



Ghana National Committee for UNESCO
Memory of the World



UNESCO MEMORY OF THE WORLD PROGRAMME FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

1. What is the ‘Memory of the World’ (MoW) Programme?

It is UNESCO's flagship programme that aims to ensure the preservation and dissemination of the world's documentary heritage, including valuable archive holdings and library and museum collections worldwide. MoW alerts governments, decision-makers and the public that the preservation of, and easy and universal access to, documentary heritage of all kinds and ages need increased efforts, especially in the digital environment.

2. What are the objectives of the MoW Programme?

MoW relates to the world's documentary heritage with these Objectives:

- To facilitate preservation, by the most appropriate techniques, of the world's past, present and future documentary heritage.
- To assist universal access to documentary heritage through encouraging institutions and individuals holding documentary heritage to make it accessible as widely and equitably as possible, in analogue and/or digital form, as appropriate.
- To increase awareness worldwide of the existence and significance of documentary heritage and thereby foster dialogue and mutual understanding between people and cultures.
- To promote the Programme and its products to the widest possible public

3. What is the Memory of the World (MoW) Register?

The UNESCO Memory of the World Programme Register is a catalogue of documentary heritage of outstanding world significance. It identifies, preserves, and promotes access to records such as manuscripts, archives, audiovisual materials, and rare publications that are considered vital to humanity's collective memory.

UNESCO has three levels of Registers: the National, Regional and International. The Registers are based on clearly defined criteria for assessing the cultural value of documentary heritage based on MOW guidelines. These Registers have criteria to be satisfied to qualify the document to be added to, that is, **inscribed** in the Register. Inscription is not permanent, and removal is possible

if the criteria are no longer met after the inscription. These criteria relate to influence, time, place, people, subject/theme, form, style, and social value.

4. What is a National Register?

A National Register comprises documentary heritage of national significance. It is not an inferior version of the Memory of the World Register, but a fundamental tool for safeguarding the documentary heritage of a nation. Every nation has documentary heritage which is integral to the memory of that nation. Its preservation is as important to them as the preservation of world heritage. This is because not all documentary heritage is of world significance. A National register must be based on clearly defined criteria for assessing the cultural significance of documentary heritage. The National Committee of the MoW Programme publishes the National Register.

5. What is the National and Regional MoW Committee in Africa?

A National MoW Committee is a body established within a country to identify, nominate, review and safeguard documentary heritage, and to coordinate national activities under the MoW Programme. The National MoW Committee must be accredited by the UNESCO National Commission. Ghana has a National Committee.

A Regional MoW Committee in Africa, known as the Africa Regional Committee of the MoW Program (ARCMoW) operates at the continental level to coordinate cooperation among African countries, review nominations, promote capacity-building, and support the development of the regional register.

6. What are the functions of a National Committee?

The National MoW Committee is a national coordination framework and mechanisms for the Memory of the World Programme. and is encouraged to implement the five key strategies: (Identification of documentary heritage, Raising awareness, Preservation, Access, and Structures, status and relationships). The formation of a National MOW committee in every country where it is practicable is encouraged and is a strategic goal. The role and range of activities vary according to resources or circumstances. The National MoW Committee operates within the framework and objectives specified in the Memory of the World General Guidelines.

The National MoW Committee is responsible for the overall management and monitoring of the Programme in the country. It includes initiating and/or supporting coordinating receiving and assessing nominations for the international, regional and national registers, publicity, promotion and awareness raising, and evolving cooperation with the government, professional associations and custodial institutions at the national level and establishing the National Memory of the World register. National MoW Committees are autonomous entities with their own terms of reference and their own rules of membership and succession. In addition, each National Committee sets up its own sub-committees and will ensure the following initiatives to ensure the achievement of its mission: encourage, receive and assess nominations of documentary heritage for inclusion in it;

work in close cooperation with governmental and non-governmental organizations in the country in developing the national register and contributing to the international register; raise awareness of and promote the MoW Programme in the country; encourage and seek government and private sector sponsorship for specific MoW projects and activities in the country; maintain regular contact with the Secretariat of UNESCO.

7. What is a “document” in documentary heritage?

A document is any recorded information created or received by individuals or institutions in the course of human activity and preserved as evidence or for reference. It may exist in written, printed, audiovisual, or digital form, and is defined by its content, context, and structure. It is preservable and usually movable. The content may comprise signs or codes (such as text), images (still or moving) and sounds, which can be copied or migrated.

10. What is documentary heritage?

Documentary heritage is a collective term used by MoW to refer to a single document of any kind, or a number of documents that form a logical and coherent group (such as a collection, a holding or an archival fonds). The size of the group does not matter; what holds the group together does. The documents must have enduring value and significance to a society, culture, or humanity as a whole, and whose deterioration or loss would be a harmful impoverishment. It provides the means for understanding social, political, collective as well as personal history. It can help to underpin good governance and sustainable development. For each State, its documentary heritage reflects its memory and identity and thus contributes to determining its place in the global community. It includes manuscripts, archives, rare books, audiovisual materials, and digital records that provide evidence of historical, cultural, scientific, or social developments.

11. What are Documentary Heritage Materials in broad terms and how do you identify them?

Historical manuscripts collection - include Historical papers and works from private organization and individuals connected with the country’s endeavours; Historical manuscripts that the National Archives keeps including writings of Missionaries, Religious institutions, Traders, Renowned individuals connected with the country’s history; Comprehensive Collection of published literature on the country including Books, Magazines, Newsletters, Newspapers, Government Gazettes, Hansards, Reports, Maps and Cinematographic collection, preserved in accordance with the National Archives Act of the country.

Public archives collection - records of enduring value which originate from public institutions and they include Minutes, Standing Orders, Agreements, Licenses, Regulations, Policies, Reports, Correspondences, Court cases, Opinions, Notices and Photographs. These materials need to be preserved in accordance with the National Archives Act.

Documentary heritage collections - in different media forms ranging from paper and other traditional materials, Photographic and micrographic materials, Magnetic materials, Optical materials. The form may be both oral and written and could be in different languages.

Printed and published works in accordance with the Publications Act.

The bottom line is any material of national, regional or global significance.

12. How can you locate Documentary Heritage Materials?

Raising awareness and institutions engaging in nominations to MoW Registers; Connecting memory institutions and improving their networking; Developing standardised protocols for sharing catalogues; Having a national committee to coordinate the identification, nomination for registers and preservation responsibilities in the country; Building the capacities of staff by training and guidance to conserve, preserve and store documentary heritage materials; and Having enough resources committed to preservation and access.

13. What is an inscription on the MoW Register?

An inscription on the MoW Register is the formal recognition of a documentary heritage item that has been evaluated and accepted as having met UNESCO's selection criteria for significance, authenticity, and integrity at the international, regional, or national level. Inscribed items are recorded in official MoW registers and benefit from increased visibility, protection, and access initiatives.

14. How do you make a Nomination for Inscription in the Register?

Appropriate Forms need to be completed; Any person or organisation, including governments and NGOs, can nominate a document; Priority for nominations to the world register is given to those that are made through regional or national MoW committees, and for heritage under threat, and Single or Joint nominations are allowed; two per country every two years (international register only); Joint nominations (two or more countries) have no limit

15. What are the Items that can be submitted?

Textual Items including Manuscripts, Books, Newspapers, etc; **Non-Textual items** including Drawings, Prints, Maps and Music; Audiovisual Heritage including Film, Discs, Tapes and Photographs; and Virtual documents including Websites, Electronic Documents. The Carriers include Papers, Plastic, Papyrus, Parchment, Palm Leaves and Electronic/digital.

16. What are the components of an inscription Form (Documentary Heritage Inscription)?

A standard MoW inscription includes:

- Title of the documentary heritage
- Description and identification of the material
- Origin and provenance
- Justification of significance (world, regional, or national value)
- Authenticity and integrity
- Rarity and uniqueness
- State of preservation and risk factors
- Ownership and custodial information
- Access and management plans.

17. What is the Selection Criteria?

Documentary heritage is more likely to be assessed by reference to several criteria: Contextual Assessment; Title of Nomination; Authenticity; Summary; Details of a Nominator; Identity and Description of the Item; Justification; World significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability

Primary Selection Criteria – Influence; Time/Period; Place; People; Subject/Theme; Form and Style; Social/spiritual/community Value/significance

Secondary Criteria – Integrity; Rarity Threat

Subsidiary Information - Assessment of Risk; Assessment of Preservation. Legal & Ethical Issues

18. What is the percentage of inscriptions from Africa on the MoW International Register?

Africa is underrepresented, with approximately 5–7% of total inscriptions on the International Register. This highlights the need for increased nominations and capacity-building across the continent

19. What are the MoW documentary heritage treasures of Africa?

Africa's MoW documentary heritage treasures include manuscripts, archives, oral recordings, and audiovisual materials that reflect the continent's intellectual, cultural, and historical contributions.

Examples include:

- The Timbuktu Manuscripts (Mali)
- Liberation struggle archives from Southern Africa

- Indigenous knowledge records and oral traditions are documented in various forms
- Colonial and post-independence administrative archives.

These are recognised for their outstanding value to world history and knowledge.

20. What are the inscriptions from individual African countries?

I. Single Inscriptions (Multinational Documentary Heritage)

- **Benin** – Archives of the Kingdom of Dahomey
- **Ethiopia** – Fasil Ghebbi Archives and Manuscripts
- **Madagascar** – Royal Archives of Madagascar
- **Mali** – *Timbuktu Manuscripts*
Ahmed Baba Institute Collections
- **Mauritius** – *Aapravasi Ghat Records*
Indentured Labour Immigration Records
Mauritius Slavery Archives
- **Namibia** – Archives of Sam Nujoma and the Namibian Liberation Struggle
- **Senegal** – Federation of Mali Archives
IFAN (Institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noire) Collections
Senegambian Historical Manuscripts
- **South Africa** – *Nelson Mandela Archives*
Rivonia Trial Records
Truth and Reconciliation Commission Archives
Bleek and Lloyd Collection
- **United Republic of Tanzania** – Records of the Maji Maji War
- **Zimbabwe** – Nehanda and Kaguvu Oral and Documentary Heritage
- **Egypt** – The Sue and Alan Henderson Collection, Ancient manuscripts collections
- **Nigeria** – Ajami manuscripts and historical archives
- **Morocco** – Manuscript collections of Fez
- **Kenya** – Mau Mau and colonial-era archives

NB: These inscriptions vary by country and continue to expand as more nations establish National MoW Registers and submit nominations to regional and international levels.

Joint Inscriptions (Multinational Documentary Heritage)

- **Angola and Portugal**
Archives relating to the history of Angola during the Portuguese colonial period
- **Burkina Faso and France**

Colonial administrative and historical archives relating to Burkina Faso (former Upper Volta)

- **Mali and Nigeria**

Cross-border Sahelian manuscript traditions and Islamic scholarly heritage collections

- **Multinational Inscription**

(Ghana, Netherlands, Brazil, Guyana, Netherlands Antilles, Suriname, United Kingdom, United States of America, South Africa, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka)

Archives of the Dutch West India Company (WIC) and related transatlantic and global trade records

21. UNESCO/Republic of Korea Jikji Prize Winner from Africa?

The UNESCO/Jikji Memory of the World Prize has recognized African institutions for excellence in the preservation and accessibility of documentary heritage.

22. Who is the African Winner of this prize?

An African recipient of the Jikji Prize is the National Archives of Tunisia, which was awarded in 2018 for its outstanding work in preserving and promoting documentary heritage.

23. How to Submit a Nomination

You may check on the Ghana National Committee for the Memory of the World website <https://unescoghana.gov.gh/memory-of-the-world/> to download the Nomination Form and Guidelines for completing the Form **OR** send an inquiry email to mow@unescoghana.gov.gh **OR** visit the Ghana National Commission for UNESCO Office at the Ministry of Education, Ministries, Accra