

https://dspace.org/

Knowledge or Information Management for Digital Future: The Case of Lesotho

Makara, Mabafokeng; Moetsana, Thabiso

2013-09-27
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/13154

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/



July 2009

1st International Conference on African Digital Libraries and Archives (ICADLA-I)

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
1 – 3 July 2009

Knowledge or Information Management for digital future: the case of Lesotho

Mabafokeng Makara and Thabiso Moetsana National University of Lesotho, Lesotho
Mabmak10@yahoo.com, *thabimoetsa@yahoo.com*











ABSTRACT

Knowledge management is commonly mistaken with information management, while in actual fact they are different although they are normally used interchangeably. This paper will therefore draw a line of demarcation between these two terms in order to discuss clearly the digital future of Africa. It will dwell basically on Knowledge management rather than Information management. Digitizing Africa's future is one challenge facing Information professionals especially Africans. Once Africa's knowledge is digitized, its power will therefore be noticed and it will then be noticeable that developments effectiveness is solely based on knowledge. This paper will again discuss importance of digitization of knowledge for the development of nations. It will further look into constraints hindering Africa in global drive. It is clear that some nations develop faster than others, but in some cases we see governments being obstacles towards development of their nations, there is no support given to either knowledge or information management. This paper will also discuss the skills and competencies needed for developing policies and strategies for Africa's Digital future.

1. Background information

Lesotho is a small sovereign state completely surrounded by South Africa. It is estimated at 30,355 sq km, and its population at 2.2 million. The majority of Basotho are indigenous people living in the highlands. Lesotho's economy is heavily dependent on South Africa with a high percentage of its foreign earnings being remittances from miners employed in South Africa. Without saying anything about its lower education system, Lesotho's higher education has a joint history with Botswana and Swaziland when the three countries had one University called University of Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland (UBLS). Of interest is the origin of Basotho which has various versions. The interesting version for this paper is that the first Mosotho person was called Mopeli, otherwise also known as Tlake. Among the descendants of Tlake was Napo, from whom the genealogy of the Bafokeng tribe emerged. This tribe came from Egypt or Ethiopia to South Africa. It came into contact with the Bahurutse in Bechuanaland centuries ago. However, it separated because of a conflict, which was against the wish of the Mofokeng chief. The Bafokeng traveled eastwards and arrived in the then Transvaal, where they divided into two groups.

Lesotho, like many other former British colonies enjoyed some support from Britain for training at postgraduate level and in some specialised areas. South Africa has also played a significant role in the training of Basotho in areas that may not be available in Lesotho, particularly in recent years. So much as this collaborative arrangement enabled Lesotho to train people in disciplines whose training was not available locally; it also made the country unable to see the need for the development of its own programmes for long term sustainability of skills training. Over years of its development, the country managed to establish training programmes in most fields even though for some it was just at paraprofessional level. One finds some form of training available locally in areas such as health, agriculture, financial management, teaching, architecture, construction, and many

others. What is conspicuously missing in all these developments in the country's education and skills training is the training in library and information management. However, The National University of Lesotho is embarking on training of Librarians at diploma level beginning academic year 2009/10.

2. Introduction

African digitization is a concern of most Africans who watched from a distance and see Africa's information being swept away by what one can call Information Erosion, hence the need for Digital Libraries and Archives. This innovation becomes the global drive to build African digital libraries and archives in order to effectively manage African information. It is true that Africa's information is scattered and exposed to non African organizations without accepted protocol and agreement on the issue of ownership of intellectual property rights. Therefore, policy makers should be aware of the cultural implications towards proper channels for collection of information into the digital markets and whether libraries and archives are able to disseminate this preserved information, and also how this information could be utilized effectively by the users at large on the bases of copyright law or what is now known as warez. Discussions here are going to highlight the challenges facing stakeholders in the whole project which involve type of strategies and policies to be in place for preserving and accessing African information, and also acknowledgement of its primary sources which at the end will be transferred into digital form. It is obvious that Africans have lost their rights to their Western counterparts when it comes to information on Africa and its people.

3. Information vs. Knowledge Management

Information and knowledge are two concepts which are used interchangeably by people who somehow find it difficult to critically make a clear distiction between them. Ponelis et al (1989) indicate that information comes from the verb inform and knowledge from the verb to know. This means that these two terms come with the logic that to know, people need a lot of information. Everybody needs to be informed of the surrounding environment to shape individualism.

3.1 Information Management

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia on the internet, Information management (IM) is the collection and management of information from one or more sources and the distribution of that information to one or more audiences. It is a method to use technology for collecting, processing and condensing information with a goal of efficient management (wikipedia). It further indicates that this sometimes involves those who have a stake in, or a right to that information. In this context, management therefore, means the organization of and control over the structure, processing and delivery of information.

On the other hand Ponelis et al 1989 points out that increasing amount of information are being generated but without the corresponding increase in the ability to manage, interpret and act on the relevant information resulting in an information overload. In this manner this paper is purposefully advocating towards managing the increased African information for the benefit of African development.

3.2 Knowledge Management

According to Botha (2007) there are twelve habours for the journey of knowledge, but for the purpose of this paper the one which he listed number 7 will be used which is “managing knowledge”. He goes further to say there are a several knowledge systems of which two are going to be discussed in this paper, which are “Western system of knowledge” and “Indigenous knowledge system (IKS)”.

Botha defines knowledge management as the ability to utilize the available knowledge resources effectively and in a timely manner, for a company benefit or advantage. This needs a clear understanding of what knowledge is. He describes what he calls knowledge enterprise as one that is staffed with knowledge workers who are totally different from other workers. These workers must have a know-how, know-who, know-when, know what, know-where, and know-why. Ponelis et al.1989 supports the above view by stating that knowledge is the combination of information context and experience. These two further clarify that context is an individual’s framework for viewing life. This includes influences like social values, religion, cultural heritage, and gender. Lastly, they indicate that experience is previously acquired knowledge. In actual fact information should be transmitted from one person to another or one continent to another; and as a result information management is the watch dog to the delivery of the correct intended information. This forces Africa to manage its information for consistency of intended outcome. The literature reveals that the future growth and prosperity of nations depend on the ability to manage both information and knowledge.

4. Digitization

One scholar posed a question of what digital libraries are and how should they be designed and used, and what relationship will they bear to what we now call libraries. However, Leiner *(1998)* states that the term "Digital Library" has a variety of potential meanings, ranging from a digitized collection of material that one might find in a traditional library through to the collection of all digital information along with the services that make that information useful to all possible users. In consideration of the above quote, one would say digitization is the conversion of information from physical to digital format. This process can be done with any form of information including physical artifacts such as plant specimens, maps, and artistic work. Once the piece of information is scanned, several other technical processes are done to the file in order to convert it into a format that can be stored as an image. To facilitate access, metadata is created for each piece and a browser interface is provided for the users. Using this kind of technology, it is possible to preserve information materials whose original pieces are almost crumbling

due to excessive usage and also to provide unlimited access to the materials through the Internet to users that are situated far away from the location of the material. In this case digital library is therefore the collection of services and information objects that support users in dealing with information objects and the organization and presentation of those objects that are available directly or indirectly via electronic/digital means (Leiner *1998)*.

4.1 Digitizing Africa's Future

African Digital Libraries and Archives; what do we actually want to digitize do we talk of a new collection with different content or already existing information resources we have in our libraries and archives? How do we want to carry out this project? These are questions we have to answer before we can start so as to see whether we are capable of digitizing our information resources or not.

Africa's information needs to be collected, organized and controlled by skilled Africans and this should be done through proper channels. It should be produced with a particular audience in view and for specific purpose as it is stated in an article in honour of Michael Omolewa edited by Oduaran and Bhola (2006).

The information management is hopefully going to help many countries even Lesotho as well to digitize their own indigenous information and preserve it for effective use. Peters and Pickover 2000 put more emphasise on this by saying digital technology is a driving force behind many of the changes occurring in higher education. Distance learning demands online delivery.

4.2 Skills and competencies for Africa's Digital Libraries and Archives

Skills are knowledge of how a particular piece of work ought to be done, and competencies are abilities that a person possesses to be able to carry out a specific piece of work. The two terms are closely related concepts and are often used interchangeably. Skills and competencies usually refer to technical abilities and such abilities are obtained from some kind of training, which is often conducted in a formal manner.

In this Era of Information we need developed skills from what we use to have as information professionals. For the purposes of discussion in this paper, these skills and competencies will be grouped in five categories according to the main functions of the information profession. These categories are as follows: acquisition of information, technical processing and organisation of information, storage of information, dissemination of information, and resource management.

Skills to manage this type of a project are very rare among Information professionals and even where they are present they are usually confined to a few. As this is becoming vital to the management of information, it would therefore be essential that all information professionals get some form of training on how technology works (Makara 2002).

5 Strategies for African digital Libraries and archives

There are a number of things which can be thought of as strategies for digitizing our Libraries and Archives. Among these are: Library research unit, Gate keeping, African Information Bank, and Africa's Information Policy.

5.1 Library research unit

The collection of information needs a special unit to find correct useful information on Africa. This information needs to be processed and be put into database and this should not be done by amateurs but professionals. Various aspects of life could bring the classification of information into various issues such as health, agriculture, culture, and many others which need to be organized and processed.

Library's main goal is to provide users with useful information from either primary or secondary sources. The Library and Archives should acquire information from around the globe. It is the Library's mandate to protect information from being misused by other nations without proper channels meant to provide such information. According to Ponelis & Frairer-Wessels (1989) Knowledge has its own hierarchical structure, meaning; it starts with data, information, and finally converted into knowledge. The lowest level of known facts is data and when it is processed, it becomes information which has no meaning. Lastly, when information is combined with context and experience, it becomes knowledge which is needed by Africans for digitization. Information as a result, should be collected by Africans from African sources and be preserved. Research is useful for collecting appropriate information from different perspectives such as health, poverty, literacy, development, culture, education etc. In this manner Africans should play a vital role in gathering all these information. Therefore, there is a dire need for adequate skills and competencies for this practice.

Research normally starts with the problem of such society which needs immediate attention. This implies that data is collected throughout the African continent and the results from the analysis should be regarded as information to be preserved with thorough information filtering. It is with research that Libraries and archives could be able to develop their services and be treated as information resource centres from where knowledge will emanate.

5.2 Gate keeping

Information dissemination is an important aspect in library work. However, it is very important that this information could be filtered before it could reach various people through out the world especially information about Africa and their people in relation to development. There are various ways of revealing what has been experienced through interaction with their environment at the right time and to the right people with

recognition based on the nature of such information. Creating website is one way of accumulating and filtering information, recognizing the ownership and disseminating African information to the world by Africans and not non Africans.

5.3 Africa's Information Bank

African website could determine what kind of information is likely to be transferred to the website through acknowledgement of its primary source. Through this strategy, people could be motivated to provide needed information for the people at large. The external liberation of information involves breaking down national barriers to information resulting in greater openness and integration of African countries in the information markets (Khor 2001). He states that this kind of process has been termed transformationalization, in which fewer and fewer African countries would gain a large and rapid increasing proportion of African Information, resources, and market shares rather than coming from the non African civil societies. This was the result of multinational continents as well as individuals used to dominate the information market but now Africa could produce service and disseminate African information through the digitlization of its information and knowledge. Therefore globalization of policy making could be the cornerstone of the success of the project of digital libraries and archives.

The standards used to process physical formats of information sources cannot always be used to process electronic information sources. As such, standards that can be used for such information materials had to be developed. Among the modern skills and competencies, therefore, one has to acquire skills and competencies in the use of Metadata, standards such as Uniform Resource Identifiers (URI) and Dublin Core and various other abstracting and indexing techniques that are used in the processing of Internet resources. These skills are lacking in most of our African Information professionals more especially Basotho.

This is only when African Information Bank, in a form of a web site, should be thought of; where all the information could be controlled from being utilized unnoticed by non Africans. With training of Librarians taking another form that focuses more on Information Technology, Librarians will be able to mange this type of a project without bothering IT specialists.

In the old days there used to be what used to be a Union Catalogue where libraries could subscribe and become members. To access information from this, more especially for Inter Library Loans there used to be a code for each country. I remember Lesotho's code was "HI BU MAO HERE". Even in this innovation we could think of something like that

5.4 Africa's Information Policy

A policy is typically described as a deliberate plan of action adopted by an individual or social group, to guide decisions and achieve rational outcome(s). The term may apply to government, private sector organizations and groups, and individuals (wikipedia).

The world has been influenced by the globalization of national policy. We think globalization is good and could have more emphasis if it could encourage African countries to come together for the accumulation and dissemination of information by their people rather than non African scholars about African activities. It has come to our understanding that information dissemination has limitations which should be taken into consideration when formulating and implementing the African information policy such as ownership, information control, security, kind of information to be disclosed, and who should be accountable for such information could it be misused. Information policy is one solution to the problem facing information professionals.

Piracy nowadays is on its top gear. All digital sound and movies are being misused by those who do not won them. Due to free access to computers people just duplicate other people's movies or albums from DVDs and start making money out of them. The facts that they sell cheap consumers buy them and never bother about the originals which are more expensive. This was a concern recently over Lesedi Radio. Which policy could be used to protect this intellectual property right? Africa needs to come up with a policy that will help it combat this piracy. Africans should consider putting a stop to warez by coming up with piracy policy.

A privacy policy is a legal document that discloses how a party retains, processes, discloses, and purges customer's data. Such examples could be the instance of a website providing information about the use of personal information, particularly personal information collected via the website by the website owner. Privacy policies usually contain details of what personal information is collected, how the personal information may be used, the persons to whom the personal information may be disclosed, the security measures taken to protect the personal information, and whether the website uses cookies and/or web bugs (Wikipedia).

6. Challenges and innovations

We are all aware that computers today have made our lives easy basically on information acquisition, preservation, management and utilization. Thornton (1997) indicates that computers have become indispensable tools in Library culture because they are effective and efficient in serving the library needs. This takes us back into the historical foundation of education where most of useful African information was not well preserved and lately such information got lost. In this regard the idea of African digital libraries and archive is of very importance to information access at the right time. Therefore the Strategies and/or policies should be in place to collect useful information and convert it into electronic format for long term sustainability.

Here we see a greater challenge facing our information professionals. They need to be in the forefront to pick this innovation up and make sure that African information is secured. At present most of our African content is being digitized in western universities like University of Wisconsin which has the whole database on African information. University of Wisconsin Library has a collection of 3000 slides, 500 photographs, and 50 hours of sounds from forty-five different countries, of which most are African countries.

AJOL on the other hand has all he its journals on African content. They come to Africa to sell their services to us on our property.
Library and information Science as a discipline on its own right has to include among its researchable topics; African Studies whereby researchers will dwell more on African content than any other.
South Africa is one country that keeps preserves African content which is not digitized. Killie Campbell collections in Durban for example, has a lot of documented information on Africa. The collection includes Killie Campbell Africana Library, the William Campbell Furniture and Art collection, and the Mashu Museum of Ethnology. However, there is a mass of information on History of Lesotho/Basotho in this collection which even Basotho do not know that it exists or is available somewhere.

7. Current Situation in Lesotho

Many countries have been training librarians, some abroad and others in their own countries. Lesotho is not an exception in this case; it has been training librarians/information specialists at all levels, although in other countries. Some joined this field from certificate to Masters; others went as far as degree, while some few have Masters after having their first degree on different fields. Unfortunately Lesotho does not have IT specialists in the library therefore most developments involving IT are a big challenge. Most of the services are suffering due to this problem. It would be proper if libraries in Lesotho have IT specialists who have a feel on a subject matter so that when a concern is raised those specialists should have a clear picture of the views.

When it comes to African studies, Lesotho is very poor in provision of African information. The little we have is documented, and a little on some activities like cultural activities which are held every year are digitized, although it is only in printed format of information and pictures. Few sounds is recorded and placed in the Archives which makes it difficult for accessibility and nobody knows that they are there due to lack of Technological competence .

National University of Lesotho is offering a course on African Languages and this is not enough. We need to have more than just languages on Africa. For example, University of Wisconsin has more information about Africa which many Africans are not even aware of. African Libraries therefore, need to have all types of information on and about Africa, this is where ownership should be clear and policies are supportive.
The National University of Lesotho Archives has a lot of printed information on Lesotho as a continent and information about Basotho as African people. This needs to be digitized so as to be globally accessible.

8. Constraints

Constraints are always part of our everyday professional developments. In this project one could see problems of, lack of adequate skills for this particular project. Information

professionals' training is the traditional one where designing Websites for an example is not of their interest. There is always a budget cut-off in most institutions when it comes to library needs. Library professionals always get it tough to get funding to attend even conferences and workshops which are meant for training and skills development. As much as they are providing a resource which one cannot do without, governments do not give Library profession a priority in anyway. However, this is the fault of Library Associations who do not advocate enough for this profession; as a Result nations have a very poor network development and unincreased bandwidth which are essential in this digital age.

9. Conclusion

When concluding these deliberations, it is obvious that Africans have been ignorant of their cultural heritage for a time. It is clear that African Library Associations are not playing their part in terms of advocating their profession. They are not managing information the way they ought to, for they are supposed to be prime movers of nations' development which is based on information. There is a need for African Library Associations to form a mother Association which could be called African Library Association. Like American Library Association (ALA), Africans will be able to be in control of information pertaining to Africa as a continent. On top of this, training in library studies should include a lot of technological skills which a lot of our Library and Archives professionals lack.

References

1. Botha, Anthon P.(2007). Knowledge: living and working with it Cape Town. Juta & Co.

2. Khor M. (2001). Rethinking Globalization: critical issues and policy choices.
. London: Zed Books

3. Leiner, Barry M (1998). Draft Prepared for the DLib Working Group on Digital Library Metrics January 16, 1998 Revised October 15, 1998

4. Makara, M. (2002). Skills and competencies for the 21st Century Information Professionals: a case of Lesotho

5. Oduaran, Akpovire and Bhola, Harbans S (2006). *Widening access to education as social justice: essays in honour of Michael Omolewa. Doldrecht*

6. Peters, Dale & Pickover Michael (2002). *DISA: Development and implication of an African model for digital library resources* [IN] Proceedings of the 15th Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern African Library and Information Associations, held at Caesars Gauteng Conference Centre, South Africa.

7. Thornton, J.K. (1997).Carpal Tunnel Syndrome in ARL Libraries. In *Journal of College and Research Libraries*. VOL. 58, No.1-6, 1997.

8. Ponels S. & Freirer- Wessels F.A. (1989) Knowledge Management: a literature overview. [In] *South African journal of Library and information Science*. Vol. 66 No.1 , 1989.

Weblography

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_management
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warez#Movie_piracy
http://home.imaginet.co.za/liasa/makara%202002.rtf