

ILLUSION OF INTERNET GREY LITERATURE BOON FOR DEVELOPING NATIONS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: The study examines the print and electronic situation in the Swaziland grey literature information system. With data from sample special collections and Web sites, it is observed that: (i) print Swaziana grey literature is more prevalent than electronic materials in terms of relevant thematic coverage, quality, and relative access, and (ii) to date, there is little substantive electronic Swaziana grey literature on the Web and in the absence of coordinated intellectual control thereon, the Internet has not significantly enhanced access. The study proposes, inter alia, cooperative bibliographic control and awareness raising as essential building blocs to a Web portal to Swaziana grey literature. It concludes by emphasizing the continued complementarity of print and electronic materials and the need for more studies on African experiences to help shape the continent's contribution to the evolving global virtual library.

Introduction

The phenomenal advances in information and communication technology, relatively small and fragile publishing sector, recurring shortages of conventional publications, and persistent shortfalls in library acquisitions budgets has, in recent times, brought to the fore, the significance of grey literature in supporting ongoing initiatives aimed at improving living standards in developing nations. Following the first international conference on grey literature held in Amsterdam in December 1993, several articles on the subject have appeared. In particular, Sturges¹ and Debachere² address the problems of obtaining grey literature and allude to possible models emanating from Sierra Leone, Sudan, Benin, Lesotho, Senegal, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Tanzania. At a general level, the adaptation of appropriate knowledge from the global information market place is, among other things, advocated to help meet information needs in developing countries³.

Related works deal with the positive impact of the World Wide Web (WWW) on the acquisition, control and provision of grey literature, the main arguments

¹ Sturges, Paul. "Using grey literature in informal information services in Africa, *Journal of Documentation*, 50 (4), 1994, 273-290

² Debachere, M.C. "Problems in obtaining grey literature", *IFLA Journal*, 21 (2), 1995, 94-98

³ World Bank. World development report : knowledge for development 1998/99. Washington, D.C., World Bank, 1999

advanced being that: the Internet has great potential as a source of grey literature; grey literature is benefiting from the increase in self publishing via the WWW and enhanced access through direct online distribution; and, because an increasing mass of Internet documents, mainly grey literature, is available to a growing number of users especially in developed nations like the European Union (EU), the concept of grey literature no longer applies. Evidently, the grey literature debate on African experiences focuses on a limited number of countries while the discussion on the impact of the WWW is mainly based on the experiences of developed nations. Not much is documented about the situation in many other developing nations of Africa.

The purpose of this study is to broaden the discourse on the theory and practice of grey literature by focusing on Swaziland. Specifically, the objectives are to: (a) attempt to determine the availability, accessibility and proportion of Internet and print Swaziana grey literature, and (b) test the foregoing arguments on the impact of the Internet on Swaziana grey literature knowledge in the context of the topical debate on the evolution of a global virtual library.

Keenan⁴ defines grey literature as semi-published literature which is not formally listed or priced but is nevertheless in circulation. Debachere⁵ on the other hand identifies the materials falling within the domain of grey literature. The two definitions provide the guidelines for this study. The only addition to Debachere's list is graduate and undergraduate dissertations which, due to scarcity of readily available materials on various subjects, are a major component of the Swaziland grey literature system. The term Swaziana refers to all materials relating to Swaziland.

Data Collection

The data for this study comes from an examination of a representative sample of Swaziana special collections in the Swaziland information system, namely: (a) special collections at the University of Swaziland Library, Kwaluseni (UNISWA) as reflected in the Swaziland National Bibliography (SNB), the former University of Swaziland Social Science Research Unit (SSRU) accessions bulletins and the corresponding holdings, Umtapo waBomake/Women's Resource Centre (WRC), Manzini, United Nations Development Programme Library (UNDP), Mbabane, and Swaziland Environment Authority Library (SEA), Mbabane; (b) analysis of Swaziana content at Web sites that include Swaziland's Internet portal, Swazi.com at <http://www.swazi.com/government/>, Southern African Research and

⁴ Keenan, Stella. Concise dictionary of library and information science. London, Bowker Saur, 1996

⁵ Debachere, M.C., *op. cit.*

Documentation Centre (SARDC) at <http://www.sardc.net>, UNISWA online public access catalog (OPAC) at <http://library.uniswa.sz>, World Development Sources at <http://www.wds.worldbank.org> and surfing the Internet for Swaziland materials from the Swaziland Internet Service Provider, Real Image at <http://www.realnet.co.sz>, and using the search engine Ananzi (from neighboring South Africa) at <http://www.ananzi.co.za/>, during the period December 2000 to February 2001; (c) discussions at and consultations after Global 2000 : Second World Wide Conference on Special Librarianship, Brighton, UK, 16 - 19 October, 2000; and (d) personal experiences in developing and managing Swaziana information services. Care was taken in selecting reputable and trusted Web sources to minimize the impact of un-authoritative Web content.

Findings

Print Swaziana Grey Literature

Table 1: *Print Swaziana Grey Literature*

Source	Estimated Documentation	Characteristics	Thematic Areas
WRC	ca73 ⁺	Studies & research reports by Swazi & external experts, and government & NGO* reports	Women in development, human rights, gender, HIV/AIDS, energy, informal sector, poverty alleviation, training, desertification, drought relief, conservation
UNDP	ca50 ⁺	Studies & research reports by Swazi & external experts, Swaziland government, international partners, consultants, commissions of inquiry & missions, & operational & action plans	NGO capacity building, physical infrastructure, agriculture & rural development, women in development, tinkhundla (local government), indigenous enterprises, civil service, tourism, land tenure, poverty alleviation, & food & income security.
SEA	ca100 ⁺	Government, consultancy & mission reports, position papers, policy documents, strategy & action plans, & workshop proceedings	Environmental impact assessments and mitigation plans & reports on projects covering roads & bridges, urbanization, sanitation, dams, mining, erosion, correctional services, electrification, tourism, sports, conservation, energy, desertification, poverty alleviation, health & agriculture.
UNISWA	ca 4525 ⁺	Studies & research reports by Swazi professionals, external experts, consultants, government, commissions of inquiry, & international partners, official speeches, theses & dissertations & conference proceedings & papers.	All the above plus politics, investment, history, language, geography, geology, transportation, housing, education, trade unions, income generation, foreign relations, librarianship, race relations, etc.
SUMMARY	ca. 4748 ⁺	Indigenous grey literature from authoritative government sources, local experts, consultants, NGOs and international partners.	Cross - cutting topical national development issues.

NGO* = Non - governmental organisations

Table 1, *Print Swaziana grey literature*, indicates that the volume of hard copy grey literature available in the four sample special collections is in excess of 4 748 quality documents, 95% of which is at UNISWA. The documentation is a result of local research and studies carried out by credible and authoritative researchers featuring experts from the Swaziland intelligentsia, consultants, Swaziland Government Ministries, NGOs and international organisations working in Swaziland, including the United Nations, World Bank, United States Agency for

International Development, European Union and World Tourism Organisation. Overall, the documentation collectively represents a significant indigenous knowledge data bank supporting a wide cross - section of Swaziland development information needs, the key areas being poverty alleviation, food security, women in development, agricultural and natural resources development, urbanization, informal sector development, energy, sanitation, water supply, public health and education.

Several factors account for the foregoing print Swaziana grey literature situation. The outstanding UNISWA print contribution is partly due to its legal depository status, national information service role, research output excellence, and the SSRU documentation initiative launched in 1981. Until its incorporation with the main UNISWA Library in 1995, the SSRU stands as an exemplary initiative in the acquisition, control and provision of and access to Swaziana grey literature. Dedicated financial, physical, human, technological and material resources were invested into the SSRU documentation service. Its specific mandate was to collect, classify and store available information on social, economic and cultural developments on Swaziland for easy retrieval when needed. By 1989, it was recognised as the most comprehensive source of indexed contemporary Swaziana documentaion⁶. Also, some key reports and documents are duplicated within the Swaziland information system. Further, though Swazi society is steeped in its strong culture, customs and oral traditions, indigenous based writing and printing has a relatively long history in the country dating back to around 1931⁷. This partly accounts for the larger cumulated volumes of Swaziana hard copy documentation. It is also noteworthy that though a considerable number of the printed reports from the United Nations system and the World Bank have a regional flavor, the diversity of ideas, experience and knowledge which they contain imparts a richness of content and quality to Swaziana grey literature. This complements the quality inherent in the relatively high volume of research reports in the entire Swaziana grey literature print system.

The drawback is that coordinated national bibliographic control is lacking and access is not optimal. However, to the extent that representative and seminal key reports are duplicated and to the extent that UNISWA listings and holdings are a microcosm of the grey literature system in terms of availability, quality, coverage

⁶ University of Swaziland. Social Science Research Unit. Documentation Centre. *Accessions bulletin*, (4), 1989

⁷ Nhlapo, M.M. *The state of printing and publishing in Swaziland : a case for the university*. Paper presented at New Technology for African Scholarly Publishers : an International Conference and Third General Assembly of the African Association of Science Editors (AASE), 1-5 February, 1988, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.

and access, it can be argued that the printed documentation is, to a considerable extent, being disseminated and therefore comparatively accessible.

Internet Swaziana Grey Literature

Table 2: *Internet Swaziana Grey Literature*

Source	Estimated Documentation	Characteristics	Thematic Areas
Swazi.com	ca15 ⁺	Government official speeches, policy documents & press statements	Public enterprises, public service, & socio-economic development
UNISWA	-ca. 1492*	Bibliographic database giving information on UNISWA holdings, mainly scholarly research, government & consultancy reports, theses & dissertations, & conference papers	Microcosm of all subjects of interest to Swaziland
Real Image	ca. 21 ⁺	Corporation annual reports, graphics, and summary reports relating to Swazi fiction.	Arts & crafts, tradition & culture, & industrial development
SARDC	ca. 75 ⁺	Bibliographic databases citing sources of grey literature produced by scholars & researchers, curriculum vitae of environmental experts, & projects.	Environment, population, natural resources, labour migration, women in development, HIV/AIDS, poverty alleviation, gender, & democracy
WDS	ca. 11 ⁺	World Bank abstracts & full text of researched project papers, reports & studies	Agriculture, education, poverty alleviation, finance, energy, urbanization & water resources development
Ananzi	ca. 9 ⁺	Abstract of conference paper, consultancy & other reports, agreement & memorandum of understanding	Conservation, Internet, librarianship, human rights, politics, & HIV/AIDS
SUMMARY	-ca. 1623	Substantive reports from international partners, Swaziland government & organizations & individuals, & bibliographic records.	National development issues reflected mainly in bibliographic records and small volumes of full text documents.

* The results of the database search include some duplicated records arising from multiple access points.

Table 2, *Internet Swaziana Grey Literature*, shows that from the sample of six Internet sites visited, a smaller volume of approximately 56 full text items are identifiable as compared to the ca. 4 748 printed documentation. This imbalance is also mirrored at UNISWA, which has only –ca. 1 492 electronic bibliographic records as opposed to the 4 525 hard copy documents.

An analysis of a sample of 600 matches of the over 3 900 Ananzi hits for Swaziland shows that only nine matches fall within the grey literature ambit. Of these, three documents are traceable to sources outside Swaziland, namely, the US State Department, Amnesty International and the African National Congress of South Africa, while the balance of six emanates from Swaziland. The nine documents are littered and orphaned in a sea of flimsy materials which lack the intellectual resilience common in the printed materials in the study sample. This trend is duplicated at the Real Image site.

With respect to the authoritative Web sites, WDS gives full text access to its only ca. 11 Swaziana reports out of a total of over 6 000 World Bank reports on the site, while Swazi.com gives full text access to ca. 15 official Swaziland government documents. The SARDC and UNISWA sites have a higher number of bibliographic references reflecting depth and breadth in subject coverage.

Evidently, intellectually resilient electronic materials are still few and far between. While significant amounts of quality electronic grey literature relating to continental Africa is available on the Web, small nations like Swaziland are marginalized. In addition, it is a matter of further research to establish whether or not the continental coverage sufficiently meets specific regional and/or national needs. It is pertinent to note that continental Africa is a heterogeneous cultural, economic, social, political and geographical complexity.

Three factors account for the paucity of Internet Swaziana grey literature, namely: (a) Internet publishing in Swaziland is only in its nascent stages and the information technology (IT) learning curve is increasingly steeper as developed nations rapidly forge ahead with new applications, (b) recent Internet Swaziana publishing efforts are populating the Web with “soft”, flimsy and often repetitive and disorganised tourist and advertising related information, and (c) neither the bibliographic records nor the full text of the Swaziana grey literature materials at WRC, UNDP and SEA are accessible on the Internet.

The limitations in electronic Swaziana grey literature are further compounded by inherent access constraints, namely: (a) lack of an organised “one stop shop” or portal to this knowledge, (b) low IT penetration in Swaziland, (c) high profile initiatives like the print SSRU are absent in the electronic environment, and (d) the

UNISWA Web OPAC and SARDC give only bibliographic information which in the absence of digital imaging and online linking, falls short of instant online access to content, which, presumably, is associated with Internet grey literature.

It is however conceded that some materials not readily available in the print environment are accessible on the Internet. Notable are official government speeches and some few World Bank reports and working papers relating to Swaziland. By and large, the study suggests that Internet Swaziana grey literature publishing in and on Swaziland is low key, the volume of qualitative electronic documents is negligible and, to date, the Internet has not significantly enhanced access thereto.

On balance, of the 6 371 print and electronic materials netted in the study, full text electronic Swaziana grey literature represents only 0,88%. The combined percentage for electronic full text and bibliographic records is 25,47% of the grey literature population covered in the study. It is clear that there is limited full text Swaziana grey literature on the Internet compared to the relative wealth of printed materials. Regarding access, it cannot be categorically stated that Internet Swaziana grey literature is more accessible than the printed collections, though the Web developments at UNISWA, SARDC and WDS represent considerable enhancements.

The challenge

Undoubtedly, the Internet is an opportunity to address the issues of availability, control and access of/to Swaziana grey literature knowledge. The apparent and immediate challenges are: (i) awareness raising in relation to the potential contribution of the abundant Swaziana grey literature knowledge to development, (ii) compilation and updating of catalogues of the materials and consolidation into a national union list, (iii) stimulating the production of local Internet publications and retrospective digital imaging of print texts and related bibliographic records, and (iv) development of a Web based portal to enhance access to the resultant virtual indigenous Swaziana grey literature “melting pot”. It is suggested that structures such as the Swaziland Research Council, and the University of Swaziland Research, and Consultancy and Training Centres, with their expertise and established support networks, in collaboration with UNISWA, Swaziland National Library and key partners could appropriately spearhead the national initiative to deal with the foregoing challenges.

Conclusion

This study indicates that from the point of view of developing nations like Swaziland, the impact of the Internet on the availability of and access to pertinent grey literature is only modest. The reality is that:

- In the absence of much qualitative Internet Swaziana grey literature, and, access constraints, the enduring importance of hard copy materials should not be underestimated.
- The technological disparity between developed and developing nations is too profound to dismiss the concept of grey literature if the global virtual library ideal is to be representative of the totality of human cultures and civilization.
- For developing nations, the foreseeable future will most likely be characterised by the continued complementarity of hard copy and electronic materials, rather than the diminishing and replacement of the former, in grey literature conceptualization and practice.
- More grey literature studies covering other developing African nations are necessary in shaping the continent's contribution to the evolving global virtual library.

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