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Bibliographic Control of Publications: The Impact on African Countries

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Introduction

The African continent is full of oral and written culture being published and preserved by her people, not only for posterity but also for academics, students, and the larger bibliographic communities. That information is generated on the face of African continent on daily bases is not in doubt as printing and publishing have flourished the continent, thus becoming the order of the day. Libraries and information centers are expected to acquire and ensure bibliographic recording and make available on request all that is written, printed and published. Bibliographic control has become a major determinant of book accessibility and utilization and a key factor in information search, delivery and dissemination.

The bibliographic control project is very important, fundamental, and indispensable in Africa. Fourie and Burger (2007) have observed that countries like South Africa have put forward efforts currently unmatched by any African country. The fact that a book is recorded in the library, internet, or the information centre is enough to give hope to the needful potential user that it may be possible to access and use it. Information materials like books, journals, manuscripts, theses, dissertations, magazines, newspapers and a host of others are written, printed, and published on African continent. As time goes on, precise bibliographic information about these materials begin to disappear from the minds of many but on the other hand, some researchers may seek them with tears to access and utilize them; thus, the importance of bibliographic control and that of the library services become glaringly indispensable. To facilitate accessibility, the bibliographic compilation must be in a particular pattern which must be systematic to accommodate essential bibliographic elements which could enable a potential user to decide to trace it when in need. This calls for a pattern of effective recording and arrangement which result from systematic listing of the records of human communication. One current type of bibliography, according to World Book Encyclopedia (2002) presents a systematic description of books as well as listing them, summarizing what each book is about as well as its currency, binding,

publisher and its value.

Bibliographic Control in Africa

Bibliographic control activities have generally developed in Africa randomly over the years. A few African countries are lucky to have gotten retrospective national bibliographies before 1940, and it was individuals who made personal effort to compile national bibliographies for these countries.

According to Musiker (2005) Mendelssohn's South African Bibliography was published in 1910 making South Africa the first African country to have a national bibliography. This was the conceit effort made by South African Librarians towards the attainment of Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC)

According to Aje (1977:16 (3), Sierra Leone was the next African country to have a national bibliography. It was compiled by Sir Harry Charles Luke and published in 1925. H.C. Luke was a colonial secretary for Sierra Leone and apparently had searched important libraries in London and the secretariat library in Freetown and came out with his work entitled "A Bibliography of Sierra Leone"

Cardinell (Aje 1977) created a national retrospective bibliography for Ghana that was published 1932. Sources of his information are said to be 19th century work was pioneered by the Basel mission who set up printing and publishing enterprise in the field of religious publications. On the government side where activities commenced earlier than the Basel Mission, Cardinell recorded that Government Printing Press started functioning after 1875, producing government gazettes and reports. Thus, the first listing of government publication was part of the colonial report on the Gold Coast. All these were precursors of the monumental work produced by A.W. Cardinell.

Beaudiquez (1977: 99) also named Burundi as another country with retrospective national bibliography compiled by individual effort. Daniel Nyambarize compiled a bibliography that was a list of publications, research reports ,and periodicals published between 1959 and 1973 and held in Burundi National Library.

Beaudiquez (1977: 419) states further that Benin Republic has a retrospective national bibliography compiled by Guillaume Da Silva. Other African countries with retrospective national bibliographies include Chad (1968); Guinea (1964); Ivory Coast (1972-1974); Libya (1951-1971); Madagascar (1952); Morocco (1970); South Africa (1910), and Zambia (no date). These retrospective bibliographies are attempts to compile all the works published in these individual countries. These show a great progress made in the development of Africa's continental bibliography.

Another study by Samuel Kotie (1971:14), on the development of library studies, University of Ghana identified thirty two current national bibliographies for African countries by 1969. Whereas, at the time the International Conference on African Bibliography (1970:1) was held in Nairobi, Kenya from December 4-8, 1967, only nine African countries were listed as having national bibliographies in the true sense of the word. These include, Ethiopia Madagascar, Malawi, Nigeria, Rhodesia, Senegal, South Africa, Sierra Leone and Tanzania.

Another writer on bibliography, Amosu (1968:14-18), explained the issue of the availability of bibliographies of all types on Africa subject and national bibliographies produced on Africa. She also explored methods of bibliographic control of materials on Africa, the problem of coordination for complete coverage and avoidance of serious duplication amongst other considerations. In Nigeria, the National Library of Nigeria has been charged with the responsibilities of compiling; coordinating and publishing the bibliography of all published materials on Nigeria.

Problems with the Compilation of Bibliographies in

Africa

There are some problems that give rise to the difficulties in the compilation of the bibliographies in Africa.

Slow pace in Embracing ICT

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is yet to gain solid grounds in libraries and information centers in most African Countries. Some African countries are slow in acquiring ICT facilities for digitization and automation. The ITU. (2007) rates Africa in 2007 as still having the heaviest concentration of countries with low ICT opportunity measured by indices pertaining to ICT networks, education and skills, uptake and intensity of the use of ICT. According to Eyitayo (2008) Some ICT services are still being restricted in Africa. For example, the voIP (Voice Over Internet Provider) that underlines all internet communications and allow people all over the world to communicate using the voice, is one such service that is being restricted. In spite of its cheapness, many African countries still have restrictions on the use of VoIP some have laws completely prohibiting its use while others have attributed its provision to the (usually state owned) Post and Telecommunication Office (PTO). Examples of such countries are Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt and Madagascar.

Publishers and printers non-compliance

Publishers' and printers' non-compliance with Legal Deposit Laws is a common phenomenon in many African countries and South Africa is one of such countries. According to Fourie and Burger (2007) "in spite of a Legal Deposit Committee and the creation of Official Publications, failure to comply with legal deposit laws has in many African Countries been noted as a problem and South Africa is not an exception.

Similarly in Nigeria, the Publications ordinance 1950 and the National Library Act of 1970 made similar stipulations which have been adhered to with levity. There is no set machinery for enforcing the laws. These create a gap in comprehensive compilation of the National Bibliography of Nigeria.

Lack of Suitable automation software

Lack of appropriate and suitable software for automation and database management in libraries in Africa is one hindrance to the smooth operation of bibliographic control activities. Many African libraries are seeking suitable software for digitizing or automating their libraries to facilitate bibliographic control processes. Various brands of library software abound and some of the automation software available include CDS-ISIS, Alice for Windows, GLASS, etc., but the problem of selecting the most appropriate and the most suitable software from the waiting hands of commercial vendors is the most difficult battle to win. This is due to the fact that each software depends on the type of library involved- special, academic, national, public, private and other type of libraries. If the choice of software is not settled it is like the Biblical 'building of a mighty house upon the sand' and could constitute a serious problem to the library. Selection of suitable software entails meeting certain criteria such as willingness of the organization to invest huge amount of money on ICT, available trained personnel and suitability of the existing building to accommodate automation equipments. These are some of the major hindrances to smooth bibliographic activities in Africa.

Weak legal deposit laws

One other setback on the comprehensiveness of bibliographies and the effectiveness of the Bibliographic Control activities in Africa is the weakness of the legal deposit laws in these countries. According to Villars (1993) The Ghana National Bibliography (GNB) began compilation in 1965. Like the case with the Nigerian National Bibliography (NNB), the GNB encountered numerous problems including poor funding and ceased compilation in 1977; and the 1977 issue was published nine years later in 1986. The GNB has also been described as not being comprehensive. It is estimated that the bibliography covers about 70% of the total output of the country. The legal deposit law is not only weak but also excludes government publications.

Poor Funding of ICT Projects

Nowadays, bibliographic control activities cannot be carried out without involving Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The ICT projects in general sometimes run into problems in some African Countries because they are inadequately funded. For example, Nigerian Universities Network (NUNET) was established by the Nigeria's National Universities Commission (NUC) in 1995. Its initial objective, according to Lukeman I. Diso (2005), was to network and connect, at least, 21 federal universities to the virtual library project within five years. The project ran into problems which bordered mainly on underfunding and by 2010 no Nigerian University was able to develop even the local area network (LAN). All that NUNET could do was to sensitize Nigerian Universities to join its membership and by 2007, fifty-four (54) out of one hundred and seventy eight (178) Nigerian universities gained membership of NUNET. Today, bibliographic control of publications within any given geographical area depends on efficient ICT facilities and without these facilities bibliographic control activities will be severely hindered.

Poor format

In some countries such as Sierra Leone, government publications are among the most useful materials in academic libraries, which could be compiled and included into its national bibliography for Africa. Karbo, John Abdul (2010) asserts that compiling such publications is not bereft of problems. These range from poor formats through lack of trade bibliographies to unsatisfactory methods of distribution. The basic problem to all these libraries, according to this author, is the volume of publications received, much of which is nothing but raw data and statistics used to support arguments or gathered more for the sake of gathering rather than for any specific reasons. Since these libraries have limited space to house their numerous collections the continued acquisition of government publications poses problems to staff and the subsequent compilation into bibliographies.

Ways To Enhance Bibliographic Control In Africa

Finally, we are considering ways that can help to promote and achieve bibliographic Control activities on African Continent. Here are some suggested ways to achieving it:

Digitization of print materials

The first thing to do is for African countries to digitize every worthwhile print or published material. This is important in view of the fact that, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has not only come to stay but has also revolutionized the Printing Press the same way the Printing Press did to the Moveable Types in the sixteenth century. African countries must quickly embrace

the new technology to forge ahead to the forefront of the new global technological order, only then can Bibliographic

Publishers Catalogues/Indexes/Abstracts

One of the ways Bibliographic Control can be achieved is through the activities of printers and publishers who produce catalogues/Indexes/Abstracts for all the works published. These usually get distributed to libraries, bookshops and book agents. While this gesture is targeted towards the promotion of the book trade, bibliographic control agents such as national libraries should not allow such opportunity to escape but quickly cease them to obtain records to assist them to execute thorough bibliographic control of publications in Africa.

The Development of the Union Catalogue

Libraries in African countries such as Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa had formed consortium within their countries for producing the National Union Catalogue. In Nigeria, this was the initiative of the National Library of Nigeria whose main aim was to centralize the collection of all the catalogue entries for every book acquired by all libraries in the country. The project ran into hitches as many of the member libraries did not comply or co-operate due to poor funding amongst other reasons. The most successful of these projects appears to be that of South Africa. According to Fourie and Burger (2007) the Coalition of South African Library Consortia (COSALC) (<http://www.cosalc.ac.za/>) was established on 2 July 1999. Its main focus was to gain access to electronic information through the establishment of the National Site Licensing Initiative (SASLI), as well as the promotion and support of national co-operative initiatives, such as contributing to the SA National Catalogue (SACat) and inter-lending agreements, training, capacity building, communication, liaison and lobbying. It should be noted that no library or information center performs bibliographic functions alone, but combines it with many other activities to achieve its organizational goals and this accounts as to why bibliographic functions appears sidelined in favor of other more urgent tasks.

The Virtual Library Project

Again, one other way of realizing the Bibliographic Control of Publications in Africa is the establishment of the Virtual Library Project. According to Daniel (2002), Nancy Schiller was the first writer to use the term 'Virtual Library' in defining this term 'Library without walls'. This means libraries with the potentials of gaining access to other libraries through internet connectivity of wide area network (WAN), which bridges the gap between the local, national and the international publications.

Nigeria has begun the Virtual Library Project which is sited at Abuja (capital city) and run by the National Library of Nigeria. The project is expected to deliver bibliographic goods to the Nation by coordinating the activities of all automated libraries in Nigeria.

The Development of CD-ROM Technology

CD-ROM is the acronym for Compact Disc –Read Only Memory, is a plastic disc measuring 120mm (4.72 inches) in diameter is capable of holding approximately 550 million bits of information. This is the equivalent of 1500 microcomputer diskettes or floppy discs or two hundred 1000 page books.

Some of the problems facing libraries in African countries as noted earlier include limited budget, lack of information infrastructure for online services, limited

equipment for automation and inadequate trained personnel are tackled effectively by the use of CD-ROMs. Organizations with databases such as AGRICOLA, CABI, EBSCO HOST, HINERI, TEEAL, AGORA, OGIAR and a host of others, deliver some materials on CD-ROM thereby becoming saving grace for African countries by providing locally available database for their communities through these services, in places where wide area network (WAN) and other aspects of automation are lacking. This provision is appropriate and most desirable for libraries in African that usually lack infrastructure for ICT. For example, the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, has subscribed overseas for The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library (TEEAL) on CD-ROM both at the Kashim Ibrahim Library and the Institute for Agricultural Library of same institution for use by postgraduate students and other researchers. Besides, the University of Agriculture, Makurdi, Nigeria also digitized some free agricultural journals from EBSCO HOST, OARE, HINERI and AGORA. These are some of the ways of effecting bibliographic control activities in the modern times.

Networking

Networking has to do with connectivity within and between libraries and information centers. Since the success of bibliographic control of publications on African continent depends on the cooperation from the constituent countries, there should be efficient inter-state and inter- university networking within each country. Each constituent unit, state and university should be connected to the national library of each country. These measures will surely place Africa on global information superhighway.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The twentieth century marks the dawn of a new era in bibliographic control activities in Africa which has come a long way. Some countries are forging ahead while others are lagging behind. But one thing important is that Africa has no choice but to move along with the rest of the world. Much information is no doubt, produced in African continent and Africa has realized that the more information you give, the more information you get and the more information you feed in the internet the more you gain from it. More importance should, therefore, be accorded to bibliographic control of printed and published materials from the national level down to the level of the individual and there should be that national, collective, and individual consciousness that information produced should be information preserved. Awareness campaigns in form of workshops, conferences and seminars could be mounted to sensitize authors, printers and publishers of the need to compile a list and preserve every printed and published work. And any depository law enacted by any African country should be willingly, promptly and totally obeyed or otherwise, enforced and this will place Africa on the pinnacle of global information network with rest of the world.

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