

Building African Studies Collections outside Africa: New Challenges and Directions for Print, Electronic and Online Communications

Ian Cooke¹ and Marion Wallace²

¹The British Library, Social Science, London, UK

²The British Library, African Curator, London, UK

ian.cooke@bl.uk

The British Library's collections on Africa have grown through acquisition of print, manuscript and recorded sound, and form one of the major centres in Europe for research on Africa. Current models for collecting focus on use of print book suppliers and specialist agents to deliver research publications, journals and government publications in print. This is supplemented by subscriptions to commercial online services where cost and licensing terms allow. Models of acquisitions such as these are however facing challenges from changes in publication practices from research, government and other groups in Africa. Publishing online, in formal and informal ways, can provide rapid access to more research and statistics, more quickly. However, this raises issues both around sustainability of access, and visibility in an online world where many sources compete for attention. Collecting and curating electronic resources differs from print in important ways. How should libraries respond to a shift of information to web-only, and the risk of data loss? What are the opportunities, and where are examples of good practice?

This paper will describe changing publication trends, in particular in areas of most interest to British Library collections on Africa, and will identify the types of electronic resource which are considered most vulnerable. It will describe projects that make African collections more widely available internationally (such as Archival Sound Recordings) and that have involved collaboration between British/ European researchers and those based in Africa (such as the Endangered Archives Programme). Additionally, it will look at other examples of North-South co-operation that suggest new ways of working to ensure long-term access to important research information. Examples will be taken from a range of European institutions, such as national libraries, and specialist research centres such as the Nordic Africa Institute and Africa Studies Centre, Leiden. This paper will invite participants to debate the merits, priorities and risks associated with different approaches.