

# African Government Documentation At Boston University

IT IS OUR BELIEF that the several libraries in the United States concerned in building up special collections in African materials might share with each other, and any other libraries interested, reports on the methods established for the procuring, cataloging, classification, storage, and access to these materials. With this in mind, though not then stated, a first report on "Bibliographical Control in an Area Research Program"<sup>1</sup> was prepared. That report was primarily concerned with book materials. This second report will discuss methods of control for official documents of African states, the publications of European governments concerned with African colonies, and the publications of quasi-official bodies at present attached to the native governments.

There are five major problems confronting libraries responsible for a collection of African documents:

1. There are no comprehensive retrospective bibliographies for reference.
2. There are no current national bibliographies, nor is there information available to determine the best sources for obtaining government documents.
3. Political changes in status of states are occurring frequently and there are even more numerous internal expansions of responsibilities of government departments.
4. There are new regional federations superimposed on several states. These

<sup>1</sup> CRL, XVI (1955), 291-95.

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federations issue documents, while the separate states also continue their own documentation.

5. There are no easily accessible sources for information on the various European governments' publications on their colonies.

Some of these problems would apply to any document project, but they are more acute in an area that is expanding so rapidly and undergoing such varied political changes. We have not mentioned the several languages, as at present, with the exception of Arabic and Afrikaans, they are chiefly limited to the well-known west European tongues. With, however, the rise of nationalism, it is likely that some of the native African dialects will become established as at least second official languages. Then documents may be issued increasingly in these languages. Already Afrikaans is being used more and more in South African documents, and certainly we can expect no less an emphasis on native languages in some other states in the future.

In obtaining documents, there are varying levels of difficulty. Not the least of minor troubles is getting credit established for orders and obtaining a working mechanism for payment in the varying currencies.

British colonial documents in the past presented relatively few problems. Crown agents and H.M.S.O. were, and are, reliable sources. However, with the rapid changes in status among the territories, and changes in their relationships to the metropole government, comes a weakening of communications and less

assurance of the reliability of established standing orders. Several times it has been necessary to write directly to the local sources, and this is costly as well as time-consuming. It is also temporarily difficult to set up a continuing pattern of dependable supply from these local sources, beset as they are with all the problems of any newly created agency attempting to take over new duties and responsibilities.

With those territories under French administration, there is an increasingly difficult and sometimes exasperating situation. Here there is little or no realistic effort to centralize sources. Bureaus overlap and give contradictory advice as to the availability of materials, if they answer at all. Many reports must be sought from the territories, many others may only be secured from booksellers in New York or Paris who have attempted in a private way to remedy the situation, and while it is more convenient to order locally, these dealers offer no guarantee of comprehensive or continuing coverage.

The Belgian Congo, as one of the larger areas of Africa with a strong connection with its home government, has dependable sources of supply for government documents. Too much, however, comes out of the Information Service and obviously is written from a public relations viewpoint. This serves to reduce the value of the information and reliability of the reporting.

South Africa's sources for documents are well established; the particular problem here is more of storage and access to the wealth of material available.

The smaller amount of Portuguese government documentation will probably make this area less of a problem. We have not, at present, used local sources enough to warrant a statement on their reliability.

The independent countries of Liberia, Libya, Ethiopia, and the Sudan do not yet have sufficiently numerous documents to present difficulties. The U.N. Trustee-

ship Reports on the Cameroons, Togo, Somalia, etc., are easily procurable and at the moment constitute the government documentation required for study of these areas.<sup>2</sup>

As the documents begin to come in, some semblance of a normal pattern begins to emerge. It is, however, as though the librarian were asked to be an architect and draw plans for a house for a family that was coming from a strange land from which it might be bringing furniture of unknown size and quantity, a family whose size itself is unstated, whose age range is unknown and whose interests are yet undisclosed. In order not to carry this comparison too far, the problem, in brief, is to devise a plan based upon general knowledge and experience in how other governments have developed their documentation, trusting that it will be possible to use it with African publications. The details hereafter described were developed in accordance with the same decisions as characterized our earlier planning, viz., to use as much as we could of information and procedures from the Library of Congress, both in classification and cataloging, and vary only when we wished to simplify or adapt for local interests some of these procedures. In those areas where there is no LC evidence to follow, we would proceed to develop our records in accordance with what had been done in a comparable situation at LC. It is obvious, of course, that without the LC Union Author Catalog we would have been severely hampered.

It was decided to keep the documents by form, separated from the book collection in the Central Library. They were requested by, received and stored in the Office of the Research Program. The Administrative Assistant of the Program placed the orders and verified accuracy of the billing, and the Program

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Adelaide Hill of the African Research Studies Program for the statements on problems of acquisitions.

Librarian provided storage boxes and was responsible for checking in after the initial cataloging and classification were done. The Central Library was responsible for authorizing the payment of bills and the classification and cataloging of each title. It was also decided that while all holdings records for serials would be only in the Office Catalog, the Library would have brief shelflist and main-entry catalog records. Monographs would have comparable records. No general subject analysis was planned.

Having decided to keep the documents by form, it was logical to use the LC schedule numbers provided for African Documents in J700-881. There remained, however, some other decisions to be made:

1. How should the documents be subdivided? By the tables of LC, or alphabetically by issuing body?
2. How should we classify monographs not necessarily emanating from an agency of the government, yet official in nature?
3. What status should we give to the quasi-official bodies, such as the Nigerian Coal Corporation or the Tanganyika Sisal Growers Association?
4. Could we put the European government documents concerning the colonial areas with those areas, or would they have to go with other material by the home government and be separated from the colony?
5. And, finally, what should we do with documents concerned with the total colonial holdings of a government, such as British Colonial documents on all British Africa?

With these problems in mind we decided to move ahead and make some *ad hoc* decisions and retrace our steps if necessary when the developing mass of documentation of a country made any decisions appear untenable. It was decided that an alphabetical arrangement by name of department would be more useful than the classified outline LC uses in its tables. If a department issues sev-

eral serial titles, as many do, then we would subdivide by successive Cutter numbers or by a title mark for the key word. For example:

Rhodesia, Northern. Posts and Telegraph Dept. Post Office Savings Bank report: J725.3.P62, and the Department's Annual report: J723.3.P621; South Africa. Dept. of Education, Arts and Sciences. Annual report: J705.E3; and the Department's Archives Year Book, J705.E3a.

The decision on the second point, the monographs issued without departmental auspices, was made on the assumption that the local government was directly responsible for them, and A19 was reserved for this material with further subdivision A-Z by author. Related to this was the problem of monographs issued under the auspices of a department but not by an officer of the service. These were treated as a part of the department's publications in the following way: The Department of Agriculture of Kenya was J732.A4, and monographs from that Department were A411, A-Z, by author. Another type of monograph that required some special consideration was the committee report. Usually these were not serials, but some were standing committees. It was decided to treat their classification as a single problem. Whenever possible we use C6 as the basic subdivision number for all committee publications and subdivide further by key word. For example, reports of the Committee on Industrial Development in Northern Rhodesia would be J725.3.C6i.

In the case of the quasi-official bodies it was decided to give them, in the classification, the status of a government department.

The fourth problem, that of European government documents concerned with a colonial area, was resolved by the allocation of A1-A189 under each area for these items. It was decided this was more useful than separating them from the area concerned.

And, on the fifth point, documents concerned with all of a colonial area, such as British Africa or French Africa, were assigned to J704 and J760 respectively.

Later some minor problems came up, such as the text of speeches and publicity articles. In the former, if the official were giving a speech routine to his job, such as a governor's political speech, it was regarded as of the same status as a department monograph and in this case would be G611 subdivided A-Z by a letter representing the governor's name. If, however, the speech by the governor is on a specific problem, such as agriculture, it will go as a monograph of that department. Signed publicity articles, if issued by a Department of Public Relations, are assumed to be a routine work and are entered under name of the Department as a monograph.

The basic decisions in cataloging were those mentioned above in the discussion of records. The briefest form of entry was adopted for serials and the major interest was in establishing the official heading as accurately as possible and the providing of references from changes in main entry and title.

As the work progressed, it became evident there must be a certain flexibility in number of cards to be prepared both for the African Office Catalog and the Library Catalog. The following cases, all occurring often enough to indicate they could be regarded as typical, merited special decisions.

1. Many reports are known by the chairman's name and needed entries for that.
2. Others, equally numerous, are known or may become known by catch phrases: "White Paper on—"; "Ashimota Conference—."
3. There are some monographs in series that would be virtually lost if only serial entry were provided. These raised another problem, for, if our policy was continued of having all but the initial cataloging and classification done in

the Program Office, the Central Library would not, with the then-present practice, know about successive numbers in such series. Therefore, it was necessary to place a directive on the Program's holding card for these sets that the Program Librarian should notify the Library of each new number received.

An authority file was established for the documents, and copy for all titles is sent to the National Union Catalog, and a second copy for all serial titles to the Serials Department of LC.

Again, as with the development of our policy for the book collection, we worked closely with the African Program Administrative Assistant. A clerical assistant was employed for typing and some searching of entries, and a brief training course was held for the Program Librarian and the clerical assistant.

The project is now functioning well, and, although it required considerable time in its early stages, particularly on the part of the library, its demands will lessen as more and more serial records are established. There are still two large questions in our minds. One is whether we are acting wisely in not providing for subject analysis. While it is true many publications are, in a sense, self-indexing by reason of their departmental sponsorship, there are others that will, in the future, be in danger of being overlooked unless African bibliography improves. We hope, however, that it will, and with this expectation are taking a calculated risk in omitting general subject indexing. The second question is whether the decision to avoid using detailed subclassification tables will prove to be completely untenable. We are allowing expediency and local methods of use of these materials to determine our present policies with the hope that whatever changes will have to be made in the future will be partially compensated for by the original easy access at a relatively small cost.