

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS: A Focus on the involvement of the National Library of Nigeria in Non-Book Materials (NBM)

INTRODUCTION

A brief definition of Non-Book Media becomes necessary for those who have not read my early article titled *Non-Book Media and Libraries in Developing Countries*.¹ Non-Book Media (NBM) have been defined by Croghan as: "information bearing media that are not in the form of the conventional book, that is verbal information in a continuous text organised in a linear order usually in print or paper, or any production of this".²

Rossi and Biddle have also defined NBM as "graphic, photographic, electronic or mechanised means or arresting, processing or reconstructing visual or verbal information or combinations of visual or verbal information".³

Books are important so also are Non-Book Materials. The importance of NBM is re-enforced by the fact that our society is deeply rooted in oral tradition. Therefore, Non-Book Media are a phenomenon which has come to stay in the same way as the printed books has remained with us since the invention of printing.

The paper referred to in the opening sentence treated Non-Book Media in a more general way. This present paper is a special focus on what the National Library of Nigeria is doing or should do in this area in compliance with the decree establishing it.

After a careful examination of the provisions of the National Library Act No. 29 of 1970, one has come to the conclusion that the National Library of Nigeria has a full mandate to collect non-book materials, hence the necessity for a peep into its activities, in this area.

IMPORTANCE OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Those who understand what it takes to achieve effective library and information services to readers have often stated that what makes any library "a library of the highest standing" is the amount of specialised materials it manages to assemble and not several million volumes of general materials that could easily be found elsewhere in the country.

To illustrate my point further, if the National Library of Nigeria (NLN) were to be closed down today, apart from the 'reading room' facility it provides, I am quite convinced that what many users will most regret would be the inaccessibility to Rare Materials, the gazettes, official documents and other Nigerian⁴ materials. In other words, these form the core of the collection. Should the National Library of Nigeria be content with these alone when there are law libraries, ministry libraries and even a parliamentary library which was being mooted during the civilian regime? The answer is no. If the National Library is to play the leading role expected of it then it should, as a matter of urgency, try to reinforce as well as expand its areas of specialisation particularly in respect of Non-Book Materials.

NATIONAL LIBRARY ACTS/AMMENDMENTS AS THE AUTHORITY TO COLLECT NBM

Let us now review the activities of the National Library of Nigeria, in the area of Non-Book Media. The burning

questions which one must now ask are, has the Library any mandate to collect Non-Book Media materials? If the answer is yes, what are the constraints? What should the subject coverage be?

The National Library of Nigeria Act of 1964 makes provisions for the establishment of a body to be known as the National Library Board and two of the most important functions imposed on the Board are firstly, to establish and maintain the National Library of Nigeria which should provide such services as are usually provided by National Libraries of the "highest standing".

The second crucial function is to assemble, maintain and extend a collection of books, periodicals, pamphlets, newspapers, maps, musical scores, films and recordings and such other materials as the Board considers appropriate, for a library of the "Highest Standing".

The Act was amended by the NL Decree of 1970⁵ which further gave the Library legal deposit privilege. These provisions clearly confirm that the Library has a clear mandate to collect all kinds of materials. The issue now to be examined is how far the implementation of the mandate has gone.



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National Library Bookshop

IMPLEMENTING THE MANDATE

What has the Library done with the mandate? Has it a collection worth writing home about? Here, I hesitate to liken the Library with a lunar walk project where the astronauts have made three quarters of the descent and still have to climb out of the space craft to do a kangaroo walk in order to hoist their National Flag.

This is because in assembling and maintaining a collection of books, newspapers, periodicals, official documents and

even a collection of maps and microforms, the National Library has fulfilled its obligations up to a point. A great deal remains to be done as far as assembling of microforms, musical scores, films and recordings and Non-book media 'hardware' and 'software' are concerned.

Non-book media have not been taken seriously enough by the management despite the fact that materials in this medium have started to play a role which is beginning to make the Library look very different throughout the world.

If the National Library of Nigeria is backed by the law and also has the legal deposit privilege, why has so little been achieved in this direction? Space, staff and financial limitations will immediately come to mind. Before June 1979, the National Library could be pardoned because of disarming space constraints which existed up to this time.

But since Management, in June 1979, took what the author considered to be one of the biggest decisions of that year by acquiring the premises of the former British Council Library of 227 Herbert Macaulay Street, Yaba, Lagos, that which now houses the readers services, the perennial space problems it used to have should have eased off.

Finance on the other hand will always be a problem for as long as information explosion and inflation remain with us. Therefore, shortage of finance is not a new thing and cannot be accepted as excuse since we are still able to buy books.

On the question of staffing, one has never been privileged to come across any library with the full compliment of staff it needs before starting a new service. The first step towards effectively implementing the Decree in the area of Non-book media is having a clear policy. It is true that there are other areas of priority such as establishing and staffing new State Branch Libraries, but non-book media have to be part of this development because of its importance.

Secondly, the range of techniques now is such that the uninitiated must inevitably find greater difficulty in sorting the wheat from the chaff whenever the decision to start becomes inevitable.

Identifying members of staff with sufficient interest in the area and sending them either on attachment programme depending on whether they already took a media option while in training⁷, or sponsoring someone for a post-graduate diploma in educational technology should be looked into.

Equally important are the drawing up of an acquisition policy, pursuing the legal deposit privilege aggressively and setting aside fund for the purchase of books for augmenting legal deposit. Important artistic works and other relevant materials produced both in Nigeria and abroad could be purchased from the vote which is thus set aside.

One must first of all point out that Nigeria cannot honestly claim to have anything like the collections assembled by institutions such as the SBC Film Library in Britain, the Educational Foundation for Visual Aids in London. Model Media Resources Centre of the ILEA (Inner-London Education Authority), the British Institute of Recorded Sound and other large, well organised film and media collections such as those maintained by United States Information Services.

TYPES OF MATERIALS TO BE COLLECTED BY THE NLN

If this is the case, one believes that the onus of collecting and co-ordinating the collections of such materials falls on the National Library of Nigeria. Would it not be nice to find the

following categories of materials: Films of different sorts, slides, sound recordings, microforms, photograph records all in good shape together with 'hardware' for their exploitation and all housed in a purposely built and temperature-controlled accommodation?

H. R. Galvin once said: a good film is said to be a book in action one is not suggesting the purchase of feature films meant purely for entertainment. This is unnecessary, expensive and usually outside the scope of any library. Libraries usually leave such films to the commercial sector. But documentary films on Nigerian life and culture should be collected. Films on the arts, government, history, sports and travel should prove quite popular with library users.

One should be able to find in the library cultural films on subjects like the FESTAC, Traditional Dances, Traditional Wrestling, Matches, Arugungu Fishing Festival, Naming Ceremonies, Tying and dyeing of materials, weaving of Akwete and Aso-oke materials, masquerades and so on.

The Library should also stock political films on subjects such as: National Census, Elections, Nigeria's Constitution/Constituent Assembly Seatings, Nigeria Civil War and the Biafra Surrender, the handing over of power from the military to the civilians, Swearing in of first executive president and the state governors. Other subjects could include state burials and important meetings as O.A.U. and E.C.O.W.A.S. summits held recently in Nigeria.

Educational films cover a wide range of subjects. The Library should collect recordings with educational and research value like historical films relating to the colonial period. Public enlightenment films include agricultural films e.g. films on Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, Pest Control, Mechanized Farming and so on.

Social films like those on Children's Day, the International Year of the Child (I.Y.C.) activities, National monuments such as the games reserves and War Against Indiscipline and Oral Rehydration Therapy should be stored for use by researchers and future generations.

The National Library will itself be a big consumer of this type of media. With trained staff, it should be possible to produce slides showing highlights of Library development overseas. Recently, an American Librarian was here showing Nigerian Librarians slides on library buildings from different parts of the world.

Orientation programmes, in-service training and seminars are areas where personal efforts needs to be made to facilitate the provision of slides for viewing. Slides of Nigerian architecture, painting and sculpture are certainly worth collecting for the use of architects and other researchers. Our foreign missions even need these to project our culture. Slides are ideal for illustrating science lectures in colleges and universities.

Tape recordings of speeches and voices of important national and international figures, for example Presidents, Religious Leaders and great actors should be collected. So also are tapes of important public lectures, seminars and conferences.

There should be on the shelves on the National Library of Nigeria recordings of our oral literature. Equally important are recordings of Ifa Incantations and those used during new yam festivals. Nature makes preservation difficult, but with new electronic gadgets this should be less so. Broadcast should cover topics such as conventions, launching of manifestos and so on.

Turning now to grammophone records, one would like to

emphasize that what is put out in the air today becomes the research material of tomorrow. Anyone wishing to look into the development/history of music in Nigeria would want to hear records of Nigerian artists like Ebenezer Obey, Sunny Ade, Sunny Okosun, Dennis Osita Osadebe, late Rex Lawson, Inyang Henshaw, Oriental Brothers. Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Onyeka Onwenu and Christy Essien-Igbokwe, Tony Okoroji, and many others. It is our duty to see that these materials are preserved, and maximally utilised by all Nigerians.

Microform materials are simply information stored in reduced size on photographic film. Argument is still on as to whether or not Micro-reproductions are non-book materials. Since the situation has not been resolved they should also be considered here.

The National Library has made a start, (see appendix for materials available on Microfilm) there are also several cabinets of microfiche sheets but as the reader machines for **reading them are out of order, it is difficult to know the subject coverage.** The problem about the NLN's Microfilm collections is that they are mostly of newspapers. Diversification is necessary here.

A long established use of the microfilm has been in public archives. The main object of filming, as is the case with rare books, is to remove the need to handle the original frequently. **A start could be made with the Rare Materials in the National Library** then extended to the University of Ibadan for older materials not available in our library.

Putting closed volumes of files in Microfilm, will also reduce the problem of shortage of space as well as reduce cases of missing files. Census returns, poll lists, maps of historical interest, dissertations, filling in of gaps in journal holdings, are some of the areas where microfilming would be invaluable.

A start has been made in collection and preservation of maps and photographs. The effort is more obvious in the area of maps where cabinets have now been acquired through local efforts. The constraints are, the absence of suitable equipment needed for storage of photographs, adequate manpower to organise the available resources and then reaching out to collect what has been left out.

A new section created within the Readers' Services Division has been charged with the responsibility for developing the map, photograph and microfilm collections. Additional staff of sufficient seniority and competence, will be needed if the work is to progress uninterrupted.

Furthermore, a suitable environment, and the necessary 'hardware' needed for exploitation of 'software' have to be provided if the National Library is to give the lead expectation of it in this area.

As has been said earlier Non-Book Media 'software' require 'hardware' for their exploitation. This means that Microfilm/Microfiche readers are needed for transparencies and projectors and viewers for slides. Cinematograph films want canisters for storage as well as projectors and screens for showing the films. Players are needed for cassettes and other sound recordings and video equipment for video tapes. These will have to be acquired if the software are to be fully exploited.

In tackling this enormous problem, the National Library should first and foremost:

- i. Adopt a positive policy towards Non-Book Media and set a target date for achieving success in this area;
- ii. It should try to enforce the Legal Deposit privilege.

This implies putting its house in order before materials arrive;

- iii. By investing on staff training, the Library should be able to produce some of these materials in-house. A developing country should think of innovations rather than expecting ready-made packages from elsewhere.
- iv. Find a suitable accommodation near the reading rooms.

The Library will need to work with Institutes of African Studies to collect recordings of important research findings after the researchers have taken their transcripts. The University of Lagos used to record Ifa incantations then make transcript and translation. The fact is that transcript and translations cannot be as authentic as the original recordings.

The National Library could be a depository for such rare original collection, e.g. Audio materials Film/Broadcasts. The Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and other radio and television stations in the country put out a great deal of educational broadcasts. The Library should be the focal point where all such broadcasts should be deposited so that the most useful ones can be selected and organised for preservation, while the rest are returned to be wiped for re-use.

CONCLUSION

I firmly believe that the provision of these special materials in addition to our official documents and other Nigerian materials will make the National Library of Nigeria truly special and great. If the Library is to assert her authority in the field of information, it has to take special collections seriously.

It is the special collection of the British Library that makes it a Super Library. This is also the case with the Library of Congress in the United States of America, the Biblioteque Nationale of France and the National Library of Australia, to mention but a few.

One can not dispute the fact that there is an increasing awareness in Non-Book Media all over the country. The recent Joint Consultative Committee⁸ Meeting devoted a considerable amount of time to discussing the subject. The National Library cannot afford to sit on the fence for much longer. It should swim with the others so as not to be left marooned.

In the area of Education Technology, for instance, one does not advocate a competition with the Nigeria Educational Technology Centre, Kaduna,⁹ and schools in collecting kits, realia and models. Even seriously speaking, what is wrong with providing a model for others to copy? However, the National Library could compliment the efforts of the Nigeria Educational Technological Centre at Kaduna by bringing the essential services nearer to the rest of the people in the country.

Considering the fact that the Library is expected by all to lead in library development, is there something wrong with having a pilot project for schools and other institutions that would want to start this kind of service?

Finally, if the National Library is to give effective service in this area, it must consider a suitable accommodation which is within easy reach of users, a priority.

Note

Since writing this piece there has been a number of changes

in the National Library of Nigeria and these includes: change in Leadership, change in organisational structure of the institution and in availability of space. Therefore, significant changes have already been observed in the area of Non-Book Media, but these have not rendered this article out of place, as

much still remains to be achieved.

However, if the interest and dynamism that have been witnessed in the last one year are sustained, the National Library of Nigeria will in a short space of time have, achieve the kind of standard that the author has in mind.

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3. Rossi, P. H. and BIDDLE, B.J. eds. The New Media ... pp. 4-5.
4. Nigerian materials published in Nigeria and overseas about Nigeria.
5. Supplement to official gazette of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, No. 27, Vol. 57, 14th May, 1970 Part A Decree National Library Decree 1970, No. 29.
6. 'Hardware' This refers to equipment needed for effectively utilizing the softer cellulose based materials such as films, slides etc.
7. CNNA Post-graduate course used to be available at Jordanhill College of Education, 76, Southbrea Drive, Glasgow, G13, 1pp Enquiries could be made by those who could afford the Foreign Exchange. Luckily, Library and Information Science Courses have been available locally for a long time.
8. J.C.C. (Joint Consultative Committee) Reference Committee on Educational Technology Meeting Held in Calabar on May 16, 1980.
9. National Educational Technology Centre, P.M.B. 2027, Kaduna.

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