

1-1-1994

Library Development in Francophone Africa

Margaret O. Saunders

E. Stewart Saunders

Purdue University, ssaunder@purdue.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/lib_research

Saunders, Margaret O. and Saunders, E. Stewart, "Library Development in Francophone Africa" (1994). *Libraries Research Publications*. Paper 25.

http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/lib_research/25

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Copyright 1994 by Wayne A. Wiegand and Donald G. Davis Jr.

Library development in 23 former French or Belgian territories of sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian Ocean is the subject of this essay. Today they include 22 independent nations, of which 20 use French as an official language, and one overseas department of France. Eight of these countries reported half or more of their population over age 14 as literate in 1985.

While both colonial and national governments recognized the value of libraries supporting scientific and administrative activities, library services for the public developed only in the former Belgian territories. Inadequate funds, few trained librarians, and competing government priorities have limited the growth and effectiveness of libraries up to the present.

Availability of trained staff has improved over time. UNESCO sponsored the first library school for French-speaking Africans, which opened at Dakar in 1963. In 1967 this program became the Ecole des Bibliothecaires, Archivistes et Documentalistes (EBAD) of the University of Dakar. EBAD is a regional school serving all of francophone Africa with UNESCO support. A rapid increase in library education began in the late 1970s, with new programs in such diverse places as Zaire (1979), Benin (1981), Mauritius (1978), Gabon (1981), Congo (1987), and Burundi (1987). Professional library associations exist in most nations.

CENTRAL AFRICAN LIBRARIES

The territories of Gabon, Moyen Congo, Ubangi-Shari, and Chad came under effective French control between 1885 and 1915; the federation of French Equatorial Africa (Afrique Equatoriale Francaise or AEF) was created in 1910 with Brazzaville as its capital. The neighboring German colony of Cameroon was divided into French and British mandates in 1922. All five became independent in 1960. Their modern populations range from 10,734,000 in Cameroon to Gabon's 1,232,000.

Libraries, like other government services, developed slowly. In Cameroon officials created small libraries to provide reading material for officers in rural areas. By the 1950s the governor of each territory preserved some records in local archives. Central AEF archives were set up at Brazzaville; most of their contents were moved to France at independence. A Government Library for the AEF was created in Brazzaville; it held only about 2,000 volumes in 1959, just before independence.

The largest and best organized collections in the AEF were special libraries created to meet research needs. Scientific research in the AEF expanded rapidly after World War II. Agricultural, veterinary, social science, and other research posts were created, including local centers for ORSTOM (Office de Recherche Scientifique et Technique d'Outre-Mer). Libraries developed to serve these centers.

School libraries were rare; indeed there were few schools beyond the primary level. Public libraries were also rare during the colonial era. The Government Library at Brazzaville was opened to the public in 1952, with no fee for borrowing books. The Alliance Francaise opened a library in the same building, with a fiction collection of

4,000 volumes and some serials. Small public libraries of a few hundred volumes existed in larger towns in Cameroon.

Soon after independence, some of the few government-sponsored libraries closed for lack of funds. The AEF Government Library was transferred to the Center for Higher Education (f. 1959) in Brazzaville, precursor of Marien Ngouabi University. Special libraries with outside funding survived. By 1986 the largest were the World Health Organization library in Congo, with about 45,000 volumes and 200 periodicals, and the library of the Brazzaville office of ORSTOM, with 17,000 volumes, 831 periodicals, 1,400 microfilms, and 2,000 topographic maps.

New libraries began to appear by the mid-1960s. The Cameroon National Library in Yaound dates from 1966. In 1969 Gabon created a National Archives which included a National Library, although the first trained librarian arrived in 1978. Congo also created a library, archives, and documentation service in 1971, with a People's National Library making up one section. In Cameroon and Congo the new libraries are sites for legal deposit. The largest national library, in Gabon, held about 15,000 volumes in 1982.

All five nations now have universities with academic libraries. The largest is at the Université de Yaound, (f. 1962-63), where the central library, opened in 1966, held some 90,000 volumes and 900 serials by 1984 and several institutes also have significant libraries. The Marien Ngouabi University library system, in Brazzaville, Congo, held about 90,000 volumes and 545 serials in ten separate libraries in 1988. The Université de Bangui (Central African Republic), founded in 1970, had about 24,000 volumes in 1985. Gabon and Chad lag, with about 12,000 volumes each reported for Université Omar Bongo, in Libreville (f. 1972), and for the Université du Tchad (f. 1971), in N'Djamena.

At independence, neither Cameroon nor the four AEF territories had any national system of public libraries. Today the largest libraries open to the public are operated by foreign cultural centers. The sponsors of major collections include France, with about 25,000 volumes in N'Djamena and Brazzaville, and 12,000 in Bangui; the United States, with 1,000 to 4,000 volumes in several locations; Libya, with an Arabic collection in Chad; and the USSR, with 18,500 volumes in Brazzaville.

During 1989 Cameroon, Chad, Congo, and Gabon signed agreements with the French Ministry of Cooperation for library activities in the *lecture publique* or public reading field. Congo plans to create libraries in various neighborhoods of Brazzaville, while in Chad libraries are to be included in youth centers also offering sports and audiovisual activities. In Cameroon and Gabon local governments are working to create libraries at the commune level.

CENTRAL AFRICIAN LIBRARIES (BELGIAN INFLUENCED)

Three countries, Zaire, Rwanda, and Burundi, spent much of the colonial era under Belgian authority. Zaire is the largest francophone African nation, with about 33,265,000 people in 1988. Congo gained independence in 1960, taking the name Zaire in 1971. The former German territory of Ruanda-Urundi became a Belgian mandate after World War I and split into Rwanda and Burundi at independence in 1962.

Leopold II began to build a library on colonial affairs even before he came to the throne in 1865. Librarian Emile Banning gathered materials to support Leopold's colonial ambitions, leading to the establishment of the Congo Free State in 1885, which

became the Belgian Congo in 1908. By 1926 the Belgian Colonial Ministry had a collection of about 30,000 volumes located in Brussels. This library became the Bibliotheque Africaine which passed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1961; it held about 350,000 volumes in the late 1960s.

The earliest Belgian libraries in the Congo were created through the efforts of the Burgomaster of Brussels, Charles Bul, who in 1898 outlined a volunteer project to supply books to Belgian outposts. Before the project ended in 1906 more than a hundred Belgian posts were provided with small collections of 150 to 200 books, complete with iron bookcases to withstand termites.

Administrative libraries for colonial officials were created by a 1910 decree; others could use these libraries after payment of a 25 franc fee. Privately-organized libraries serving the public opened in Leopoldville (now Kinshasa) in 1925 and soon after in Elizabethville (now Lubumbashi).

Decrees of 1931 and 1932 authorized the Governor General of the Congo to create public libraries in the Belgian territories. By 1940 23 libraries for whites and about 15 for Africans had been created, including three in Ruanda-Urundi. A 1946 law specifically authorized the creation of libraries for Africans, and a rapid increase followed: 184 by 1948 and 388 by 1958. By 1958 there were 39 libraries for whites. Although most of these libraries were very small--an average of no more than 400 books in those for Africans--the creation of a system of public libraries is unique in francophone Africa. A total of 5,572 library subscribers and 536,987 book loans were reported for 1955. Many public libraries disappeared during the early years of independence, which saw major upheavels in all three territories, but Bujumbura (Burundi) reported 26,000 volumes and Kinshasa 24,000 volumes in the 1980s.

Belgium also created the Bibliotheque Centrale du Gouvernement-Generale, located at Leopoldville. Opened in 1949, it grew to 90,000 volumes and 1,500 serials by 1958. At independence this library became the Bibliotheque Nationale du Congo.

Special libraries appeared in the 1930s. The Institut des Sciences Agronomiques du Ruanda (f. 1932 in Butare) and the Institut National pour l'Etude et la Recherche Agronomique (f. 1933 at Yangumi) were among the earliest agencies to build research collections. Mining companies and religious groups such as the Dominican Fathers did likewise. Academic libraries came later: in the Congo Lovanium University opened in 1954, and the Universite Officielle in 1956.

At independence in 1960, the Congo had a large central library in the capital; a substantial number of small public libraries; special libraries serving industry, government, and religious bodies; and two academic libraries. Burundi and Rwanda also had public libraries and a few special libraries. A third university was created in Congo during 1963/64.

Since independence academic libraries have received the most support. The Universite Officielle de Burundi (f. 1961 at Bujumbura) has a central library and five departmental libraries with a total of 110,000 volumes and 1,270 serials. In Rwanda, the Universite National du Ruanda (f. 1963 at Butare) was combined with the former Institut Pedagogique National in 1981 to create two university campuses, each with a library; the larger held 115,000 volumes and 720 serials in 1983.

In 1971 the three Congolese universities were reorganized as the Universite Nationale du Zaire (UNAZA), with campuses at Kinshasa, Kisangani, and Lubumbashi.

Each UNAZA campus has a central library, some departmental libraries, and affiliated research centers. The first Zairois director was appointed at Kisangani in 1975; by 1980 all three were Zairois. Professional librarians are covered by the university personnel ordinance of 1978, which includes them among scientific and academic personnel with the same benefits as other faculty members.

Collection size and physical facilities vary. In the late 1980s the Kinshasa campus (formerly Lovanium University) held some 300,000 volumes, while Lubumbashi (the former Universite Officielle) held 93,000 volumes and Kisangani (the former Universite Libre) held 46,000 volumes and about 450 current periodicals.

Burundi and Rwanda, but not Zaire, are moving in the direction of creating national documentation centers to coordinate networks and policy on scientific and technical information. In Burundi this function has been allotted to the Centre National d'Information et de Documentation Scientifique et Technologique (CNIDST) and in Rwanda to the Ministere de l'Enseignement Superieur et de la Recherche Scientifique (MINSUPRES).

EAST AFRICAN LIBRARIES

The only lasting French enclave on the East African mainland was Djibouti, at the mouth of the Red Sea. However, five islands or island groups in the Indian Ocean off the eastern coast of Africa spent time as French possessions and include French influence in their mixed heritage of Arab, African, and other elements.

Of the Indian Ocean territories, Reunion (1988 pop. 515,800) has been an overseas department of France since 1946, with a Bibliotheque Departementale (95,000 volumes), a Central Lending Library (150,000 volumes), and a library of 100,000 volumes and 710 serial titles at the Universite de la Reunion.

Madagascar, the largest French-speaking nation in the region, with a population of 10,913,000 in 1988, became independent in 1960 with Malagasy and French as the official languages. The colonial Government Library (f. 1920) grew to 80,000 volumes by 1961, when it became the National Library. It moved into a new building in 1982 and held 180,000 volumes in 1990. The major academic library, serving more than 40,000 students, is at the Universite d'Antananarivo in the capital. It holds 190,000 volumes, including 40,000 foreign theses, and 700 serial titles.

Major special libraries include the Malagasy Academy Library, with 33,000 volumes (f. 1905), and the library of the Geological Service, with 42,919 volumes (f. 1926). Some 55 public libraries are found in the six provinces; the largest is the Municipal Library in Antananarivo (f. 1961), with about 22,600 volumes today. Several foreign cultural center libraries are also open to the public.

Mauritius (pop. 1,075,000) and the Seychelles (pop. 68,000) became British colonies in 1810 and 1814 after periods under French rule and gained independence in 1968 and 1976. French Creole is the most widely spoken language in both nations.

In Mauritius, a Municipal Library was founded at Port Louis in 1851; it was opened to the public in 1933 and grew to 80,000 volumes by 1987. Other libraries serve the larger towns, including a Carnegie Library in Curepipe. A library created at the Mauritius Institute in 1901 serves as a national library with 52,000 volumes by 1987. The largest special library is at the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute (f. 1953),

with 20,000 volumes and 659 periodicals. The Central Library of the University of Mauritius holds about 75,000 volumes and 575 serials; the university began offering library science courses in 1978.

A Carnegie Library was founded in the Seychelles in 1908; it forms the basis of the National Library (f. 1978), which held 50,000 volumes in 1984. Small libraries of about 400 volumes each serve the 25 primary schools. The Seychelles Polytechnic opened in 1983 to provide upper secondary training, with a library of 10,000 volumes at Anse Royale and another 10,300 volumes at Mont Fleuri. The French Cultural Center library of 10,000 volumes is also open to the public.

The Comoros became independent in 1975. Most of the 500,000 Comorans speak Arabic or Swahili, while French is the official language. Libraries in Moroni, the capital, include the Centre National de Documentation et de Recherche Scientifique, with about 6,000 documents in 1990; the Ecole Nationale d'Enseignement Supérieur, with about 6,000 volumes and 28 serials; and the Alliance Franco-Comorienne, which also sponsors libraries in two other towns.

Djibouti (formerly French Somaliland), on the mainland, became independent in 1977. The official language is Arabic; some French is spoken, but most of Djibouti's 376,000 residents speak Afar or Somali. A new Library of the National Assembly, which includes a documentation service, opened in 1988. The library of the French Cultural Center (f. 1978) holds about 8,000 volumes, while the Arab Maritime Academy has about 8,500 books and 180 serials.

WEST AFRICAN LIBRARIES

Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal were formerly members of a federation of French colonies called Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF) or French West Africa, created in 1895. Togo became a French mandate in 1922. Libraries existed in this part of Africa as early as the sixteenth century, as traders from North Africa brought the literate tradition of Islam. Centers of scholarship grew up in Timbuktu and Djenne, for example; Muslim teachers and wealthy laymen formed personal libraries.

The libraries created during the colonial era supported the scientific and educational missions of the colonial regime. In 1915 Governor General François Clozel created the Comité d'Études Historiques et Scientifiques (CEHS) to oversee scientific and scholarly work carried out in the AOF territories. A CEHS library was created and put under the charge of the AOF archivist, Claude Faure. Small office collections also sprang up in various government agencies; none of these exceeded 3,000 volumes. Other small legal collections served territorial and provincial capitals.

Just before World War II, French colonial officials became very active in promoting research libraries. Jules Brevie, the Governor General of the AOF, championed the concept of the civilizing mission of French culture. In 1937 he founded the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire (IFAN) to coordinate and carry out scientific and scholarly research in the AOF. As such it replaced the CEHS. IFAN was charged with setting up libraries, archives, and museums relevant to West Africa. A central IFAN library was created in Dakar with André Villard as director. The book budget increased from 10,000 francs initially to 194,000 francs in 1938. From 1939 through the war years,

the IFAN library had an annual book allocation of 100,000 francs; it grew from 7,000 volumes in 1939 to 21,000 in 1949. Over time the legal collections of the territorial governors were converted into IFAN libraries. From 1945 to 1960, the AOF experienced an era of economic growth. Library services were better funded than in the past, although the focus was still on special libraries.

New opportunities for higher education for Africans also developed after the war. To meet the need for employees in an expanding variety of jobs, the French created the Institut des Hautes Etudes (IHE) in Dakar. Its initial library was a small medical collection inherited from the Ecole Africaine de Medicine. In 1950 an instructor began a small collection on law, humanities, and sciences. In 1952 a French librarian, Suzanne Seguin, was hired to catalog and administer the collection. In 1957 the IHE became the University of Dakar. By 1960 the university library held 80,000 volumes and construction for a central library building had begun; the collection grew to 350,000 volumes and 5,000 serials in the 1980s.

Public library services were of minor concern to the AOF administration, reflecting the low priority given to public libraries in metropolitan France during the colonial era. Although a municipal library was created at St. Louis in Senegal as early as 1803, the Government General left such services to other bodies. Another municipal library was established in Abidjan, and the Alliance Francaise sponsored a subscription library in Dakar. Three proposals for public library services were presented to the Government General during the 1950s, but none resulted in any concrete steps toward a system of public libraries. In 1964 UNESCO established a pilot public library in Abidjan.

Guinea became independent in 1958, the other AOF colonies and Togo in 1960. Libraries now became the responsibilities of new national governments. Most but not all created national libraries, often based on the regional IFAN libraries which held the best collections in the new states. Most of the specialized scientific libraries continued to function, although names and ministerial affiliations changed.

There have been efforts to improve both higher education and mass literacy. Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Niger, and Togo as well as Senegal have created national universities with academic libraries. Guinea, Mali, and Mauritania have institutes of higher education with libraries. The Islamic University of West Africa, sponsored by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, has opened in Say, Niger. In several countries small village libraries are included in literacy or rural development projects; other projects encourage reading by the general public.

Several countries established national documentation centers. These centers collect and distribute documents about the country, organize existing scientific and technical libraries into networks, and establish national policies for scientific and technical information. As such, the documentation centers have at times replaced the national libraries as the main coordinating and policy bodies for information.

In Togo, for instance, the Centre de Documentation Technique (CDT) has created a national network from sector networks. The sector networks are rural development libraries, school libraries, libraries for higher education, and documentation centers for socio-economic development. Financial support came from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Similar networks exist or are planned in Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Senegal. Some serve as local links to the Pan African

Documentation Information System (PADIS) created by the UN Economic Commission for Africa.

LIBRARIES AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Libraries were initially a low priority for African governments. Officials had little experience with good libraries and the potential contribution of information resources to national development goals was not self-evident. Academic and special libraries with established clienteles were first to marshal financial support from new nations.

Recently African governments have shown growing interest in libraries to serve the public. In 1989 14 francophone African states signed agreements with the French Ministry of Cooperation and Development for projects designed to encourage reading by the general public. They include school libraries (Mauritania), libraries in local youth centers (Djibouti, Chad, Burundi), public libraries in scattered cities (Guinea, Zaire, Congo) or in regional capitals (Togo, Senegal, Benin, Mali), and other activities.

The project in Mali, termed "operation public reading," is one of the oldest and most ambitious library projects in francophone Africa. Begun in 1977, it calls for the creation of 1,000 volume libraries in each of the nation's 46 districts. By 1989 these 46 libraries held about 60,000 volumes. Another French project in Congo is creating small rural libraries as part of a cultural, agricultural, and medical development project. Beginning with as few as seventy-five books, these village libraries are intended to grow to 500 volumes.

Small village level collections of books and pamphlets prepared by literacy personnel in local languages have been included in literacy projects in a number of countries. Niger created village libraries consisting of a wood or metal box with a lock, stocked with 20 booklets and 10 brochures, at a cost of about 27,000 CFA francs each (about \$75 US). By 1980 45 such centers were in place.

The French Agency for Cultural and Technical Cooperation (ACCT) has also sponsored networks of local cultural centers which include libraries. A total of 57 such centers were operating in 1989 in Benin, Senegal, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso.

Despite UNESCO's recommendation that each developing country adopt a national information policy, the early growth of libraries was often uncoordinated. African nations and donor agencies responded by establishing information networks focusing either on a sector of the economy, a development problem, or a discipline. Limited resources could be shared while meeting the immediate needs of projects or government agencies. One of the early attempts to provide documentation on a regional basis was the Institut Africain pour le Developpement Economique et Social (INADES). Founded by the Society of Jesus in 1962, with headquarters in Abidjan, it provides reference services and distributes bibliographies concerning development. Subcenters are located in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Rwanda, Togo, and Zaire.

The Reseau Sahelian d'Information et de Documentation Scientifiques et Techniques (RESADOC) is another network designed to share resources to address the pressing problems related to drought in the Sahel. Created in 1979 in Bamako, it receives documents and cataloging from about 60 documentation centers in nine Sahelian countries. In return it makes them available on microfiche to those concerned with

drought-related problems. In 1986 a satellite center opened at Universite Laval in Canada to increase use of RESADOC's resources.

The Centre International des Civilisations Bantu (CICIBA) meets documentation needs in central Africa. Founded in 1983 in Libreville, Gabon, it collects information about Bantu culture from subcenters in other countries. It also provides technical support in information science and uses CD-ROM to provide references to journal articles for institutions in central African countries.

By the 1980s it was apparent that much of the literature on development was not available in the developing countries. In 1983 the French Ministry of Cooperation and Development created IBISCUS to bring together in one database the unpublished reports resulting from French bilateral aid projects. A number of periodicals are also abstracted for IBISCUS. From this database bibliographies and abstracts are produced both on paper and on diskette. Updates from the IBISCUS database are sent to INADES to avoid duplication.

In 1986 the summit of 41 francophone nations, meeting in Paris, set a goal of reassembling the literature of each of the francophone countries. The Banque Internationale d'Information sur les Etats Francophones (BIEF) was established in Ottawa. In 1986 and 1987 BIEF coordinated a search for materials on Third World francophone countries in Canadian and other libraries. Besides creating a database, BIEF is microfilming important works in order to provide copies to the countries which are the subject of the work. BIEF also gives technical support to documentation centers in the Third World. It has established subcenters in Senegal, Burundi, Ivory Coast, and Gabon.

The French Ministry of Cooperation and Development has undertaken projects in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Madagascar, and Niger to create national databases based on the holdings of existing libraries and documentation centers. Such databases encourage government planners and other officials to use existing information. For cooperation between centers, a common communication format named BABINAT was developed in the 1980s. BABINAT transforms the various forms used by individual documentation centers into one bibliographic format. Since many documentation centers have been computerized using UNESCO's CDS/ISIS bibliographic retrieval program on a microcomputer, information sharing among centers is facilitated by the exchange of diskettes containing newly entered records.

SELECTED SOURCES

1. "L'Information pour le Developpement en Afrique." Special issue of *Afrique Contemporaine*, vol. 151 (3) (1989): 1-294.
2. Maack, Mary N. "The Colonial Legacy in West African Libraries: A Comparative Analysis." *Advances in Librarianship* vol. 12 (1982): 173-245.
3. Sitzman, Glenn L. *African Libraries*. (1988) Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.