“Patron-driven, perpetual access & primary data”

Collection development policy
Library, Documentation and Information, African Studies Centre Leiden

Executive summary

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1. Mission and user groups ........................................................................................................ 2
2. Description of the current collection .................................................................................... 3
3. Changes that will influence collection development policies ............................................. 4
4. The LDI response .................................................................................................................. 4
   Ad a). Patron-driven core collection .................................................................................... 5
   Ad b). Perpetual access & preservation of non-core academic materials ............................. 5
   Ad c). More primary material ............................................................................................... 6
5. Expected consequences of this policy .................................................................................. 6

1. Mission and user groups

The ASC library collection is instrumental in realizing the institute’s mission formulated in the statutes:

“The African Studies Centre [...] aims to promote a better understanding and insight into historical, current and future social developments in Sub-Saharan Africa”

Among the primary and secondary strategic goals formulated in the policy plan 2004-2008 two are relevant for the library and its collection

- The ASC strives to be a top international scientific institute that collects and makes available knowledge and information about Africa for scientific research and academic purposes through the provision of a library, information and documentation department.
- The ASC aims to further the debate between researchers, policy-makers and development practitioners, journalists, the businessworld and the general public, and also to promote an understanding of African societies in these groups through the provision of library, information and documentation services.

As the second goal makes clear, the user groups of the Library, Documentation and Information department (LDI) are quite diverse: among them are researchers, policy-makers, development practitioners, journalists, the business world and the general public. LDI serves not only local ASC affiliated researchers (most of them also have positions at other universities) but also visiting scholars, the (Dutch) academic community at large and it’s own Research Master students. The largest percentage of visitors and book circulations can be attributed to non-ASC BA and MA students, but the collection of the library aspires to be more than geared towards instructional support.
2. Description of the current collection

To realize the above mentioned goals the collection of the LDI consists of a wide range of multidisciplinary, European-language materials from and about the African continent. The total collection consists of some 78,000 printed books, 2400 serials (about 600 current), 25,000 microforms, 600 electronic documents stored on a ASC-server and 4 daily/weekly newspapers, 1200 films on DVD. Most of the important scientific Africa-related journals are also published in electronic format and are available in the OPAC. The number of e-journals is now approximately 330.

In addition to this collection the LDI offers access to 28000 titles in academic repositories around the world, via the web service Connecting Africa. The LDI also subscribes to the Cooperative African Microform Project (CAMP) through which it is able to offer its patrons access to one of the world’s largest collections of primary materials. LDI has managed to increase the annual percentage of acquired books and serials published in Africa from 43% in 2006 to 53% in 2010.

The major languages of the collected materials are English (65% of all monographs), French (25%), Dutch (4%), German (3%) and Portuguese (1%). Annually some 2400 monographs and electronic documents as well as 120 films are added. Major acquisitions methods are: regular orders with publishers, approval plans, donations, acquisition journeys and downloading free materials. Budget allocated to collection development in 2010 was 82,000 euro (2000 earmarked for audio-visual materials).

Thematically the collection focuses on works relevant for the social sciences and the humanities. The following 8 subdisciplines can be distinguished (an estimation of the number of monographs in this field is added between brackets)

1. Religion & philosophy (5,000)
2. Society, culture & social issues (16,000)
3. Economy & development (15,000)
4. Education (4,000)
5. Political conditions and developments (17,000)
6. Law & constitutions (5,000)
7. History (10,000)
8. Arts & Literature (11,000)

Two special collections are the large (> 8600 titles) collection of African literature (novels, short stories, poetry, drama) and the film collection (documentaries and feature films from and about Africa, 1200 titles).
3. Changes that will influence collection development policies

The following global, European and national trends will affect the collection development in the future;

- The overall visibility and availability of material relevant for the library’s collection has substantially increased over the years. Emerging economies with economical and other interests in the African continent (for example India) have published a lot on Africa and will increasingly continue to do so. Many of the existing collections are more and more visible through aggregated catalogues on a global (WorldCat), European (IlissAfrica) and Dutch level (Netherlands Central Catalogue). This shows at least in the Netherlands high rate of redundancy.
- Open access, born-digital material is rapidly increasing. Academic institutions in Africa are developing their own repositories where academic output is being stored.
- Apart from the secondary, academic output, more primary and grey literature has come within the reach of research and academic libraries.
- Within the social sciences and humanities scholarly communication is changing and dependency on the traditional libraries as warehouses of printed material is reducing. This is reflected in a decreasing number of visitors and circulation statistics.

4. The LDI response

Facing the challenges mentioned above (increase in availability and visibility of scholarly material, increase in open access digital material stored in repositories, increase in grey and primary materials published on the internet and a reduced need for classical library services), LDI has proposed to make the following choices related to Collection Management:

a) to develop a more patron-driven core collection
b) to collect non-core scholarly materials selectively, with a focus on (perpetual) access and long term preservation
c) to increase primary data collections

These three choices do not result in independent sub-collections (a document may fit more than one category) but should be seen as policy guidelines used to drive the collection as a whole. Practical changes in development policy do not concern the themes (LDI continues to collect according to the 8 major themes in the fields of social sciences and humanities) nor the collection levels (which are at this moment difficult to measure anyhow) but rather the way of access offered to patrons (connection instead of collection), increased dependency on shared resources and a different secondary/primary materials ratio.
**Ad a). Patron-driven core collection**

The move from a paper to a digital library is in full swing. At the same time levels of paper holdings will be maintained or even increased. Due to the unique position of the ASC within the Dutch academic landscape as the only research and documentation centre fully devoted to the study of Africa, patrons from all over the country rely on the LDI collection often through interlibrary loan. Because of the restrictions publishers have imposed on the lending of electronic materials, policy is to buy paper copies of monographs. A core collection of about 700 to 800 monographs annually meeting (short term) demands of users will be maintained. These include core resources and reference materials to be used for curricular support and reflecting current academic/societal debates. In order to make sure this core collection really meets the need of real users in the near future the following action points should be considered:

- user group surveys;
- intensified contact between LDI and patrons;
- actively soliciting suggestions for titles, e.g. by employing forms on the website
- more efficient measurement of actual use of this part of the collection;
- Increasing the speed of document processing by using Approval plans, changing workflows and by making the title available in the OPAC at an earlier stage.

**Ad b). Perpetual access & preservation of non-core academic materials**

Apart from the short-term needs of scholars and students which are met by a standing core collection described above, the LDI strives to preserve or give access to a cross-cut of the scholarly record, cultural heritage and mental legacy produced in and related to Africa. Because it is difficult to guess how the needs of future generations of researchers can be met, priority will be given to a collection as diverse as possible. This prevents costly duplication of titles on at least a national level.

The following steps to achieve this will be taken in the future:

- harvesting of links to open access material sustainably stored in trustworthy Institutional Repositories will be increased and (web)presentation including searchability of this material will be improved;
- downloading, describing and indexing of free online documents from less reliable (African) sites and storing these documents on local servers will be increased to about 500 a year;
- Coordination of collection development within the Netherlands will be seriously considered where possible. Titles not eligible for the standing core collection and accessible within the Netherlands will only be accepted (in the case of gifts) or acquired in rare cases. The adagium is ‘just in time’ versus ‘just in case’;
- Coordination of collection development of free online documents will be taken up with European ELIAS partners. Cooperation already takes place: the ASC
catalogue is now part of ilissAfrica, the internet library of 5 European Africana collections.

Ad c). More primary material

While the visibility and availability of academic secondary sources is increasingly guaranteed by aggregated catalogues and better Inter Library Lending services, Collection Development staff believes that in order to support the institutes’ mission “to promote a better understanding and insight into historical, current and future social developments in Sub-Saharan Africa” it is essential to offer a collection where both primary, secondary and tertiary materials are presented. In the past LDI has collected a substantial amount of primary materials from Africa like newspapers, development plans and literature. More recently the subscription to CAMP and the start of collecting digital documents like censuses and constitutions continues this trend. After a short lapse the collection of primary material is recently revived, mostly by the acquisition of free electronic documents. Concrete steps to achieve a more considered and transparent ratio between secondary and primary sources within each of the 8 subdisciplines are:

- diversification of acquisition methods including regular acquisition journeys and contacts with individual researchers;
- more emphasis on global (regarding Worldcat) and European (regarding ilissAfrica) unique material in this category;
- making an inventory of the primary/secondary ratio of the materials within each thematic category and developing a policy about the desired collection levels

5. Expected consequences of this policy

Most of the proposed changes can be realized without extra money but budget and time must be allocated in a different manner. The most important changes are:

- emphasis on African, primary and grey material makes it necessary to allocate more time for selection and acquisition. Subscribing to African journals for example is very laborious and takes a lot of efforts of the serials librarian
- Acquisition journeys become more important for the collection and need to be carried out more often. Books acquired on a acquisition trip are cheaper than those acquired through approval plans and other commercial channels but selection takes more time
- Description of electronic free material is done rudimentary by Collection Development staff but is checked by cataloguing staff (involving more work, but since the material is not paid for, budget should be allocated differently)
- Circulation numbers will rise when a proper patron-driven core collection policy is implemented but for other materials lending statistics might remain low or even decrease