

FIVE YEARS AFTER: EVALUATION OF THE STATE OF DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AND CULTURAL ARCHIVES (DPCHCA) IN UGANDA

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Abstract

Much of Uganda's cultural heritage was exported by colonial powers to outside countries. The colonialists wanted to have their countries, museums and archives where such unique heritage could be preserved for eternity. This was partly because of lack of reliable and systematic preservation, conservation and restoration of the Uganda cultural heritage and archives. Worse, many of the cultural artifacts were destroyed by natural disasters including fire, war and malicious ignorant people. Digital Preservation of Cultural Heritage and Cultural Archives (DPCHCA) has taken popular turn in Uganda as elsewhere in the world as a means of conservation and preservation of cultural heritage for posterity. Through cooperation between the World Digital Library (WDL) and the National Library of Uganda (NLU) remarkable digitization and preservation of Uganda Cultural heritage has taken place. The aim of this paper is to evaluate the development of Digital Preservation of DPCHCA in Uganda with special reference to the World Digital Library and the inception of the National Library of Uganda to the present day. The objectives that guided this exercise/evaluation were: to review the state of development of WDL (Uganda) activities since inception under the National Library of Uganda, to establish the challenges encountered, and advance strategies for future development. Methodology included: review of reports, study tours to custodial institutions of Uganda's cultural heritage, interviews with staff at NLU and individual producers/custodians of Uganda's cultural heritage. Beneficiaries include: archivists, records managers, historians, administrators and managers, LIS educators and students/users all over the world

Keywords: Evaluation; Digital Cultural Heritage; Cultural Archives, World Digital Library and National Library of Uganda.

1. Contextual background

Uganda, politically - the Republic of Uganda- is a landlocked country in East Africa. It is bordered to the East by Kenya, to the North by South Sudan, to the West by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to the Southwest by Rwanda, and to the South by Tanzania. Uganda is the world's second most populous landlocked country after Ethiopia. The southern part of the country includes a substantial portion of Lake Victoria, shared with Kenya and Tanzania,

situating the country in the African Great Lakes region. Uganda also lies within the Nile basin, and has a varied but generally equatorial climate. Uganda takes its name from the Buganda kingdom, which encompasses a large portion of the South of the country including the capital Kampala. The people of Uganda were hunter-gatherers until 1,700 to 2,300 years ago, when Bantu-speaking populations migrated to the Southern parts of the country. The official language is English. Luganda, a central language, is widely spoken across the country, and multiple other languages are also spoken including Runyoro, Runyankole Rukiga, Langi and many others.

Apart from the multi-tribal composition of the Uganda population, the many religions and beliefs in Uganda, and different local governments, there is intensive multi-cultural mix in Uganda. The situation is made more complex and interesting because of the many nationals from all over the world. These nationals reside and work in Uganda making Uganda a very intricate multi-cultural mix. It is an appreciated view among civilized communities that the civilization of a nation is measured by the development of preservation and conservation of cultural heritage and advancement. Culture is the accumulated indigenous and adopted civilization of a nation.

Digitization of cultural heritage has taken popular turn in Uganda as elsewhere in the world as a means of conservation and preservation of cultural heritage and archives for posterity. The strategy of achieving the above was through collaboration between the World Digital Library based at the Library of Congress and the National Library of Uganda. This paper is a review of the state of development during the five years of inception and implementation (2009-2015).

2. Key Concepts defined

World Digital Library- This is an internet based information resource that creates an online collection of unique materials that would enable people from all over the globe to access the documented heritage that exists in various cultural institutions around the world.

National Library of Uganda- NLU was established by the National Library Act, 2001. It is nick named the mother of libraries in a nation. It is a centre of library and information services within the country that manages the legal deposit act, produces the national and retrospective bibliography, offers access to information resources, supports universal availability of publications, and in the absence of library schools/departments it takes the role of educating and training of information professionals (Researcher, 2016).

Digital preservation- This involves protecting cultural heritage through digitizing it to minimize physical deterioration and damage and prevention of loss of information content.

Conservation

Conservation is defined by the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) by providing three definitions of related concepts:

- **Preservation**—the protection of cultural property through activities that minimize chemical and physical deterioration and damage and that prevent loss of informational content.
- **Conservation**—Conservation activities include examination, documentation, treatment, and preventive care, supported by research and education.
- **Restoration**—Treatment procedures intended to return cultural property to a known or assumed state, often through the addition of non-original material.

Cultural heritage

Cultural heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values. Cultural heritage is often expressed as either Intangible or Tangible Cultural Heritage (ICOMOS, 2002). As part of human activity Cultural heritage produces tangible representations of the value systems, beliefs, traditions and lifestyles. As an essential part of culture as a whole, cultural heritage, contains these visible and tangible traces from antiquity to the recent past. Cultural heritage is manifested in three major types below and as depicted in the diagram:

- Built in Environment (Buildings, Townscapes, Archaeological remains),
- Natural Environment (Rural landscapes, Coasts and shorelines, Agricultural heritage)
- Artifacts (Books & Documents, Objects, Pictures)



Figure 1: Cultural Heritage
Source: Thurley (2005)

According to Feather (2006) the driving force behind all definitions of Cultural Heritage is: *it is a human creation intended to inform.*

Heritage Cycle

The Heritage Cycle diagram gives us an idea how we can make the past part of our future (Thurley, 2005). In a clockwise direction the wedges and arrows read:

- By understanding (cultural heritage), people value it
- By valuing it, people want to care for it
- By caring for it, it will help people enjoy it
- From enjoying it, comes a thirst to understand
- By understanding it...etc

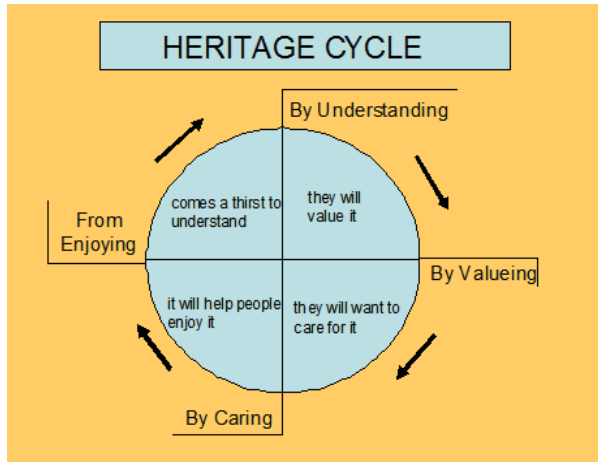


Figure 2: The heritage cycle
Source: Thurley (2005)

3. Background to the National Library of Uganda (NLU) and the World Digital Library (WDL) in digitizing cultural heritage

NLU was established by the National Library Act, 2003. It repealed the Public Libraries Act, 1964 which set up the Public Libraries Board to run Public Libraries in Uganda. The powers to run Uganda Public Libraries were vested in the Local Government as per the Local Government Act, 1995. The establishment of the National Library Act vested an advisory role on public libraries in Uganda (National Library of Uganda Website, 2016).

NLU participated in the World Digital Library (WDL) project began over its inception, implementation and this review (2009-2015). WDL is an Internet based information resource that is co-sponsored by the Library of Congress (LC) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). In 2005, the Librarian of Congress, Dr. James Billington approached UNESCO with a proposal to create an online collection of unique materials that would enable people from all over the globe to access the documented heritage that exists in various cultural institutions around the world. WDL is intended to be used by everybody. Particular emphasis is put on young people especially, to promote international and inter-cultural understanding. The description of each item is meant to capture the interest and imagination of the user so that he/she develops an appetite to know more about the country and the institution where the items are located.

According to the WDL website (www.wdl.org), the principal objectives of the WDL are to:

- Promote international and intercultural understanding;
- Expand the volume and variety of cultural content on the Internet;
- Provide resources for educators, scholars, and general audiences;
- Build capacity in partner institutions to narrow the digital divide within and between countries.

4. Aim and objectives of WDL in Uganda

The general objective of WDL in Uganda was to trace and digitize the Uganda's political, economic, social and technological (PEST) history. This was guided by the theme "Unity in diversity - the coming together as a nation through documentation, preservation and dissemination of Uganda cultural heritage home and abroad".

Related to the above general objective, WDL (U) specific objectives included: promoting Uganda's heritage worldwide; bringing Uganda national heritage in one place/space for use by both intellectuals and the general Ugandan public; conserving and preserving Uganda's heritage; and contributing to regional cooperation

5. Review of the state of development of WDL (Uganda) activities since inception (Achievements)

Digitisation of cultural heritage of Uganda- Over three thousand (300) Cultural heritage collected from individuals, and custodial institutions were digitized from which many qualified for inclusion to the world digital library website.

Knowledge and experience of the digitization process acquired- Six members of staff acquired knowledge and experience in the digitization process of cultural heritage.

Coordination- National institutions have cooperated in preserving and conserving cultural heritage and digitising them.

International visits- International visits were made to the National Library and Archives of Egypt (Dar al-Kotub at Bab El Khalq) in Cairo , Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Alexandria, University of Pretoria and the Library of Congress. From the visits staff was exposed to new methods of planning a Digital Conversion Centre.

Sensitisation of stakeholders- To consolidate their commitment and performance to the contribution of cultural heritage, stakeholders were sensitized on the aim and objectives of WDL Uganda.

Treatment of digitisable collections- Cultural heritage of digitisable collections from stakeholders was treated to preserve and conserve them for the future generation.

Establishment of a Task Force- A Task Force was established with specific responsibilities to identify digitisable areas on Uganda.

Adoption of the digitization theme- WDL Uganda adopted the theme "Unity in diversity - the coming together as a nation through documentation, preservation and dissemination of Uganda cultural heritage home and abroad" which was the password for the strategy of digitization, preservation and conservation of cultural heritage of Uganda.

Consolidation meetings- These were the strategies for the institutions that were already partners and those that intended to become potential partners to fully participate in establishing and maintaining a Digital Scan Centre.

Networking-This was set as a mechanism for both Networking of both physical and informational resources and ideas in the digital process.

Presentation of papers- Papers were presented in fora to disseminate of knowledge, experience and plans on the digitization process

Trainings - Training sessions were conducted to staff and stakeholders on digitization.

Meetings- Several meeting were held to both stakeholders and NLU staff to review and plan for the digitization activities.

Conferences- National, Regional and International conferences were held to discuss and agree on common aspects related to digitization.

Recruitment of staff- Staff was recruited to shoulder the respective responsibilities in the process of digitizing Uganda Cultural Heritage.

6. Challenges

In undertaking new ventures such as WDL, challenges are expected. Some of the challenges encountered are enlisted below:

- Knowledge of digitisation and its importance;
- Lack of digitisation Infrastructure;
- Lack of digital specialists;
- Uncooperative institutions;
- Brittle nature of some of the collections;
- Copyright and neighboring rights matters;
- Lack of conservation and preservation policies;
- Young national library - Limited number of WDL qualifying items from National Library of Uganda (NLU) collections;
- Poor environment for documents - Tropics climate and paper documents do not go together – humidity, mould, insects, water and dust;
- People not being aware of the ‘treasures’ they have and having thrown them away because they have photocopies;
- Suspicion by holding/custodial institutions as to the project’s intentions;
- Poor handling of documents leading to their destruction. Some of those that qualify for the project are in a very brittle state;
- Most of what we can show to the world that is unique to us and inherent within us is passed on to the next generation orally;
- Most of Uganda’s uniqueness is therefore undocumented;
- Competing national priorities; and
- Lack of Internet access by most ordinary Ugandans.

- Technical Support - WDL (U) has two computers for both scanning and post processing activities. The Post Processing Scanner broke down which slowed the progress of the post processing activities. Further, Uganda experiences power rationing (load shedding) which affects the scanning activities.
- Difficulty in digitizing materials - Some digitisable materials are in hard-bound format which makes them difficult to digitize. Many materials are too brittle to be digitized. Furthermore, institutions insist that their digitisable materials should be scanned at their premises for security reasons.
- Scattered collections – many institutions holding unique items are scattered all over the country. It is not easy to know who has which materials because there is no tracing guide. The only alternative is to enquire from different historians and administrators, who many times are un-cooperative or are not sure.
- Demand for compensation in exchange of ideas and digitisable materials which drains the limited financial resources.
- Lack of guidelines in ‘metadataling’ African based information resource
- Lack of preservation materials, tools and equipment, coupled with technical inabilities also contribute to the great loss of records.
- Maintenance of the most essential equipment is limited, with spare parts hardly available. Such equipment are more of museum pieces than functioning preservation tools.
- The absence of exemplary regional centers that continuously offer training to young professionals (especially conservators) is another hindrance to having skilled staff within most institutions and archives.

7. Strategies for future development

Creation of the Uganda Digital Repository-NLU should create a Digital Repository of the WDL (U) output from all stakeholders which should be accessible freely to end-users both within and outside of the institution.

More Dissemination strategies of WDL Uganda activities- There is need to develop viable dissemination strategies of WDL Uganda activities to both existing and potential stakeholders.

Sensitising of non participating institutions in WDL Uganda activities - There is a need to sensitise those institutions and individuals that are not yet stakeholders to WDL to do in order to reap benefits from WDL benefits.

WDL (U) infrastructure and facilities- WDL Uganda infrastructure must be planned, implemented and maintained to provide efficient services.

Training of required personnel- As the services of WDL (U) expand, there is need for well educated, trained and experienced personnel – conservators, metadata specialists, scanner specialists, etc. to plan, execute and evaluate WDL (U) services nationally and worldwide. Therefore, a regional education and training centre should be established.

Sustainability- The process of digitization, meta data, preservation, conservation cannot be fully achieved overnight, consequently, there is need to plan for sustainability strategies such as comprehensive budget, enhancing staff recruitment, training and retention, establishing a

digitisation department/centre dedicated to digitization of cultural heritage, collaborative efforts, education and training, exchange of staff and hosting of seminars, workshops and conferences as for a of updating knowledge that keeps on changing.

8. Conclusion

Uganda is joining the community of nations in making any items that it deems to be unique and of great historical value accessible to the rest of the world. With a very rich cultural heritage, Uganda has a lot to offer to the world. In addition, there are many unique documents and other items scattered in various public and private collections in the country that would be of great use both to the Ugandan public. This would bring it all together in one place. We sincerely hope that as a nation we can all work together and bring forward our different expertise in library, archival and museum work, in ICT, in law and in the many other fields represented here, to get all the various 'treasures' we have in our institutions in one place and available to Ugandan public and to the rest of the world.

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