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CREATING DIGITAL LIBRARY COLLECTIONS: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FOR LIBRARIES IN MALAWI

By

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Presentation Outline

- Efforts to access and increase African electronic information online
- The status of Malawi libraries
- Digital libraries collections in Malawi
- The role of African Digital Library Support Network
- Challenges in the creation of Digital Library collections in Malawi
- Conclusion

Efforts to access and increase African electronic information online

- Over the years there has been steady progress in demand for electronic access to electronic information by researchers, academics, scholars, policy makers, etc.
- Institutions such as Electronic Information for Libraries (eIFL), International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Research4Life, International Aquatic and Science Libraries and Information Centers (IAMSLIC), and Cornell University with their programmes, or electronic resources such as HINARI, AGORA, OARE, PERii, Aquatic Commons and TEEAL, have assisted a number of institutions in Africa to easily access to electronic information by either making the electronic resources available free of charge or heavily subsidized costs.

Efforts to access and Increase African electronic information… (cont'd)

- Notable progress has also been registered in increasing African content on the web, preservation and conservation of local materials or cultural heritage through the creation of digital libraries.
- Institutions in Africa have also taken advantage of the availability of open access software such as Greenstone, DSpace and e-Print to create digital libraries or repositories.

Efforts to access and increase African electronic information... (cont'd)

- Institutions such as eIFL, INASP, ITOCA, University of Waikato, IFLA and DISA have assisted in introducing free software, training of library staff on the use of the software, training users of e-resources, provision of equipment such as computers and scanners, and provision of internet connectivity.
- These efforts have assisted libraries and information services in Africa to increase African content online and its usage.

The status of Malawi libraries

- There is a variety of libraries in Malawi, including academic, school, public and special libraries, mainly as integral parts of institutions such as universities, research stations, government departments, statutory organisations, non-government organisations, and schools (both public and private).
- Their levels of funding, stock collections, staffing, and the numbers of their users vary greatly from one library to another.
- Most of the libraries are headed by well-trained staff and almost all run automated operations.
- Malawi libraries have also embraced use of computers in providing services to their users.

The status of Malawi libraries...(cont'd)

- Libraries in Malawi have benefitted from some internationally initiated programmes and opportunities.
- Through the Malawi Library and Information Consortium (MALICO), libraries are able to subscribe to a number of fee-paying e-resources and register for free ones on behalf of their users.
- Working with some of the institutions, Malawi libraries have some staff trained in digitization, created some digital libraries and provided connectivity to their users as has been the case in other African countries

Digital libraries collections in Malawi

- Introduction of Greenstone software through training a workshop and networking
- Introduction of other content software such as DSpace, the Electronic Records and Management System, and Endnote followed.

The role of the African Digital Library Support Network

- Malawi is a member of the African Digital Library Support Network (ADLSN) which was formerly the Southern African Greenstone Support Network. ADLSN supports Greenstone and other free-open source systems.
- Through ADLSN, some Malawi libraries have enhanced their skills in creation and management of digital libraries, by training workshops and sharing of technical information, about Greenstone software in particular and digitization in general.

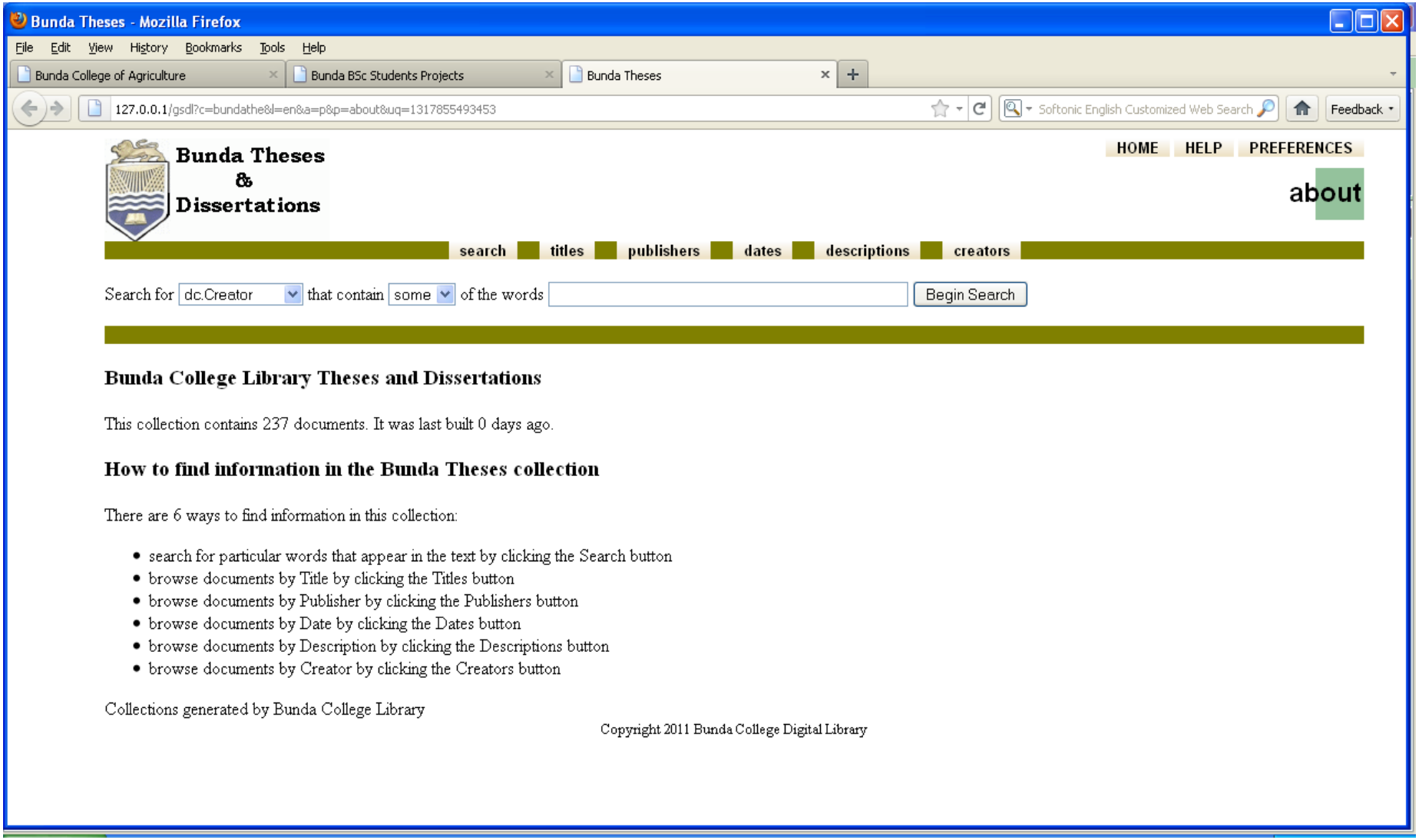
Status of Digital Library collections in Malawi

- There are about 12 digital library collections created by Malawi Libraries
- These are available on intranets or CD-ROMs

Digital Library Collections Created by Libraries in Malawi

Institution	Collections on	Software used	Accessible on
Bunda College	• Students Degree (BSc) Projects • Malawiana Collection; • Past Exam Papers • Theses and Dissertation	Greenstone	Intranet and CD-ROMs
Chancellor College	• Theses and Dissertation	Endnote	Intranet
College of Medicine	• Local publications on HIV and AIDS, • Local publications on Reproductive Health,	Greenstone	Intranet
Mzuzu University	• Theses and Dissertation • Student dissertations • Local scientific papers	Greenstone	Intranet
National Archives	• Presidential speeches	Electronic Records and Management System	Intranet
National Library Services	Scanned articles from local daily newspapers on: • HIV-AIDS • Gender issues	Greenstone	Intranet

An example of a Digital Library collection



Digital Library collections usage at Bunda College of Agriculture

Users' Category	%
Undergraduates	67.5
Postgraduates	75
Academic staff	82.05

Source: Majawa (2011). Implementation and usage of Digital Libraries: a case study of Bunda College of Agriculture Greenstone Digital Library

Digital Library collections usefulness at Bunda College of Agriculture

Users' Category	Very Useful %	Useful %
Undergraduates	45	38.5
Postgraduates	40	60
Academic staff	17.5	75

Source: Majawa (2011). Implementation and usage of Digital Libraries: a case study of Bunda College of Agriculture Greenstone Digital Library

Challenges in the creation of Digital Library collections in Malawi

- Lack of essential equipment such as scanners and servers with adequate saving capacity.

Possible solution:

- A scanner and OCR (optical character recognition) software (ABBYY Fine Reader Ver 9.0 professional edition) were purchased for use by all those institutions without any. This scanner and OCR software are housed at Bunda College of Agriculture Library;
- Other libraries such COM have acquired heavy duty scanners;
- Collaborative projects with international organizations such as CABI and Association of African Universities (AAU) for scanning documents.

Some Types of Scanners in Use



An office scanner based at Bunda College



A heavy duty scanner at COM

Challenges... (cont'd)

- Lack of expertise among library staff in the creation of digital library collections.

Possible solution:

- Cascade the training workshops
- Take advantage of network support

Challenges... (cont'd)

- Introduction of different versions of digitization software in Malawi has created challenges, especially in the exchange of collections' documents among the institutions.
- Some librarians in Malawi have been introduced to at least three different software packages.
- Levels of technical expertise also vary amongst librarians using different software.

Challenges... (Cont'd)

- Institutional staff turnover

Possible solution:

- Continuous training of library staff
- Reward staff for work done

Challenges... (Cont'd)

- The need to secure copyright permissions

Possible solution:

- To review Malawi's Copyright Act to clarify electronic aspects of the law.

Challenges… (Cont'd)

- Almost all these first generation Malawi digital library collections are currently only accessible on the respective institutional intranets

Possible solution:

- Some libraries such as Bunda College of Agriculture have taken the initiative to also make their collections available on CD-ROMs, which are distributed to other institutions.
- Plans are underway to have these collections made accessible online.
- Collaborative projects with international organizations such as CABI
  - Global Agricultural Research Archive (GARA)

Challenges... (cont'd)

- Lack of proper planning by libraries and information centres on digitization projects
  - Institutions jumped on digitization without clear plans
  - Plans not embraced by institutional management
- **Possible Solution**
  - A lot has already been in this conference

Conclusion

- Despite all these challenges, what is important is that some libraries and information centres in Malawi have been able to create useful digital library collections.
- For example, the digitization of examination papers will save students much time, whilst online theses will enhance research. Some are on the right path towards realization of increasing Malawi content online through the creation of digital library collections.

Conclusion ...

- These collections have assisted in the preservation and conservation of rare or unique documents for current use by students and academics and also for posterity, and eventually will make Malawi documents visible online.
- Given the necessary resources, future developments could include broadening the subject scope of content to be digitized and also widening access to these significant scholarly collections.

Conclusion…

- The first step towards broadening the subject scope of content digital library collections and widening their usage in Malawi is to have printed publications scanned then have them available online.
- As already stated, most of the Malawi publications are in print form. Scanning the publications requires heavy duty scanners like the one available at College of Medicine Library.

Conclusion…

- Institutions are supposed to invest more on the equipment to be used for the creation of digital collections. Librarians must also write proposals seeking funding for the equipment.

- The equipment and scanned documents or collections could be shared amongst those who don’t have these.



Thank you for your attention!

