



Botswana Government Publications: Turning the Pages of Culture

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Abstract:

This presentation deals with publications of Botswana government which is also the largest producer of these publications. Government, non-governmental and inter-governmental publications is a conscious effort by the University of Botswana Library to revive pride and an appreciation of local culture and traditions amongst the Batswana .

According to Butcher (1991¹), government information affects the life of every single citizen. For instance, Botswana government publications provide Batswana with information on services and facilities offered by the government. It also reflects the diverse functions, activities and interests of different ministerial departments encompassing items such as evaluation reports, feasibility studies, reports of commissions, conference papers and research findings, survey results, consultancy reports, minutes of meetings, laws, parliamentary proceedings, project documents etc.

This paper will discuss the publications of Botswana government in the University of Botswana Library, (which will be referred to as Botswana Collection), historical significance and access in the digital age.

The Changing Nature of Deposit Programmes

A lot of materials on cultural value are published online, and government publications that were made available in print through legal deposit appear and disappear on the web on a daily basis. This is because the existing legal deposit law is not designed for, or adequate to deal with this

new digital environment. This is a concern even in Africa because the extremely important materials are currently being lost due to the lack of revised deposit legislation.

The challenges faced by other depository libraries in ensuring that government information continues to be preserved and disseminated in the digital age is a wake up call for the University of Botswana Library. For example, the material deposited in digital format must have software to enable access. Should the publishers ensure this? The ideal is for the publisher to send the electronic material to the library or a note informing them of the existence of the material, then the library retrieves the material from the publisher's server. There is however, a likelihood that the library would receive a lot of irrelevant materials.

Government information represents the history of a nation and libraries should ensure that this is preserved in the digital age. Depository libraries in Botswana should get ready to archive culturally significant websites if and when they exist.

This is a great opportunity to learn how developed countries deal with this issue. This calls for revision of Botswana's legal deposit law which is not designed for, or adequate to deal with this new digital environment.

Introduction

Will all the networked government information created today be available in ten, twenty or even one hundred years? Can it be refreshed, converted, migrated for use with software that has yet to be developed: and will that software retain the manipulation capability integrated into the information by its original producers? ²

This paper will try and answer that question but first let me start off by pointing out that the most important function of a national depository is to preserve the intellectual and cultural heritage of a nation, guaranteeing each citizen access to the nation's published heritage, in this case the nation of Botswana. Without that, there would be no record of her past.

In Botswana, there are 3 national depositories, namely University of Botswana Library (UBL), Botswana National Library Service (BNLS) and the Botswana National Archives. These three are responsible for assembling comprehensive collections of the published outputs of Botswana, record and organize them for use and most important preserve them for posterity.

Historical importance of Government Publications

Government publications, also known as official publications, are part of the legal deposit scheme in most countries. Botswana government is the most prolific publisher, from the point of view of both the number of titles and the variety of materials produced. In Botswana, government publishing is done by a government agency called Government Printer, these are government publications within the legal deposit program of Botswana. Documents on all subjects, journals, feasibility studies, consultancy reports, project documents, law reports, survey results, parliamentary papers, conference papers and research findings, minutes of meetings, statistical reports are part of government publishing. Statistical reports are usually the most utilized and important components of government information, and these reports usually come out as annual reports. The University of Botswana Library relies on legal deposit to ensure the comprehensiveness of our national deposit collection.

It would be depriving the nation of Botswana the opportunity to "turn the pages of culture" if government publications are not included in the national legal deposit law.

Legal deposit has been recognized as an effective means of collecting and preserving a country's published heritage for more than 450 years. It was established in 1537 with the Ordonnance de Montpellier enacted by King Francis 1 to ensure the collection and preservation of documents published in France. Since that time, legal deposit has become an important part of building a comprehensive collection of a nation's published works.

The objectives of legal deposit laws vary from country to country; also changes and additions have been made according to each country's needs. Having said that, the main objectives of the Legal deposit law of Botswana should be:

- The accumulation of the national collection in order to preserve, transmit and develop the intellectual and cultural heritage of Botswana for future use
- Compilation and publication of national bibliography
- To secure availability and access as a last resort collection
- To safeguard the authenticity and integrity of Botswana publications

Let me further develop the above mentioned objectives. The first objective speaks for itself. Deposit materials document our common past, the history of our societies and our intellectual and creative achievements. We learn from the past to better understand ourselves.

The second objective is equally important. Given the ever increasing demand for access to information and the ever growing number of publications, the need for bibliographic control, national or universal is obvious. Without the help of national bibliographies, it would be very difficult for one to find her way in this sea of books, journals and newspapers. A National bibliography, for example, National Bibliography of Botswana, (NAABOB) is a complete listing of all books, documents, pamphlets, serials and other publications within the bounds of Botswana. It contains descriptions of every publication, following precisely defined cataloguing rules.

Together, these national bibliographies provide a worldwide network displaying the supply of publications and could be used to obtain materials for exchange. It is also a good selection tool. However one must note that a current national bibliography service is largely dependent on the effectiveness of the legal deposit law and its acquisitions procedures. But because of the ineffectiveness of some of these legal deposit laws on which the national bibliographies are based, many of the national bibliographies are not at all exhaustive. This is because some of the legal provisions do not charge the depository library with responsibility of producing the national bibliography, the laws being exclusively towards acquisition of materials. This is true of University of Botswana Library which is not charged with producing a national bibliography. Fortunately, the National Library has taken full responsibility with regard to compiling a bibliography in Botswana. The first issue of the National Bibliography came out in 1969. It comes out three times a year, the third issue being a cumulative issue covering the whole year. The third objective is of crucial importance to present readers. After a few years of its publication, a book goes out of circulation and the only place you can find it, is in the library! The library at this point in time becomes a place of last resort where at least one copy of any publication can be found. Printed publications need unambiguous identification hence the objective to safeguard the authenticity and integrity of publishers.

Changing nature of Legal deposit programmes

In dealing with the changing nature of legal deposit programmes, I will first of all discuss the legal deposit of print materials in Botswana. In most countries, national libraries have traditionally built up their published collections through legal deposit. Legal deposit in Botswana has traditionally applied to print publications because that was a means of storage and display of publications. The Botswana Legal Deposit Law was established under section 10 of the 1967 National Library Act which empowers the national library and the University of Botswana library as depositories. The Botswana National Archives was also established in 1967 although it was only in 1978 that the Archives Legislation was passed by Parliament.

Section 10. Deposit and Preservation of copies of books

The law provides that the publisher of every book published in Botswana shall within a month after the day in which the book is first delivered out of press, and notwithstanding any agreement to the contrary with any person, deliver at his own expenses one copy of the book to the librarians of the University of Botswana and two copies to the National Library.

Every copy delivered under the provisions of this section shall be a copy of the whole book, with all maps and illustrations belonging thereto, finished and coloured in the same manner as the best standard copies of the same are produced, and shall be bound sewed or stitched together and on the best standard paper on which the book is printed. Having looked at the Botswana Legal Deposit law, there are more weaknesses than strengths. Strengths may include but are not limited to the following - there is a guaranteed permanent free access to the national legal deposit collection of Botswana. But there are also weaknesses. The following are some of the weaknesses.

- The legal deposit law of Botswana has a narrow scope in terms of materials to be deposited. The law does not include non-book materials such as tapes, films, photographs, post cards, tape recordings for example, oral history, poems, songs and music and no mention of electronic publications.
- The law states that the obligation to deposit lies with the publisher who has to do that at his own expense. Since our legal deposit law emphasizes on the term “publisher” and does not include “printer” the result of this poor phrasing is that a lot of materials go unnoticed. The law also excludes materials produced by other means rather than publishing. At this point in time, no studies have been done in Botswana to determine the state of compliance with legal deposit requirements of the country.
- The law does not include any subsequent editions of a book where the first or earlier editions of a book have been delivered already unless such editions contain extra information or illustrations
- There is no provision in the act of confidential materials and material still under consideration in the depositories
- The law doesn't include an adequate definition of its aims and purposes. This is evidenced by some publishers who enquired about the relationship copyright has to legal deposit. In Botswana, copyright is covered by a separate program from that of legal deposit. Depositing with the University of Botswana Library for example, does not represent copyright protection.

After all that has been said, this paper continues to discuss the issues surrounding the changing nature of legal deposit programmes in Botswana and around the globe.

National deposit collections of electronic publications

No doubt information technology has radically transformed the process of information dissemination, but the necessity to preserve national culture for perpetuity is indispensable. Will the publishers of electronic publications take care of long term availability? As stated by Drimmelen, “Are the publishers going to take care of long term availability? They did not in the case of printed materials, so why should they in the case of electronic publications³”? These technological developments have changed the nature of Legal deposit, user access to information and the way government information specialists manage and present information.

What has changed?

Digital resources are becoming more prevalent in many areas of the library today. However, despite the talk of ‘paperless’ society and claims that everything can be found on the Internet, the transition to a fully digitized collections is by no means complete and still far in Botswana. On the other hand, some countries have taken action to include electronic publications in their legal deposit scheme. For example, Denmark, Finland, Norway and South Africa are including online material as well, through a definition that accommodates current new publishing formats and those of the future and through eliminating from definition any reference to physical format. There has never been a study in Botswana to analyze the current state of government information collections, or to find out whether the online collections of government information could be sufficient to replace traditional collections. From my experience as a Special Collections Librarian, I don’t think online collections of government information could be sufficient to replace traditional collections. The move by South Africa to change their legal deposit legislation to include electronic publications is good benchmarking for Botswana. For the purposes of the study, it is important to look at both the advantages and disadvantages of online collection of government information.

Advantages

It is very advisable for government agencies to take advantage of what Internet collections have to offer. I must point out here that I am not making direct comparison between Internet and traditional collections as this will be inappropriate. There is no doubt that Internet collections add more value to the collections. For example, the use of hyperlink features which provides gateways to other collections, and it is also possible to create tables using statistical information because data can be manipulated in ways that are not possible in the paper format. Further, researchers are interested in getting in-depth government information in as short time as possible, so the internet environment provides the researcher with various methods of searching unlike in the traditional environment where the researcher has to go to several different publications of which some is a waste of his precious time. In an internet environment, users can retrieve statistical data from all regions of the country. For example, in Botswana, the Government Printer is the main publisher and it publishes publications from Gaborone which is the capital city. Information from other regions is not readily available. In the internet environment, data is updated more often. For instance, the online Botswana Gazette is available online before the paper copy is distributed by Government Printer.

Challenges of ensuring that government publications continue to be preserved and disseminated in the digital age

Despite the difficulty raised by the electronic environment concerning legal deposit, it should be remembered that the national depository libraries still have a long term preservation responsibility. This means therefore, all the electronic publications, both off and online, should be subject to legal deposit for posterity.

How can this be possibly achieved?

The only way that electronic publications, both off and online are subject to legal deposit is to ensure that national legislation on legal deposit includes electronic publications. Earlier on, I pointed out that Botswana Legal deposit law is silent on electronic publications both online and offline.

No doubt there are a lot of problems in dealing with the legal deposit of electronic publications, but it is imperative that efficient, effective and practical methods of long term preservation of electronic publications are put in place.

This will surely ensure that this important part of our cultural heritage continues to be preserved and disseminated in the digital age.

Having said that, some of the issues challenging legal deposit of electronic publications are as follows:

- **Comprehensiveness.** Some argue that online electronic material such as networked database is not meant to be preserved for future use since the information is constantly being updated in real time, so that data and information systematically disappear in a matter of seconds, and are not available any longer as historical records. I fully agree with this statement. The big question is what about materials on national culture which need to be preserved for posterity? Comprehensiveness has been compromised here.
- **Major investments in hardware, software and staff.** Even if all things were equal, there might be a situation where the depository library cannot handle the material within its technical environment, or the technology is just not there to store online material, a good example is the University of Botswana Library. Even if the legislation provided the right to do so, it is not possible in a long time.
- **As already illustrated using the University of Botswana Library, (UBL), the National legal deposit collections of electronic publications will develop on a gradual basis, as the institutions responsible for legal deposit will not be able to cope with new developments at the same pace as the publishers.** For example, Botswana National Library Service is not fully computerized, so even if the publisher deposited materials electronically it is going to be useless since no one would access them in a long time.
- **For electronic publications, the issue of the number of copies is still a problem.** For instance, for online searching, the number of users or accesses counts. Most electronic publications need to be communicated to the public, but what will become of the copyright owner who has exclusive right to communicate a protected work to the public? As the nature of materials changes, documents are no longer “published” but “made available” on networks.
- **The copyright issue is also critical.** Publishers and legal information producers might be reluctant to get involved in electronic publishing because the nature in which digital information is transmitted from one point to the other is complicated. There is no assurance that their intellectual property rights will be respected. Also, there are government publications that are not for public consumption, what guarantee do we have that they will remain so.

- Legal deposit law in Botswana was established under section 10 of the 1967 National Library Act, not dedicated to legal deposit. A legal deposit act needs to be established in Botswana which should include electronic publications and other non print formats. It would have been better if the legal deposit law of Botswana was contained in copyright legislation like in Australia, UK and USA for example.
Copyright law in Botswana was reviewed in 2000 and a new act, the Copyright and Neighbouring Rights Act of 2000 was enacted. Even this one, doesn't cover storage of the copy by digital means, what happens when information is placed on the library server allowing readers to download for themselves.

Apart from the complex nature of legal deposit of electronic publications, there is a problem of preservation. The primary role of libraries and depositories is to collect, preserve, organize and disseminate information. With the advent of technology this seems no longer the case. Will the publishers of electronic publications take care of long term availability? I quoted this statement and I think it still applies even here. Drimmelen, asked, "Are the publishers going to take care of long term availability? They did not in the case of printed materials, so why should they in the case of electronic publications"³? Archiving is left to the owners and producers of online information resources and one wonder how well this works.

Collection Development

Publications received through legal deposit must be identified, acquired, registered, catalogued, stored and maintained since that is the primary role of libraries as indicated above. Collection development is compromised in an electronic environment because electronic resources include only the latest works. Most importantly, they must be recorded in the National Bibliography. The question is, how do libraries catalogue these publications and how are they added to the national bibliography. For instance, should it be necessary to state that the record is in another format? During the process of formatting is all information included? Further, electronic formats tend to have a short life span unless they are maintained in a form which can be reformatted or refreshed or else it won't be possible to preserve material for posterity. If not maintained in an appropriate format, it will mean bibliographic records have to be amended more often to record the transfer of the content to new storage devices.

Organization

A number of preliminary steps take place in libraries before publications can go to the shelves. For example, in UBL new books are triggered, stamped, catalogued, classified and spine labeled. Libraries also organize their materials under schemes. For instance we, at UBL use Dewey Decimal Classification scheme. (DDC) Electronic resources have different organization.

Access

Documents acquired through legal deposit are not available to the general public, but only to researchers carrying out research in Botswana Collection. In the physical copy environment, libraries loan out materials to the people for a certain period. No equipment is needed to handle the material.

In online environment, information is delivered to a computer in the library. This does not get the information to the person who requested it. This calls for appropriate skilled staff to provide access to the publications. Further, if the patron needs it then he will have to copy it into a

memory stick and print it somewhere, in this case bearing the cost of printing. I foresee a situation where every library in a country becomes a depository.

Conclusion

This article gave an overview of the way Botswana government knowledge resources are created, disseminated, collected, accessed and preserved. The aim is to apply this in the digital age. Many weaknesses were identified, starting with the Legal Deposit law. The article has indicated that in Botswana we have not yet started the legal deposit of electronic publications. I am sure that after this presentation, work will start on thinking about the changing nature of deposit programmes. There might be some form of electronic publishing of government information, but it has not developed fully. As I have pointed out, up until the Legal Deposit law of Botswana is revised, we cannot talk of legal deposit of electronic publications.

I have now come to a realization that the creation of internet based collections pose fundamental challenges for cultural heritage institutions, Botswana included. Our legal depository institutions are searching for new ways to demonstrate their relevance in the digital world, but they are not very sure how far to go with this. In Botswana, internet access to government information does not have direction, and it will take a while before this becomes a reality. There are reasons for this. First of all, one of the depositories, the National Library is not automated; secondly, most government information is still available in print.

There is an urgent need for the revision of legal deposit law to include electronic publications. This law is long overdue in Botswana. When the law changes, then the government will be forced to publish some collections electronically. We should however be aware of the fact that there maybe important government materials which are not available online.

Yes, there are many problems associated with the legal deposit of electronic publications, but Botswana can benchmark with for example, South Africa to learn of the best practice. In fact, studies show that South Africa is one of the first in the world to make provision for the legal deposit of electronic publications.

I have mentioned the advantages and disadvantages of government information in digital format. For instance, information that is available on the internet is unstable. Depository libraries have been able to control and maintain their physical collections, ensuring their longevity and availability. Without this, we will be faced with a sea of disorganized and unreliable information. On the other hand, access to legal deposit of online electronic publications is recommended. I would like to point out that the digital collection of government publications will remain a supplement and not a replacement to the traditional collection.

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