SPECIAL COLLECTIONS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES: *CURRENT TRENDS AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES*

Stephen Akinyemi Akintunde

A B S T R A C T

The importance of special collections for academic and research work was emphasiszed. Their diversity, richness in raw data and rarity continue to make them a gold mine for researchers. The inability of libraries to meet their normal acquisition targets due to the depressed national economy is underscored. The present individualistic approaches to collection building must be reviewed to give way to a more institutionally relevant, geographieally-meaningfully co-ordinated effort. This is *in* view of a survey of Nigerian Federal Universities which reveals gaps in the acquisition of special collections. A review of past efforts at cooperation shows discontinuity and inadequate planning. Suggestions are proferred for a more meaningful acquisition, processing and administration of special collections in Nigerian University Libraries.

Stephen Akinyemi Akintunde is the Documents Librarian, University of Jos Library, Jos, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Special collections, by name, connote special consideration. Their peculiar contents, irregular format, important. Every academic and research library has a tendency towards building collections of this nature. In paper, attempt is made to outline categories of special collections and critique the present state of their development in Nigeria. Solutions are proferred particularly for collection building.

METHODOLOGY

The mailed questionnaire survey research method was used in early October in generating information from three academic and four research libraries in the Jos Metropolis. This served as a pilot study. In late October, another questionnaire was prepared and distributed to all the twenty-one federal university libraries with the exemption of Abuja. A 100 percent response rate was achieved. This was made possible when the researcher enjoyed the cooperation of colleagues from all the federal university libraries who had converged in Zaria for a workshop.

The researcher had earlier visited Special Collections at Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Library, Bauchi, Kashim Ibrahim Library of Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, and Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife in addition to the University of Jos Library where he works. Face-to-face interview was also used to complement

the data in some of the universities.

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

From the responses received, special collections in Nigerian University Libraries could be classified broadly into eight, viz:

1. University Archives

This is a collection of papers (published and unpublished) - speeches, academic presentations (of members of the community such as research results; Departmental and journals), articles and monographs on or by the university and, the individuals in any way connected with it; including memorabilia like invitation cards, notices of meetings, posters, etc.

2. Conference Papers

Proceedings - either published or unpublished, of conferences, workshops and seminars held in Nigeria and elsewhere. So far, only the University of Jos seems to be working towards being a national documentation centre for essentially Nigerian conference papers.

3. Biographies

This particular collection comprises both biographical, autobiographical and other works such as the Henry Carr Collection in the University of Ibadan, The Bishop Kale Collection in the University of Lagos and, Usmanu Dan Fodio Collection in the Usmanu Danfodio University, Sokoto.

4. Africana

Materials that are exclusively African in origin and/or content. They could be broken down into:

(a) Africa General - including publications of:

- The Organization of African Unity (OAU)
- Governments of African Countries
- Central African Customs and Economic Union (UDEAC).
- Common Organization of African and Mauritian States (COAMS).
- Conference of East and Central African States(CCAS).
- Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS).

(b) Nigeria - consisting of publications of:

- Nigerian Federal Government (including the Colonial Government).
- State Governments and;
- Local Governments.

They include publications of government ministries, departments, parastatals and research institutes.

(c) Local History - these are publications emanating from, or, about the geographical area in which the institution is situated. For instance, Bauchiana by Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Bauchi; Bauchi-Benue-Plateau Special Collection by the University of Jos; Biafrana by the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Gongoliana by the Federal University of Technology, Yola; and Arabic/Islamic Manuscripts Collections by Bayero University, Kano and the Usmanu Danfodio University, Sokoto.

5. Business Organizations

They are usually annual reports, house organs and occasional publications of such organizations which can be grouped into three:

a) Multinational Organizations - such as United Trading Company, Lever Brothers and Cadbury; all operating in Nigeria.

b) Indigenous Private Companies

c) Financial Institutions - these include Banks, Insurance, firms and Stock Exchanges.

6. United Nations and its Specialized Agencies

United Nations (UN) publications are held in different levels by 70 percent of all the libraries. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife, Universities of Ibadan, Port Harcourt and Nigeria are repositories of all UN publications. Other Universities are repositories of one or other of the agencies, for example, University of Jos collects publications of United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA); Abeokuta and Akure collect those of Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), while Maiduguri collects those of UNESCO.

7. Other Specialized Agencies

These comprise organizations like International Development Research Centre, Canada (IDRC), and Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

8. Ephemeral

These are publications which are either not central to

the collection development policy, or are most infrequently received usually, unsolicited for. Publications from countries outside Africa (usually through their Embassies and High Commissions in Nigeria) belong to this class. So are some other organizations whether local or international, private or governmental, example, The Red Cross, and Amnesty International.

IMPORTANCE OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

The importance attached to special collections in Nigerian university libraries is a necessary consequence of their nature (i.e. special collections). They present three common and distinguishing characteristics: rarity, limited audience, and substantial raw data. They cannot be found on the bookshop shelves as other books because they are published and distributed in limited quantity for limited circulation. Their contents, like those of business organizations and UN publications, appeal only to a limited curious public such as shareholders and researchers. For researchers, special collections are 'gold-mines' of raw, credible, authentic, and substantial data.

It is noteworthy that 16 out of the 20 libraries surveyed have a separate room for their special collections. Moreover, 15 out of the 20 have Documents Librarians. It could be said, therefore, that some fundamental steps have already been taken towards adequate development of special collections in at least 75 percent of the libraries. The operational variability of these provisions is a different

matter not particularly addressed in this paper. The range of materials held by the different universities is tabulated in (Table 1).

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LIBRARY ACQUISITIONS

Acquisition of library materials in Nigerian universities has generally ran into severe economic problems since the last ten years when the country's economy nose-dived. (Universities in the country are about 90 percent government sponsored). The situation was so grim that in 1987 it was stated that "some libraries had no journal issues after 1982"[1]. Nwafor went beyond Nigeria, periscoped the Third World, and concluded that:

> "A decade of economic privation has brought universities and university libraries of the Third World to the brink of chaos and possible extinction"[2].

He preferred "enormous advances in institutional cooperation" as a necessary solution. This prescription is also emphasized in this paper. In 1987, the Academic and Research Libraries Section of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) organized a seminar out of concern for the worsening economic situation. Strategies agreed upon for the survival of academic and research libraries included: the need to explore all avenues of, and vigorously develop collections through gifts and exchanges and; the operationalization of "pragmatic schemes for interlibrary cooperation and resource sharing"[3].

Perceiving the library situation in the country as an emergency, the federal government in 1990 bargained for and

secured a World Bank Credit Facility to provide federal university libraries with books, journals and equipment. However, this facility largely excludes special collections. Librarians, therefore, must evolve better strategies for building their special collections even in these austere times.

Justifying the above suggestion is that to all the libraries, special collections come under no separate budget heading. Therefore, the availability of funds for purposes of acquiring them other than through gifts and exchanges, legal deposits, and commitments, is dependent on the funding made available for books and journals. Noting the importance of special collections for scholarship, it is perhaps necessary to now consider an additional head - (special collections) in the library budget of the universities. The implication of this is that Documents Librarians would now be compelled to prepare definite programs and make definite efforts at special collection building.

COLLECTION BUILDING

As currently obtaining at Ibadan, Ile-Ife and Jos, a Collection Development Policy (CDP) is a pre-requisite for effective special collection building (SCB). Their CDPs state the type of materials to be acquired and the procedures for acquisition, processing and administration. Most of the libraries currently have no CDP for their special collections.

The past and current efforts at SCB in the university libraries have been through a combination of the following channels: Acquisition trips (including purchases), Bequests, Commitments, Gifts and Exchanges, Legal Deposits as discussed below.

1. Acquisition Trips

This has been more of a necessity in collecting or purchasing materials from, especially, government departments and ministries. Moreso, government publications are produced in limited quantity and the possibility of reprints is remote. In the last five years, governments - federal and state, have either slowed down or stopped sending complementary copies to institutions on their mailing lists, because of national austerity budget cuts. All the university libraries currently undertake acquisition trips, the most aggressive being about twice a year out of town, while for many, it is becoming a biennal activity due to declining funding.

A solution would be for libraries to consider establishing "Clearing Houses". Thus, the universities would be zoned along subject and/or geographical lines and a library identified in each zone would collect government publications on behalf of the zone. The respective government - ministries and departments would equally be notified by the Committee of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities (CULNU) of this arrangement.

The specialization of universities in terms of disciplines as presently constituted, makes this suggestion plausible. Moreover, it has a potent economic advantage of reducing cost of acquisition trips for each library. But each library must imbibe the necessity of such a program in order for it to succeed. Otherwise, problems of management and transportation of materials would emerge. However, it is observable that publications emanating from Nigerian governments have, in the last couple of years, drastically decreased both in quantity and frequency due to the austere economic situation of the country, so there may not be many items to carry about.

2. Bequests

Generally of biographical nature, they are acquired usually through the administration of wills, bequests or as commitments from some organizations. Each library will continue to attract bequests. For a meaningful CB where a university acquires a collection through bequests, and, without strings attached, and such a collection is not directly relevant to its academic program, it could be turned over to another institution where it would be more academically relevant.

3. Commitments

Commitment is used to represent the situation where, like with UN publications, the publisher or donating organization undertakes, through mutual agreement with a library, to send some or all of its publications to it. This

is usually entirely without cost to the receiving library. Most publications of African governments, inter-governmental and international organizations have been received this way. It is worthy of note that this category and, legal deposit materials, form the most current publications held in all the libraries, compared with journals!

Presently, there appears to be a geographically balanced and institutionally relevant CB in this regard. The universities at Abeokuta, Akure and Ibadan, which are within a radous of 200 kilometres, tend to overlap in their collection of the Food and Agricultural Organization. This is permissible due to their direct institutional relevance and, in order to enhance ease of use and cost effectiveness. The three institutions offer degree programs in Agriculture. Ibadan has a well established and internationally respected program while Abeokuta is an agricultural university.

However, it does appear that a cooperative scheme between the federal universities for the acquisition of publications of African governments launched in 1975 is moribund and needs to be resuscitated. Socio-politico-economic changes in Africa have been so rapid since the last decade and the nation's universities may become academically malnourished (in this regard) if they fail to keep track of the trend. This is the more so as seven new universities have since been established. Moreover, there is no medium - such as circulated lists, of knowing what each of the participating libraries had acquired

under this particular scheme. A resuscitated scheme should take these shortcomings into consideration. Reviews could be done after every five years.

4. Gifts and Exchanges

Currently, only 50 percent of the university libraries undertake this actively. The major constraint is attributable to inadequate funding such that even mailing of parcels becomes unbearable. Yet, this is a usually profitable channel of CB.

5. Legal Deposits

Acquisition of special collections via legal depository rules appears to have been perhaps the only channel through which most of the libraries' Nigeriana collections are distinguishable from archives. Government publications like gazettes, annual reports and budgets are sent regularly by some of the states to the relevant libraries. This is the case with business organizations which, as one of the conditions for their registration with the Federal Ministry of Trade, must publish and send their annual reports and statements of accounts to relevant bodies/institutions.

In the past, both the federal and state governments sent their publications to most libraries. This has ceased to be the case in the last six or so years. The trend today is that even when the university is located in a particular state, unless the Documents Librarian makes an effort, the library might not get publications emanating from that state even when legal deposit law exists.

It is suggested therefore, that for the same economic considerations, each university library should first ensure (possibly through the Library Association) that a repository law exists in the state for which it would be a beneficiary where no such law currently exists. Then, it should strive to ensure that all publications meant to be received by law, are acquired. If this is ensured, other libraries will then confidently and conveniently access the materials through normal resource - sharing arrangements.

6. Purchases

An increasing number of government publications have to be purchased. Materials on local history also often have to be purchased.

The problem with the purchase of certain government publications is that it is not all the time that the library gets to know of their availability. When it does, it might not have the fund. When it does have the fund, the publications may be out-of-print. Very few of the government printers in the country produce lists. The last list produced by the Federal Government Printer was in 1978[4].

Moreover, the publication of government documents are not necessarily centralized, with various departments and ministries publishing. Thus, bibliographic control becomes critical. This trend is a challenge to particularly librarians in government departmental and ministry libraries.

With due consideration of the joint acquisitions program suggested under Acquisition Trips, there would be need for

adequate funding of the zonal clearing houses by participating libraries, possibly through CULNU. This would enable the acquiring libraries to purchase sufficient copies of government publications for distribution to the libraries.

OTHER AVENUES FOR COLLECTION BUILDING

A few other possibilities for CB are explored here.

1. Cooperative Acquisition Scheme and National Union Catalog

In 1980, the National Library, following recommendations of a national conference on cooperative acquisition, launched a Cooperative Acquisition Scheme involving all libraries in the country. The country was divided up into eight zones with six university libraries and two state libraries respectively serving as zonal headquarters. Their functions were:[5]

a) to acquire materials on the subjects allocated to it (i.e. each zone):

b) each library within a zone is to send one catalog card each of all its acquisitions to the National Library for the National Union Catalog to its zonal headquarters.

It is noteworthy that the enthusiasm which greeted this innovation did not survive the decade. From hindsight, it represents a copied foreign model that ignored the Nigerian realities. Militating obstacles could be summarized as:

a) general austere economic condition prevailing in all libraries;

b) inability of libraries to meet their normal acquisition targets due to inadequate funding;

c) ineffective (or lack of) follow-up by the National Library Serving as national headquarters in terms of coordination, definite pursuit of goal and, the non-availability of review seminars.

These obstacles must be eliminated if any measure of success would be achieved. The project is potentially useful since it naturally leads to the emergence of a more authentic national union catalog. The National Library headquarters must, and, can, practically assert its role even in times like these when it is comparatively economically better off than most libraries.

In many respects, the emergence of a credible union catalog would go a long way in ensuring bibliographic control in the country. This is presently lacking. The situation is entropic. With particular reference to special collections, a rejuvenated Cooperative Acquisition Scheme would ensure a national bibliographic database which would enhance access to the country's information resources.

2. Union Lists of Africana and Nigeriana

In 1975, CULNU agreed to have a union list of university libraries collections on Africa and Nigeria. This project, like the previous ones mentioned, also fell along the way due perhaps to a lack of enduring commitment, since the generation and collation of lists is not as fund consuming as, say, generation of extra catalog cards.

This project can, and, should also be revived, especially now that libraries are unable to meet their usual acquisition targets. It will enhance access of materials.

3. Courier Services

In 1973, CULNU established courier services for facilitating inter-library lending and photocopying. In some cases, researchers who needed to physically access materials in cooperating libraries were able to accompany the courier vans. It was more of geographical convenience, which, by 1976 had the following routes:

(1) Lagos-Ibadan-Ilorin-Zaria (South-North) axis.

(2) Zaria-Kano-Maiduguri-Jos-Sokoto (Northern) Route.

(3) Ibadan-Ife-Benin-PortHarcourt-Calabar-Enugu-Nsukka (West-East) Axis.

Ibadan and Zaria were to serve as switching points while each of the libraries were to contribute ₦5,000 to pay for take-off facilities. As at that time there were twelve federal universities compared to twenty today.

This purposeful innovation has also been virtually eclipsed by the prevailing economic down-turn. Most library vehicles are now only able to cater for local runs in each university. University Librarians should not allow this innovation to go into oblivion. Those, like the University of Jos which are still striving to maintain courier services, are making tremendous contribution to the growth of scholarship in a near - impossible situation.

4. Postal Services

For the researcher who cannot afford to physically travel down to the resource library, lending by post may be the only option left. But it could be very costly particularly the use of postal courier services, while normal postal mail services could be unnecessarily slow and insecure.

However, one means which is yet to be fully exploited by Nigerian libraries is the use of inter-city transport services which are now ubiquitous. Both government and the organized private services already are involved in such arrangements for individuals. For a useful service, CULNU could seek clearacne from the Federal Ministry of Communications in view of the ban on "illegal courier" services. Also, embarking on such services would require plans towards security of materials and speed. As test cases, individual libraries should approach relevant organizations for appropriate beneficial arrangements.

5. Photocopying Services

Realizing that special collections are usually on close access, any form of accessing them in other libraries would still have to be either physical or through photocopying of relevant pages. But in many cases, photocopying of items in special collections is not even allowed.

6. Microfilming Services

One definite way of building up special collections and enhancing use by the academic community is the introduction

of microfilming facility. Some international agencies have already microfilmed some gazettes, development plans and other documents of Nigerian and African governments. The universities at Ibadan and Ile-Ife possess microfilming machines which are presently used largely for lodging newspapers. This should be extended to special collections as it would help to overcome problems of shelving the rather flimsy and deteriorating documents and, increasingly, space which about 65 percent of the libraries currently face. In passing, it should be stated that one of the libraries has had to lock up its collection in a steel cupboard because of problem of space. The provision and maintenance of microfilm machines and readers is worth pursuing now especially through the World Bank Credit facility for federal university libraries.

STANDARDS

The country's university libraries would also need to agree on standards for the cataloguing and classification of special collections. The present situation is as varied as the distances separating the universities. The Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife has developed a classification scheme. The University of Ibadan does more of indexing than classification; while the University of Jos has adapted the classification scheme developed by the National Library of Nigeria.

Generally, government (including inter-governmental) publications are catered for in the above schemes. There are

wider variations between the libraries on the classification of other categories of the special collection like university archives and local history. A standards guide would, therefore, not only aid individual libraries but also, conceivably enhance resource sharing.

FORUM FOR DOCUMENTS LIBRARIANS

In view of the immense value of special collections and the inherent problems militating against their acquisition, processing and availability, a forum would need to be created for documents librarians to:

(1) meet regularly to discuss state-of-the-art.

(2) provide standards for the cataloguing and classification of special collections with the cooperation of the Cataloguing and Classification Section of the Nigerian Library Association.

CONCLUSION

The nature and diversity of special collections in Nigerian federal university libraries has shown a rich resource base. The exploiting of these has been the thrust of this paper. Resource-sharing through meaningful inter-library cooperation for the acquisition and accessing of materials will need to be fully developed. This is in view of the devastating effect of the country's economic predicament since the early 80s and the nebulous approaches so far adopted to collection building and administration. The new decade offers hope for libraries but only if librarians in the country jointly rise up to the challenge.

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Table 1: Classification of Special Collections by University

UNIVERSITY	SPECIAL COLLECTIONS							
	Uni-Archives	Conf Papers	Biogra-phies	Afri-cana	Biz Orgs	U.N	Other Spe Agens	Ephe-meral
1 Abeokuta				x	x	x		x
2 Akure				x	x	x		x
3 Bauchi	x			x	x	x	x	x
4 Benin	x			x	x	x	x	x
5 Calabar	x			x	x			x
6 Ibadan			x	x	x	x	x	x
7 Ile-Ife				x	x	x	x	x
8 Ilorin				x	x	x	x	x
9 Jos	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
10 Kano				x	x			x
11 Lagos		x	x	x	x	x		x
12 Maiduguri				x	x	x	x	x
13 Makurdi				x	x			x
14 Minna				x	x			x
15 Nsukka				x	x	x		x
16 Owerri	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
17 P/Harcourt				x	x	x	x	x
18 Sokoto				x	x			x
19 Yola				x	x			x
20 Zaria				x	x	x	x	x

*Abeokuta and Makurdi are Universities of Agriculture; Akure, Bauchi, Minna and Owerri are Universities of Technology; while all others are conventional universities.

*/GREG./NARP/NAPRI-SHIKA/**