where retreating fighters sabotaged water sources. Even a nearby ancient Omumborombonga tree (sacred in Herero cosmology as an ancestral tree of life) stands as a symbolic witness to the past. For the Ovaherero people, both those in Namibia and those in diaspora communities, such places are **crystallized spaces of memory** – at once sites of profound trauma and symbols of cultural survival. Elders in Okandjira still perform commemorative rituals and share oral histories to honor the events of 1904, keeping the memory alive within the community. However, much of this heritage remains marginalized in official narratives and national history education. Unlike better-known historical events, the stories of Okandjira and the broader genocide have not been adequately recorded in textbooks or memorialized in national monuments. As a result, many in the younger generations – especially those born and raised outside Namibia – risk losing touch with this aspect of their identity as elders pass on and oral traditions fade.

**Transnational and Contemporary Relevance:** A key aspect of this heritage is its transnational nature. The legacy of the Ovaherero genocide transcends the borders of Namibia. In the early 20th century, thousands of genocide survivors fled or were displaced into Botswana (then Bechuanaland) and South Africa, establishing enduring diaspora communities. To this day, significant populations of Herero descendants live in western Botswana (for example, around Maun and Ghanzi) and in parts of South Africa, maintaining elements of their culture while also assimilating into new homelands. These communities carried the trauma and memory of the genocide across borders, creating a network of shared history that spans three countries. Survivors’ descendants in Botswana and South Africa continued to practice traditions like annual memorial services and kept alive the Otjiherero language and oral literature in exile, though often in fragmented forms. Yet younger members of the diaspora sometimes grow up with only fragments of these stories. Some might know that their great-grandparents came “from Namibia during the war,” but not the full narrative or significance of events like the Battle of Okandjira.

This scattered heritage is now at a turning point. Internationally, there is growing recognition of the 1904–08 genocide – the German government only in 2021 formally acknowledged it as genocide and issued an apology – which has sparked new discussions about historical justice and remembrance. However, from the perspective of the affected communities, much of the storytelling and interpretation of this history still needs to be driven by African voices. *Return to the Source* addresses that need by facilitating an **intergenerational, intercultural reclaiming** of the narrative. By bringing together Namibian, Botswana, and South African participants, the project quite literally enables a “return” – younger diaspora artists will journey to the source of their history in Okandjira and reconnect with the land and its stories. Through this process, they and their Namibian counterparts will unearth shared memories and explore their relevance today.

The heritage narrative of RTS is not a static, closed chapter of the past; it is a living story with contemporary resonance. Themes emerging from the Ovaherero genocide speak to universal and current issues: the experience of **forced displacement** and the long shadow it casts on refugee communities; the struggle for **recognition and reparative justice** (as debates with Germany continue); the role of **cultural resilience and memory** in healing intergenerational trauma; and the importance of **land and environment** in indigenous identities (many Herero descendants in Botswana, for example, still feel spiritual ties to the waterholes and graves in Namibia). Moreover, the gender dimension of this heritage – such as the valorous but overlooked role of women in the resistance, or the matriarchal transmission of memory through storytelling and song – links to contemporary movements for women’s empowerment and historical inclusion. By highlighting women’s experiences during and after the genocide, RTS helps ensure gender equality in the telling of the heritage.

In sum, the heritage that *Return to the Source – Namibia* engages with is both deeply rooted in a specific locale (Okandjira and the broader ancestral landscape of the Herero people) and expansively transnational. Its cultural significance lies in giving voice to a community’s trauma and endurance that have long been ignored or silenced. Its contemporary relevance is evident in the ongoing quest for healing and justice: descendants across Southern Africa are still processing the impact of those events over a century later, and seeking ways to pass on their heritage meaningfully to the next generation. This project will shine a light on this **untold heritage**, increasing its visibility within the region and beyond. By doing so, it contributes to a broader understanding of Southern Africa’s history and identities, and fosters dialogue on how remembering the past can inform a more just and inclusive present.

*[PLACEHOLDER: Archive photograph of Ovaherero community or Okandjira historical site to be inserted]*

## Proposed Themes

The RTS Narrative Cluster will delve into several interrelated themes drawn from the Ovaherero genocide heritage. These thematic focuses ensure that the project’s creative outputs cover a rich spectrum of perspectives, bridging historical experiences and present-day reflections. Our preliminary thematic framework includes:

* **Routes of Exile & Networks of Return:** This theme examines the movement and connections of the Ovaherero people across borders, highlighting how kinship and cultural networks survived displacement. After 1908, Ovaherero families were scattered, yet many maintained ties through oral genealogy, letters, and later, cross-border visits and reunions. Untold story elements here include the **family networks that endured separation for generations** and the traditional leadership structures that continued to link communities in Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa despite colonial borders. We will explore how a sense of belonging persisted in exile – for example, through shared clan histories and rituals maintained even in exile. In the modern era, these old networks find new life via digital means: today’s Herero descendants use social media (e.g. WhatsApp groups) to reconnect relatives across continents, and annual diaspora gatherings serve as reunions for the scattered community. Artistically, **Routes of Exile & Networks of Return** offers a wealth of interdisciplinary possibilities. For instance, one narrative might be a documentary or docu-drama following a young woman from Botswana tracing her lineage back to an Okandjira family – a literal and symbolic journey home. Another creative concept could be an interactive family-tree exhibit where visitors navigate connections between communities, with audio of praise poetry and stories from each locale. By focusing on this theme, the project will illuminate the resilience of a people who, though uprooted, wove new webs of community across time and space.
* **Land, Memory & Healing:** This theme centers on the profound relationship between people, place, and the process of healing historical trauma. For the Ovaherero, land is not just a backdrop to history but an active repository of memory and a source of spiritual sustenance. **Sacred sites** – such as battlefields, grave sites, and the revered Omumborombonga tree – were preserved in collective memory even when communities could not physically access them. During decades of exile, knowledge about these places (their names, the stories attached to them) was passed down through generations, functioning as a compass that kept the diaspora oriented toward home. Within this theme, we will explore untold facets like the role of women as custodians of cultural and ecological knowledge during displacement (for instance, women who carried traditional healing plant knowledge from Okandjira’s region into exile and passed those remedies down to their children). The theme also brings in the idea of environmental and cultural restoration: now that some descendants are able to return or visit ancestral lands, there are efforts to rehabilitate those spaces – tending neglected graveyards or holding cleansing ceremonies to symbolically “heal” the land from violence. Contemporary applications of **Land, Memory & Healing** include drawing on traditional environmental stewardship in today’s climate justice movements, and using communal rituals as therapy for group trauma. In terms of artistic expression, this theme could inspire immersive and emotive works. One idea is a **sound installation** that captures the “voices” of heritage landscapes: imagine ambient recordings from Okandjira’s hills – the wind, bird calls, rustling trees – layered with distant hymns or laments, conveying how the land itself carries echoes of the past. Alternatively, participants might create a performance art piece or short film that reenacts an old ritual of reconciliation on the very soil where conflict occurred, inviting present-day community members to take part. For example, a filmed re-creation of a traditional Herero cleansing ceremony at the “poisoned well,” intercut with descendant testimonies about reconnection to that place, would powerfully blend past and present. **Land, Memory & Healing** as a theme ensures the project addresses not only historical events, but also the ongoing journey of recovery and the environment’s role in cultural identity.
* **Women’s Voices & Intergenerational Memory:** A critical yet often overlooked narrative thread is the role of women in both the history and the remembrance of the genocide. During the 1904–08 war, women were not merely bystanders – many fought in battles (including at Okandjira) or served as spies, couriers, and healers – yet colonial accounts omitted these contributions. This theme aims to surface those **women’s stories of resistance and resilience**, ensuring a gender-inclusive heritage narrative. Equally important is how women have been the backbone of preserving memory over generations: mothers and grandmothers in exile recounted where they came from and kept cultural traditions (dress, songs, recipes) alive under hardship. Making **Women’s Voices & Intergenerational Memory** a core theme ensures female perspectives drive many of the project’s stories. Potential outputs could be, for example, a short fiction film following a present-day Herero woman discovering her great-grandmother’s wartime heroism and drawing strength from that legacy. Through such a work, the project would highlight not only what happened to women during the genocide, but also how women today are reclaiming and retelling that history. This directly supports the cross-cutting goal of gender equality by centering women’s experiences and ensuring female creatives lead parts of the narrative development.

Collectively, these themes ensure a holistic yet multifaceted portrayal of the heritage, spanning journeys of exile and return, the healing bond between people and land, and intimate intergenerational stories. They invite interdisciplinary artistic exploration (film, performance, digital media, etc.) and align with AEPC’s goals for narrative innovation. Participants may blend thematic elements across their projects – the framework is flexible to encourage creative innovation while staying grounded in the core heritage narrative. Ultimately, this thematic approach will yield a suite of co-created narratives that are emotionally powerful, inclusive, and culturally resonant with communities, keeping this heritage alive and relevant for new audiences.

## Collaboration Plan

**Motivation and Approach:** Our project is built on a collaborative model spanning countries, disciplines, and communities, because this heritage is best explored collectively by uniting many voices and expertise. The three-country cluster (Namibia, Botswana, South Africa) is a natural choice given that the descendant communities span these countries. By pairing heritage experts with artists and blending local knowledge with creative innovation, RTS ensures all collaborators learn from each other. We even piloted this approach in 2024: a small workshop brought Namibian artists together with Okandjira’s community to create a short film, reinforcing our confidence in scaling up this co-creation model under AEPC. *[PLACEHOLDER: Photo from 2024 pilot]*

**Artist Recruitment and Participation:** We will recruit a cohort of approximately 9 emerging creatives (from Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa) through an open call. The call will emphasize inclusion: we aim for at least 50% women participants and will encourage creatives with disabilities to apply (with assurances of providing necessary accommodations during the project). We also seek a mix of disciplines – film, visual, literary and performing artists – to foster interdisciplinary collaboration. Selected artists will form a collaborative team working together throughout the project. The lab environment will encourage peer learning and shared creative ownership, rather than competition.

**Key Partners and Roles:** We have assembled a partnership that combines institutional strength, creative leadership, and community roots. Each partner has a clear role:  
- **Museums Association of Namibia (MAN)** – *Lead & Coordinator*: MAN oversees project management and administration. It will host the Project Coordinator, manage finances/reporting, and ensure heritage best practices are followed. MAN also leverages its network to secure necessary venues, archives, and community support in Namibia.  
- **Old Location Films** – *Creative Lead*: Led by **Perivi Katjavivi**, Old Location Films drives the artistic vision. They will design the narrative lab curriculum, mentor participants, and supervise production of the films and other outputs. By contributing their professional crew and equipment, they ensure the co-productions are high-quality.  
- **Mucii Pictures** – *Workshop Facilitator & Mentor*: Led by **Fibby Kioria**, Mucii Pictures enriches the training and mentorship aspect of RTS. Fibby will co-facilitate the workshops and provide mentorship in story development and production. Mucii brings extra coordination capacity and a pan-African perspective to the cluster.  
- **Ovaherero Genocide Foundation (OGF)** – *Community Liaison*: OGF (with representation in Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa) connects the project with grassroots descendant communities. They advise on cultural sensitivities and assist with community outreach in Botswana and South Africa, ensuring the project remains accountable to descendant communities.

**European Collaboration:** In line with the Africa-Europe partnership spirit of the program, we are open to European contributions to our cluster. We plan to invite a European expert – for instance a German historian or artist – as a guest advisor during our Narrative Development Retreat. This exchange will enrich the dialogue and aligns with AEPC’s goal of fostering Africa–Europe cultural partnerships.

## Outreach Strategy

**Local Presentation (Namibia):** We will hold a final multi-day heritage festival in Okandjira (the source community), featuring screenings of the co-created films, live performances, and facilitated dialogues. The event will be co-designed with the community – incorporating traditional ceremonies (to honor ancestors) and local cultural groups – to ensure it is culturally appropriate and inclusive. By hosting the showcase in Okandjira, the community at the heart of the story is directly involved in witnessing and discussing their history. Additionally, to engage national stakeholders and a wider public, we will host a follow-up screening in Windhoek at a national cultural venue, attracting media attention and policymakers for greater visibility of the narratives.

**Regional Outreach (Botswana & South Africa):** RTS will also bring the narrative to communities in Botswana and South Africa through one public screening event in each country. In collaboration with local Herero associations, we plan to organize screenings and moderated discussions in places like Gaborone (Botswana) and Pretoria (South Africa), where many Ovaherero descendants live. These events will mirror the Namibia presentations on a smaller scale: showing the films and then holding dialogues led by community representatives. We aim to have some of the Namibian team or Okandjira representatives present to personally connect with the diaspora audiences. This regional outreach ensures the shared heritage is acknowledged and discussed across all three countries, reinforcing transnational community bonds.

**Community Engagement & Media:** Throughout the project we ensure continuous community involvement. Okandjira residents are consulted in planning and will see their input reflected in the final festival (e.g. local youth helping to host the event). All events are designed to be family-friendly, encouraging attendance across generations. To extend reach beyond on-site audiences, we will collaborate with media and online platforms: for instance, airing snippets on local radio/TV, and uploading the subtitled films online. We also plan to submit the films to regional film festivals and explore museum exhibitions, so the narratives continue to find audiences regionally and internationally.

**Cross-Cutting Measures:** We have integrated key cross-cutting principles into our outreach activities:  
- **Gender Equality:** Women are prominently involved in presenting and facilitating the events, and many project narratives themselves uplift women’s stories, ensuring gender-balanced visibility.  
- **Inclusion:** Events will be accessible to persons with disabilities. Venues are chosen or adapted for wheelchair access, sign-language interpretation will be provided for dialogues, and information materials will be available in accessible formats, so that all community members can participate fully.  
- **Environmental Sustainability:** We minimize environmental impact by using solar power for outdoor screenings, avoiding single-use plastics, recycling waste, and offsetting carbon emissions from necessary travel.  
- **Human Rights Approach:** All outreach is guided by principles of participation, equality, and respect. By centering descendant communities in the telling and sharing of their own heritage, we uphold their cultural rights and foster intercultural dialogue in the spirit of AEPC’s human-rights-based approach.

## Budget Summary

The proposed budget for RTS is **€55,000**, which will cover the entire 18-month project. All costs are allocated to eligible activities as per AEPC guidelines (project staff, events, co-productions, travel, outreach, accessibility, etc.), with no funds requested for ineligible expenses or general overheads. A summary of the main budget categories is provided below:

| **Budget Category** | **Amount (EUR)** |
| --- | --- |
| Project Coordination & Staffing | 10,000 |
| Artists & Facilitators Stipends | 12,000 |
| Travel & Accommodation | 8,000 |
| Workshops & Events | 8,000 |
| Production of Co-Created Works | 10,000 |
| Outreach & Community Engagement | 3,000 |
| Monitoring, Evaluation & Contingency | 4,000 |
| **Total** | **55,000** |

Each category is carefully justified to ensure cost-effectiveness and maximum impact. For instance, **Coordination & Staffing** includes a part-time Project Coordinator and necessary administrative support to manage the cluster. **Artists & Facilitators Stipends** will compensate the creative participants for their time in workshops and production, and cover fees for key mentors (ensuring we attract high-quality expertise). **Travel & Accommodation** is budgeted to bring participants from Botswana and South Africa to Namibia (and to the regional events) and to cover transport and lodging for on-site activities like the Okandjira retreat – leveraging cost-saving measures like group transport and community guesthouses. **Workshops & Events** covers the logistics of the two-week retreat, joint working sessions, and the final presentation events (venue setup, equipment rental, catering, etc.), with community contributions (venues, volunteers) helping to reduce costs. **Production of Co-Created Works** will fund the making of the short films and other outputs – including any needed equipment hire, props, or post-production services – allocated flexibly across the teams to ensure each project can be realized. **Outreach & Community Engagement** provides resources for the Botswana and South Africa screenings (e.g. venue hire, promotional materials), as well as accessibility accommodations (such as sign language interpreters) and sustainability actions (like renewable energy setup for outdoor screenings). Finally, **Monitoring, Evaluation & Contingency** sets aside a small portion for impact evaluation tools and an emergency buffer (~5–7% of the budget) to handle unforeseen expenses, which adds to the project’s resilience.

In-kind contributions and partnerships will augment these grant funds. For example, MAN will provide office space and utilities, Old Location Films will contribute some film equipment and editing facilities, and local community partners may donate venue use or volunteer labor. These contributions are not monetized in the budget but increase our cost efficiency. Overall, the €55,000 budget is sufficient to implement *Return to the Source – Namibia* at a modest scale, covering all critical needs while adhering to AEPC’s eligible cost guidelines. We will maintain diligent financial management and reporting through MAN’s systems to ensure transparency and accountability for every Euro.