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Docs Out of Africa: Why Libraries Should Collect African Government Information

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Documents Without Borders. *Docs Out of Africa: Why Libraries should collect African Government Information*.

Introduction

Just when you thought it was safe to open the covers of *DttP*, Jim Church is back with another polemic. With my column co-editor Jane Canfield, I decided to address government information from other countries: a topic I feel GODORT has neglected for some time. At UC Berkeley I have the privilege of collecting government information from Africa, and after much thought have decided to write about this challenging topic.

Not long ago there were U.S. librarians who specialized in foreign government information. Two of the most notable were Gloria Westfall at the University of Indiana at Bloomington, and David Rozkuszka at Stanford[1]. In 1990 Westfall published (through GODORT) her comprehensive *Guide to Official Publications of Foreign Countries*[2]. She also published a *French Colonial Africa: a Guide to Official Sources*[3] and a *Bibliography of Official Statistical Yearbooks and Bulletins*[4]. GODORT has a scholarship for library school students named after David Rozkuszka. Yet in spite of the interest in globalization and international affairs, I count few U.S. documents librarians now who specifically work with foreign government information. We seem to have largely ceded this responsibility to our colleagues in area studies, and in other instances it seems to have been a matter of "shifting priorities." So why should government information librarians get involved with this? And who could possibly do so anyway, with all the different countries and languages in the world?

Vendors and Languages

The answer is of course no one – unassisted - but there are collaborative models that can work well. Let's take Sub-Saharan Africa as an example. In Africa, for better or worse, many official publications are written in former colonial languages: primarily English, French, and Portuguese (there are naturally exceptions). This is not an insurmountable obstacle for a librarian with a reading knowledge of one or more Romance languages. Another issue is the choice of vendors. There are again, to the best of my knowledge, only limited vendors who sell African government publications: examples include Clark's for South Africa (http://www.clarkesbooks.co.za); Mary Martin (http://www.marymartin.com); MEA Books (http://www.meabooks.com); Hogarth (for Nigeria), and the LC Office in Nairobi

(http://www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/nairobi/)[5]. Libraries may also provide vendors with a subject profile for documents on standing order. At UC Berkeley our Africana librarian worked to craft a Library of Congress Profile (AfricCap) for statistical and human rights publications from Eastern and Southern Africa. We created another profile with MEA Books for categories of government publications from Western and Central Africa. When collaborating on a profile, one may also wish to tell vendors what *not* to send. We do not get budgets, military magazines, newsletters, or investment reports from overseas firms. We do get reports from International Organizations based in Africa, and NGO publications. If the profile is set up carefully and negotiated successfully, it can work well. Here is the essence of what we crafted. Other profiles can of course be implemented based on local needs and shared agreements with other libraries.

Collections Areas by Subject and Type

1. Censuses: population, housing, and economic
2. Statistical yearbooks
3. Economic development
4. Population, demography and vital statistics
5. Human Rights
6. Foreign relations & international affairs
7. Government policy
8. Gender studies & family issues
9. Public health
10. Constitutions and constitutional conventions
11. Elections
12. Environmental policy, sustainable development, and natural resources
13. Labor, poverty & social issues
14. Urban studies & planning
15. Languages and Literacy

Exclusions by subject and type

1. Annual reports from ministries
2. Budgets & public finance
3. Business and investment
4. Higher education, educational policy, educational curricular material
5. Laws, parliamentary papers, and gazettes
6. International Trade Statistics
7. Applied technology
8. State, provincial, and municipal documents

Additional priorities:

1. High interest in African IGO country office publications and NGO literature

2. High interest in subject specific monographs

The above categories are broad and of course many libraries will not wish to collect all of this. So here are some fleshed out examples of general interest I hope will pique your curiosity.

Statistical Abstracts and Censuses

Statistical abstracts and census volumes are my top category: you just can't find much of this information anywhere else. An immediate objection might be this data is all online. This is often assumed and is frequently true. But sometimes, it isn't. As of June 12 2014, historical volumes of the *Statistical Abstract for Kenya* were online but the 2001-2012 issues were not. The Central Statistics Office for Botswana web site has many categories, but at the time of this writing none of the links worked. The likelihood that African documents may not be online is substantial, and the risk of the information being lost is critical. There may also be differences between online and print versions. The print 2002 census volumes of Rwanda include the *3ème Recensement General de la Population et de l'habitat du Rwanda au 15 Aout 2002. Monographie* (12 volumes) and *3ème Recensement Général de la Population et de l'habitat du Rwanda au 15 Aout 2002. Analyse des Resultats* (17 volumes). A web search for these titles retrieves http://statistics.gov.rw/publications/population-and-housig-census-2002 which contains some of the latter volumes, but none of the former. For the most part, libraries still need to collect most of this material in print, or trust to digital repositories like the Internet Archive to preserve the digital content.

Development

For development information, I often turn to publications co-authored by International Organizations and African governments. Most African countries have country offices for United Nations agencies and collaborate with them on development projects. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) co-authors numerous publications with African countries each year. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has assisted Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Niger, the Central African Republic, Lesotho, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo with their censuses. UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (household surveys developed to monitor the situation of children and women) are internationally comparable and highly cited collaborative efforts. African governments have also created their own interesting agencies to address policy concerns in the Global South. They often have ministries for Youth and Sport. Zambia has a Ministry of Sport, Youth, and Child Development; Kenya has a Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture, and Social Services.   Researchers study sport as a means to increase

participation in schools, combat gender discrimination, promote social mobilization, and foster peace-building (the UN has an Office for Sport for Development and Peace). Other countries have agencies on the environment and tourism: Uganda has a Ministry of Tourism, Trade & Industry; Lesotho has a Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Environment. These agencies may seem like random hodgepodges, but there is a philosophy behind this: tourism and ecotourism can enhance development (as I have written about elsewhere[6]) and if implemented thoughtfully, can promote environmental sustainability and peace.

Gender and Human Rights

Gender and human rights are other key areas, and many African governments have ministries devoted to women, gender and families. Zambia has a Gender in Development Division (with no web site); Burkina Faso has a Ministère de la promotion de la Femme; Mali has a Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Famille, and Ethiopia has a Ministry of Women's Affairs. These agencies publish on gender policy, education, inequality, gender-based violence, and other topics. Many co-publish with International Organizations in accordance with multilateral agreements, or even to comply with UN Security Council Resolutions. UC Berkeley has a document checked out entitled *The Uganda Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 & 1820 and the Goma Declaration*[7]. Many African countries have human rights commissions. In 1995 the Uganda Human Rights Commission published its *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Violations of Human Rights: Verbatim Record of Proceedings*, in fourteen volumes[8]. And even if the findings of these commissions are questionable, don't forget NGOs. The Kenyan National Commission on Human Rights and the Kenyan Human Rights Commission are examples of Civil Society Organizations that publish on this topic, and these publications can be ordered from African vendors or included in profiles.

Is it All Online?

The new "global information pipeline"[9] has a tendency to spring leaks and succumb to saboteurs in every nation, but in the developing world the risk is arguably higher. While no government web content is safe from negligence or meddling, civil conflict, regime change, and natural disasters can exacerbate the situation and hasten the demise of digital content. But another reason to get the print is the online information may simply not be *findable*. Most search engines do not attach a high degree of relevance to government publications from the Global South - especially those in foreign languages. Online searches for African government information frequently mix commercial and popular content with government

information. Unless you know exactly what you are looking for, it can be difficult or impossible to find the right ministry and the relevant content.

Why us?

This brings us back to the question of why collecting this information should be, at least in part, the job of a government information librarian. I think the answer is self-evident: we know what types of government information are important and valuable to our users. We appreciate government content and will make sure it is collected when it might otherwise slip through the cracks. But we cannot do this alone, and partnerships are crucial. Our colleagues in area studies can provide valuable assistance with foreign languages and vendors. And if we cultivate relationships with students and faculty and keep track of the materials they need, we will acquire the right stuff.

But at the end of the day, this is a question of values. The main reason why African government information should be collected is because it is interesting, informative, and important. Despite the glaring shortcomings common to many official publications[10], government information is part of the human record. Any academic library with students and faculty working in global development, the environment, poverty, public health, human rights, or political economy should acquire this material, and I would argue it is wrong not to do so. I urge GODORT and the profession to give serious consideration to this matter, and advocate amongst our colleagues and administrations to devote more time and resources towards it.

References

1. Stanford had (and still has) other librarians who work with African Government Information. For an amazing guide see http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/ofguide.html.

2. *Guide to Official Publications of Foreign Countries.* American Library Association, Government Documents Round Table. Bethesda, Md.: CIS, 1997.

3. *French Colonial Africa: a Guide to Official Sources*. Gloria D. Westfall. London; New York: Hans Zell Publishers, 1992.

4. *Bibliography of Official Statistical Yearbooks and Bulletins*. Gloria Westfall. Alexandria, VA: Chadwyck-Healey, 1986.

5.   There may be others and this list is not an endorsement for these vendors or their products.

6.   Church, Jim. "The Other WTO." *DttP: A Quarterly Journal of Government Information Practice & Perspective*. Spring 2006, Vol. 34 Issue 1, pg. 6-8.

7. *The Uganda Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 & 1820 and the Goma Declaration: Commitments to Address Sexual Violence Against Women in Armed Conflict*. Kampala: Ministry of Gender, Labour & Social Development, 2011.

8. *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Violations of Human Rights: Verbatim Record of Proceedings*. Uganda. Commission of Inquiry into Violations of Human Rights, 1995.

9. Reilly, Bernard. "The New Global Information Pipeline." *The Global Dimensions Of Scholarship and Research Libraries: A Forum On The Future*. Discussion Paper, Center for Research Libraries. http://www.crl.edu/Events/8478/Agenda. Accessed 6/15/2014.

10. António Lourenço provides a frank assessment of these in his chapter "Official Publications" in *Studying Africa: A Guide to the Sources*, published by the Nordic Africa Institute, 2011. See http://nai.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:403984/FULLTEXT02.pdf.