Access to Audiovisual and Multimedia Materials: What Are the Challenges for Developing Countries?

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Introduction

The ever-increasing use of a multiplicity of formats to create, gather and store information has had a major impact on the range of materials found in libraries. Libraries, particularly those in the Western world, have not been immune to such developments. Of particular note has been the growth of non-print materials to support educational, informational and recreational needs. Non-print or audiovisual materials are found in every type of library that exists in the West.

The development of AV collections in libraries is tied directly to the technological revolution that began in the 19th century and which has steadily gained momentum over the years. Most notable among the early achievements in this regard are Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre's 1839 demonstration that images could be captured on film and Thomas Edison's 1877 mastery of recording sound. The combination of these two technologies gave rise to the AV revolution that ultimately impacted on the delivery of library and information services. In developed countries,

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where the relevant technological developments have occurred, the inclusion of a diversity of AV formats to provide library services has become the norm. Unfortunately, a similar pattern of information provision and use has not been evident in most libraries in developing countries.

This paper will look at the issues that negatively affect access to audiovisual materials in developing countries. While the Caribbean serves as the paper's main geographical delimiter, many of the factors that the paper discourses are also evident in and relevant to other parts of the developing world.

Terminology

Many terms are used to describe these materials. They include: non-print materials, non-print media, AV, audiovisual and multimedia materials. While for the specialist these terms can have particular meanings, the terms will be used interchangeably in this discussion.

The range of audiovisual materials available is wide and includes sound carriers of all types; moving and still images with or without sound; realia; ITC-created materials; and, graphically generated materials all of which may be used either as stand alone items or in association with another piece of information. For the purposes of this paper, no distinction will be made between the various types of non-print materials that exist.

The Importance and Role of AV in Libraries

In today's high-tech multi-sensory approach to learning, education, information and recreation, print has a number of deficiencies: it assumes that everyone learns at the same pace and in the same manner. Many people, for example, have challenges reading and learning from textual information. Research indicates that there is a large range of learning styles and that for many people the stimulation of their other senses improves learning. Either on their own or in association with print, AV materials are important modalities that assist or enhance learning. Additionally, for learning situations that include movement and processes, the staticity of print does not convey the intricacies of action that AV media facilitate. Multimedia materials are able to capture, in startling detail, complexities that are unviewable or incomprehensible to the naked eye. Through their ability to demonstrate complicated activities and processes AV items considerably enhance understanding and learning.

The ability of non-print resources to meet the differing needs of clients is supported by John Ellison and Judith Robinson's reference to Lester Asheim's 1968 comment that it requires different types of media to meet the different information needs of different audiences (17). This view is further advanced by educationalist Robert Gagné who asserts: "no single medium is likely to have [all the] properties that make it best for all purposes" (n.p.). While Gagné was referring specifically to education media - his comment is equally applicable to the print and/or non-print in libraries debate.

The number of people who are able to use a printed text at one time is limited, whereas a single pass of an AV item can accommodate a large number of persons. Thus, accessibility to information is considerably increased through the use of AV materials.

The absence of AV materials in a collection also assumes that reading is a satisfactory medium for all purposes. This does not take into account persons who for various reasons prefer to use alternative sources and resources of communication.

Libraries that have not expanded collection development strategies to include all information carriers therefore are unlikely to satisfy all of the information needs of their clients. One this point, Dorothy Broderick opines: "the librarian who fails to use all media is narrowing the world he offers to his users" (34). These views indicate why it is important for non-print materials to form part of the information arsenal of today's libraries and librarians.

Ellison and Robinson advance that the primary purpose of libraries is to help guarantee equal and unrestricted access to all information. Many sources of information are now born as AV materials and often these releases do not have print counterparts. While AV releases used to be restricted to popular culture or educational materials aimed at the pre- and early school ages, this is no longer the case. Today's AV products are universal in scope, covering the gamut of knowledge and information that exists. Non-print materials have come of age as informational, educational and recreational sources and resources. Therefore for libraries to support a comprehensive information service they must extend their collection policies to include multimedia materials.

Specifically regarding the expansion of the resource base of a library to include AV materials, Ellison and Robinson write: "the concept of [the] supremacy of print must be replaced by the concept of the supremacy of information" (17). Information provision should be the guiding criterion for library services and not the format of the presentation. Libraries must therefore extend their collection polices and information carrier holdings to include non-print materials if they are to provide a service that fits the needs of all of their clients.

Associated with the elevated position of print over other media of communication is what Wayne Weigand describes as the "aesthetic conservatism" (200) that exists in librarianship and among librarians. The dominance that print has enjoyed historically as the main means of communication and recording ideas has not made it easy for the newer and technologically-based forms of communication and information provision to be readily accepted in libraries or by librarians as standard items. Many librarians are unaware of the compelling reasons why they need to extend the resource base of libraries to include AV items. Therefore, they are unable to make the case to high-level decision makers about the need to extend the resource base of their institutions to include AV media.

Barbara Moran's investigation into the collection of popular culture materials (which are often released only in an AV format) by academic libraries states that "academic librarians have been wary of collecting popular materials because it goes against the grain of what they have been taught" (4). When this statement is examined in association with her another of her comments namely that "schools of information and library science have done little to widen their student's horizon" one has a better understanding why AV materials are not often found in libraries. While her research was specifically related to academia, her findings are also applicable to other types libraries as well. Through her work Moran clearly demonstrates the reasons why library

and information science students do not get the necessary level of AV exposure that would enable them to confidently institute an AV information service. Moran's comments imply that the reluctance and resistance to including AV services in a library is deep-seated and multi-faceted.

While Moran's observations were made with respect to schools in the West, her comments are equally applicable to library schools in the developing world. Very few schools in the developing world include AV courses in their curricula and those that do are highly academic in orientation. Limited is the hands-on experience that would help and improve a student's comfort level with AV materials. Thus, students in the developing world also graduate from library school with a restricted knowledge base about AV information services, thereby perpetuating the hegemony of print-based library and information services.

Particular Challenges to Providing Access to Audiovisual Materials in Developing Countries

Several factors negatively impact on the ability of libraries in the developing world to provide access to audiovisual materials. This paper will examine a number of the impeding factors.

PHILOSOPHICAL BARRIERS: The continued reliance on print for information purposes is due, in large part, to the supremacy that print has enjoyed of more than 500 years as the main media for information and communication. As Moran, intimates librarians tend to base the services they offer on what they were taught during their training. Given that AV services are a not high priority in many library schools, it is therefore not surprizing that within libraries in developing countries AV services are not the norm.

In the developing world, library and information services are not generally held in high regard by politicians and decision makers, thus attempts to expand library and information services are often resisted. The reality is that libraries are lowly ranked against road, running water and electrification programmes. As AV library and information services are new to many policy makers they are unappreciative of the importance of fostering such a service. Regrettably, libraries and librarians have not always seized opportunities that will enable them to demonstrate the important contribution that libraries generally and AV services in particular can make to the development process.

Where such a service exists an integral part of the philosophical issue is who will be granted access to the service and under what conditions? Access policies range from restricted to full and open access. Which model is adopted will depend on the philosophy of the parent institution and also on the openness of the host library to user access. It is not unknown for example, that for "protective" reasons AV equipment is kept unused in boxes only to be brought out for display purposes on occasions when the donor or a prominent person is making a visit!

FINANCIAL ISSUES: AV resources have particular requirements in order to protect them and also to extend their life. Factors such as appropriate storage conditions, staffing needs, staff training and differing hardware requirements all have financial implications. Each AV software format has its unique hardware requirements and substitutions are not possible. There are financial

implications attached to the acquisition of each non-print format. While an AV service will ultimately become cost effective, the capital outlay required for an AV service is higher than that required for books. For libraries hard pressed to provide a book-based service the funding requirements of an AV service are often incomprehensible.

EDUCATION: Many librarians in developing countries have not had the benefit of pursuing any level of training in AV services. The absence of staff trained in AV and sensitive to the needs of a multimedia service is detrimental to the development of quality non-print library services.

In the developing world, the impact of the absence of such courses is particularly marked. If library and information science students are not widely and equally exposed to the different types of formats that can be used and are available for information storage and dissemination they are unlikely to be proactive in extending the formats collected by their institution(s).

STAFFING: AV services have specific staffing requirements. Particular skills are needed to: development and manage multimedia collections; maintain AV equipment in good running order; ensure that the software is in good condition; and also to set up and dismantle the range of equipment attendant on the type of software found in the collection. Librarians who work in traditional library services are usually unable to execute the technical services associated with AV services, and those who have the aptitude, often require additional training to be able to provide the service.

INADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURAL FACILITIES: Many libraries in developing countries do not have the infrastructural services needed to support AV services. Some lack the electrical supply needed to run electrically powered hardware; others do not have a power supply service that meets hardware needs, e.g. incompatability of voltage and ampage ratings; and, many libraries in developing countries do not have spaces that are suitable for projection or listening services - particularly those which do not adversely affect others as they use the library.

While advances in solar powered technologies are being made, current prices still make such equipment unaffordable for most institutions in developing countries. For example, a recent advertisement for a solar powered desktop quoted a price of over US$1,200 per item.

To maximize the life of AV products they need to be stored in a climatically controlled environment - particularly with regard to the elements of temperature, moisture and light. All of which are difficult to achieve in traditional constructions found in the tropical climates of most developing countries.

CONTENT ISSUES: There are several factors that affect the suitability of AV materials to meet the information needs of users in developing countries. Most AV materials currently available on the market have been produced in the West, by persons from the West and from a Western perspective. Cultural bias and the misrepresentation of social and cultural factors in AV programmes are therefore realities. Which image is used, whose image is captured and what views are portrayed become sources/factors of potential bias. AV materials that accurately

represent the realities of developing countries from the perspective of such regions are not easily available because of such factors as cost, lack of expertise and access to technological resources.

Datedness in AV materials is another content issue affecting accessibility. As AV materials are such powerful media, dated images give the wrong impression of a person, place or situation. Unlike printed materials, updating editions are not part of the AV world, therefore recordings that convey up-to-date information are not always available. Access to up-to-date AV materials can be problematic.

For countries where the lingua franca is not one of the major Western languages - having access to commercially produced AV materials in the national language is almost impossible. Thus, persons seeking AV information in a specific national language have considerable difficulty in accessing such material.

DISTRIBUTION AND LEGAL ISSUES: The rights governing distribution arrangements for AV products are quite different from those that govern the print world. For most AV products, distribution rights are governed by licences, granted on a territorial basis. Many developing countries are excluded from licenses awarded by extra-territorial production houses, presumably because developing countries are not deemed to be a big or important market.

Identifying and locating a vendor of AV materials can be quite challenging. Librarians knowledgeable about book-based acquisition processes find the multiple vendor and vendors of single items that are part of the acquisitions process in the AV world quite challenging. There are no AV jobbers or book seller counterparts in the world of AV. Further, there is no equivalent to the BIPs of the print world. Identifying suppliers of AV materials has to be done on a distributor house-by-house basis. Knowing who sells what and to whom is one of the greatest challenges of providing an AV service. For librarians in developing countries, far removed from the sphere of activity of AV distributors, the identification of non-print vendors becomes even more challenging.

Even when distribution licenses exist, locating the appropriate vendor is quite difficult. Often extraneous factors intervene. The Caribbean, for example, is commonly linked to Latin America. In reality, commercial relations between these two regions are negatively affected by factors such as language barriers, currency regulations, infrequent links for the transferal of goods and high transportation costs. This geographic fusion is often not convenient for Caribbean librarians.

The implications and ramifications of laws and international treaties that govern Intellectual Property are not universally understood. Therefore many persons cannot understand why they cannot copy an AV item and donate it to the library as a means of building the collection or conversely copy a film or recording that the library owns for their own purposes. Also affected by these laws are situations when it is desirable to migrate data from one format to another, particularly when the original carrier is in danger of being corrupted. All of these affect a library's ability to provide a robust AV service.

METADATA ISSUES: The development of metadata descriptors that adequately detail the content of material on or about developing countries is another challenge. As AV materials cannot be scanned like a book, they require detailed cataloguing so that any segment can be accessed for any purpose. For example, a researcher of Jamaican music would want to have an entry under the different genres of Jamaica music such as burru, mento, pocomania, ska, rocksteady, reggae, dancehall and dub, some of which would also need subdivisions. If there are choreographic movements, costuming and other cultural factors associated with the music these also need to be identified. This level of detailing would not be captured under generic terms of "Jamaica - Music" or "Jamaican Music", the applicable cataloguing headings found in established and available international cataloguing schemes. These schemes do not take into account the particular access needs regarding information on developing countries or the unique characteristics of the cultural landscape of developing countries.

Cataloguers who work mainly with printed materials find the cataloguing of AV items very time consuming. In the time that it takes to catalogue one AV item, several books can be catalogued. For example, a 3 hour film can take more than 6 hours to catalogue if it has to be viewed more than once to ensure that it is fully catalogued to ensure maximum access and use.

TECHNOPHOBIA: AV library services are highly dependant on the use of technology. Every item of software usually has its own dedicated piece or pieces of hardware. Many librarians do not have a high comfort level with technology, making the need to use the several different types of hardware associated with an AV library service becomes a challenge for a number of librarians - particularly when it is necessary to do some troubleshooting to address a problem. For those libraries that have a dedicated technical staff this is not as problematic, but there are few libraries in the developing world that which have immediate access to such services. Equipment that is non-functioning or mal-functioning negatively affects an AV library service.

Technologies such as the computer and microfilm reader/printer somehow do not seem to be as challenging - perhaps because they are primarily used to access material that is print-based.

RAPID CHANGES IN TECHNOLOGY: Constant upgrading and technological changes are a reality in the developed world. Developing countries cannot afford to keep pace with the rapidity of technological changes that occur in the developed world. They are financially unable to entertain such changes, as a result the technological platforms found in developing countries are often several generations older than that found in developed countries. This often hinders access to the most recent releases of AV products.

Access to spare parts is also problematic. Maintaining equipment in good running order can be challenging due to the cost of parts, obsolescence of equipment owned and difficulties in sourcing vendors of replacement parts. Repair and maintenance issues are also affected by the lack of personnel skilled in the maintenance of a particular technology.

This examination has highlighted some of the many factors that affect the provision of AV library services in developing countries. Some barriers are institutional while others are personal. While they cannot all be overcome at the same time, never-the-less incrementally it is

possible to introduce AV library services in developing country libraries at a rate that will not be counterproductive or lead to the establishment of systems and procedures that cannot be maintained.

Steps That Can Be Taken to Enhance Access to AV Library Services in Developing Countries

While decisions on factors such as technological developments, the content of extra-regionally produced programmes and some of the distribution and legal issues which pertain to AV library services are beyond the determination of librarians in developing countries, there are some areas in which they can make a difference. . The following are some of the initiatives that librarians in developing countries can take to assist in the development of AV library services in their institutions.

ATTITUDINAL CHANGES: Ellison and Robinson's exhortation that librarians must become engaged in the business of providing information and not books is the fundamental principle that must underpin all AV services. The appropriateness of content should be the delimiter of information provision and not the container.

Librarians in the developing world need to understand the important role that AV materials can and must play in the services they provide. They also need to involve themselves with sensitizing policy makers about the importance of extending collections to include all information formats. Additionally, librarians have to become engaged with other professions and professionals who have interests in information creation and provision. Such a strategy would be empowering and create networks and partnerships that can strengthen any proposal made by librarians regarding the implementation of an AV library service.

Librarians in developing countries need to become more engaged in national developmental initiatives. This will help to make libraries and librarians central to such programmes. Libraries should be at the heart of such national goals. The use of AV in instances of illiteracy demonstrates the power of non-print materials. For persons unable to read, the screening of an AV programme serves as an important means of transferring information, knowledge and communication. Through such an event libraries would become intimately involved in national development goals, become sources of community information, introduce people to libraries who through their inability to read would otherwise be marginalized from library services, and, libraries would ultimately become engaged in helping to reduce illiteracy. Thus, an AV service would serve to help libraries become major social and national transformational agencies.

EDUCATION: In order to extend the provision of AV library and information services the curriculum of all library schools must be revisited so that their products are will be well tooled in this branch of the profession. Developing adequate library programmes to support AV services is a critical step in with respect to the introduction of AV library services.

In the developing world in particular, a determined effort must be made to include exposure to all aspects of AV services including the practical aspects of service delivery and product creation. Such education will also help to reduce technophobia, enable librarians to advance the

need for AV services and generally support the development of non-print collections and activities based on such materials.

In addition, as part of their own professional development programme, librarians in developing countries need to expose themselves widely to the literature of AV services so that they are better tooled to deliver such services.

FUNDRAISING: Fundraising to develop, support or extend an AV library service can help to overcome the financial barriers negatively impact on the availability of AV services. While the capital outlay may be high, in reality many videos are cheaper than the printed versions of the same work. It is possible for example to purchase film versions of classical texts for below US$20. There are few books that are available for that price in today's market.

The development of projects to establish an AV service and underwrite the cost of training programmes is another possibility. Project writing has to be guided however, by the parameters that are established by the funding agency. Librarians have to become familiar with all of the non-traditional sources of funding library services so that they can be exploited to assist with the development of an AV library service.

In addition to these general possibilities, at the local level there are several financing options that librarians could explore to help with the institution and maintenance of a non-print library service.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES: The institution of an AV service does not have to be inclusive of all available formats. There are some formats that are more widely used, readily available and manageable. An AV service could therefore be limited to video, DVD, CD-ROMS and sound carriers (mainly CDs and cassettes). Within these technologies a library can provide quite a sophisticated AV service. Limiting one's service to only particular formats is also cost effective as financial outlays would be geared towards formats that would be widely used and for which a wide range of releases are available.

Librarians in developing countries who are required to catalogue such materials have the potential of adding to cataloguing theory and practice through the development of descriptors that appropriately describe materials on or about the developing world. They are in the best position to contribute to the practice of the discipline in this area, as they are intimately familiar with the content and how users could use the information or would want to access the material.

The paucity of non-print materials on the developing world - particularly those created from the perspective of such regions - provides a unique opportunity for librarians to become creators of AV materials and AV-based information. In much the same way that paper-based practice has enabled print-oriented librarians with opportunities to create information, AV practice can do the same. For example, there are few library orientation programmes that are culturally relevant. An enterprizing librarian could develop a library orientation programme that would meet the cultural and social needs of many countries in the developing world. The skills developed in this

area could then become the foundation on which a career is built in developing information packages on various topics on and of the developing world.

Regarding distribution arrangements there are two approaches that libraries could use which would not contravene any established policies. The use of an intermediary in the West to serve as a purchasing agent is one option. The other is the acquisition of a skybox or poste restante to which items are sent for transhipment to the library. Once a vendor does not contravene his assigned rights, material can be used anywhere in the world.

Conclusion

While there are a number of factors that impede the development of AV library services in developing countries, because of the contribution that such materials make to the educational, informational and recreational needs of a society, libraries and librarians must do all that they can to ensure that such a service exists.

Creative measures must be employed to support the development of comprehensive library services so that clients in developing countries will always be assured of access to quality library services that are not constrained because of the container in which the information is captured, stored or disseminated. It is only through such proactivity that librarians will break the incapacitating mold of "aesthetic conservatism" that Weigand sees as permeating the profession.

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