Supporting African Digital Library Projects: Experiences from the Field

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Outline Of Presentation

• Background
• Formation of Support Network
• Projects
• From SAGSN to ADLSN
• Partnerships
• Support Activities
• Challenges
• Recommendations
• Conclusion
Background

What is a Digital Library?
A digital library (DL) is "an organised collection of information, a focused collection of digital objects, including text, video, and audio, along with methods for access and retrieval, and for selection, organisation, and maintenance of the collection" (Witten and Bainbridge, 2003)
Background

Digital Library Software: Greenstone
Greenstone is an open source suite of software for building and distributing digital library collections (New Zealand Digital Library Project, n.d.)
Formation Of Support Network

In 2004 a Greenstone Support Organisation for Africa (GSOA) was conceptualised (Dynal Patel) with these phases:

Phase One
A comprehensive feasibility study with the support of an advisory panel of African specialists (study: Peters, 2006)

Phase Two
Preparing facilities and resources

Phase Three
Launch of services, start of monitoring, reaching sustainability
Phase 2 and 3: externally funded projects

• Pilot Project (2007 - 2008)
  – Southern African countries
• 2009 - 2010 Project
  – Included countries from other regions
• External funding from the US
• EIFL FOSS as executing agency
• All coordination through Regional Coordinator
ADLSN National Centres

Senegal  Nigeria  Namibia  Lesotho  Kenya  Tanzania  Malawi  Zimbabwe
The Cascading Principle…

Whereby National Centres draw trainees from neighbouring countries including Botswana, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Swaziland, Uganda and Zambia, who are in turn candidates to start their own National Centres
The 2009-2010 project added these numbers of specialists trained in the use of Greenstone:

- Ethiopia: 1
- Kenya: 35
- Lesotho: 6
- Malawi: 10
- Mali: 1
- Nigeria: 44
- Senegal: 23
- Tanzania: 55
- Uganda: 1
- Zimbabwe: 39

10 countries: 215 new specialists
In 2009 – 2010 as a result of training and follow-up support through the National Centres

Over 65 collections have been created containing approximately 20,000 items of all types, including conference and seminar papers, research reports, student projects and theses, past examination papers, archival materials and multimedia.

See: http://www.adlsn.org/results
From SAGSN To ADLSN

Vision
To be a leading network in the development of digital content in Africa

Mission
To facilitate access to local digital content in Africa by means of open source software
ADLSN Key Strategic Objectives

• Extending the network to other countries in Africa
• Continued promotion of digital collections development
• Providing technical support for open source digital library (and related) applications as tools to build collections.
• Giving advice on funding opportunities, sustainability, and best practices in managing digital libraries.
Partnerships

- Greenstone Community
- University of Waikato
- eIFL
- UNESCO
- KIT
- IR-Africa
Support Through Training

- Workshops
  - Formats
  - Duration
  - Participant mix
- Ad hoc Training
- Internships
Other Support Activities

- Site visits
- Mailing List
- Chat
- Telephone
Challenges

• Choosing between applications
  • Choice Matrix

• Lack of Technical Infrastructure
  • Sharing of equipment, e.g., scanners

• Low Technical Skills Levels
  • Workshop participant mix, internships

• Low Skills Levels Amongst Information Professionals
  • LIS Curricula, e.g. SLADS

• Hosting

• Copyright issues

• Sustainability
Recommendations

• Programmes should be demand-driven, results-oriented, starting with advocacy targeting top management and policy makers in participating institutions.

• Projects should include provision of collaborative hosting solutions to ensure global access to African knowledge produced in local digital libraries.
Recommendations (continued)

• Training initiatives should target the right people
• Library schools must be engaged and encouraged to align their curricula to incorporate emerging technologies.
Conclusion

• In order to ensure success, DL projects need top management support and institutional commitment
Thank You!

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For more information...

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References

