



### ABSTRACT

Government documents of publications are very useful to government officials for reference and continuity purposes and to the public as informational sources about the activities of government. The problems encountered in the process of acquisition are discussed, especially the inadequate

# THE PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS ACQUISITION OF GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS IN NIGERIAN LIBRARIES

**ISAH SHUAIBU; AHMED BALA UMAR; &  
HABIBAT UMAR JAJA**

Federal Polytechnic Bauchi Department of Library  
and Information Science

### INTRODUCTION

Government documents or publications, as the name implies, come from government, Marley (1977) sees them as “directives, regulations, reports, technical studies and other informational issuances.” These include speeches, government white papers and decrees. They can be printed books, typed or printed single sheets or pamphlets. In effect, they are publications in any form resulting from the activities of government departments at national, regional and district levels and from its executive, legislative and judiciary arms and other agencies. Documents from some government parastatals, and various commissions also fall into this category. These documents deal with all subject areas and most of them contain policies



lists of such publications; the lack of continuous supply which creates gaps in the collection; the ineffective means of publishing and distributing the documents; and the non-inclusion of government publications in the legal deposit act. Solutions are proffered on how to acquire easily.

**Keywords:** Problems, Prospects, Acquisition, Publications, Nigerian Libraries

which affects the well-being of the citizenry. Most of them are also specifically published as necessary for legislative and political purposes. The citizenry therefore has a right of access to them in order to be educated and/or enlightened for development. They are not primarily for sale or specifically for libraries, but for free supply and general use. In most cases, however, these documents do not get to the public as expected. Access to them sometimes is so restricted that the very purpose for which they were published, that is to educate and enlighten the citizenry, is defeated.

Government publications are of immense value especially as primary source information. They are accurate in basic and statistical information. They are very useful to the public for general reference, to the academia for research purposes, to the arms of government which produce them for income if they are sold, as publicity for government programmes and policies and also for reference. They also serve continuity purposes especially for researchers pursuing issues of national interest over a long period. They also serve as indicators of government performance and as a means for testing reactions of the public to government policies and programmes.

There are often limited copies and they usually have no reprints. They are also neither published by commercial publishers nor available in



bookshops nor listed in the regular trade bibliographies, so they are not easy to come by. More interestingly is the fact that they have corporate authorship and so are difficult to monitor and control. The presentation and appearance of government documents are also most often unattractive, compared to that of products from commercial publishers. They may have long and clumsy titles, no titles pages, no indexes, unattractive covers, low quality paper, poor printing and lack of information on how more copies can be obtained. These affect their acquisition.

### **Acquisition of Government Publications in Nigeria**

Government publications are primary information sources. In Nigeria, they are acquired through gifts, exchanges, acquisition tours and purchases.

#### ***Gifts***

Lots of government publications from the Government Printer are normally given out free but are often in short supply. Most times, even libraries do not get copies because they do not know when they are published and the Government Printer does not keep a mailing list of all libraries. For the other departments/agencies who also publish such documents, libraries are put on their mailing lists when they are contacted. They then send their publications as at when published. Sometimes, however, in spite of the blanket order placed, the libraries may not receive all documents from government printers.

#### ***Exchanges***

Most departments/agencies research institutes prefer to exchange documents. This means that the library must have publications acceptable to the agency for exchange.



## **PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF ACQUISITION**

Often the library lists all available publications which are available on exchange and sends them to others for selection. These include discarded books, calendars or research publications of faculty if it is a university library. After selection then the exchange is effected. If the documents are published regularly, then the process continues.

### ***Acquisition Tours***

This carried out in two ways, intra-and inter-city. The librarian visits the offices in the city or town to physically collect or purchase such documents from selected establishments.

### ***Purchases***

Some of the government publications for sale like brochures and statistical reports could be purchased directly whenever fund is available.

The methods explained above are used in Nigeria, but unfortunately none of them is efficient. For instance, at the University of Science and Technology (UST) Library, Kumasi only a few government documents are acquired periodically, because the library relies greatly on gifts and exchanges which never come as expected, and the aspects of acquisition tours and purchases are neglected because of lack of funds. These have brought about gaps which are difficult if not impossible to fill in government documents collection.

### **Problems of Acquisition of Government Documents in Nigeria.**

The major problems of acquiring government publications are the lack of working of government documents definition, inadequacy of the legal deposit Act of Nigeria, lack of physical access and bibliographical access to government documents (indexes, directories) and, more



importantly, lack of finance. The desire of libraries to acquire government publications solely as gifts without considering the options of purchase and exchange is a problem, as it deprives them of the much-needed documents.

Sometimes the ad hoc nature of some government agencies is a problem. Agencies are established with pomp and fade out with little notice. So the collection of publications from such agencies begins well but ends abruptly, sometimes with some published agencies is hard to trace as they exist only on the pages of newspapers, so one cannot collect their publications. Closely related to this is the fact that some government departments have multiple agencies and this sometimes brings about difficulties in tracing them.

### **Solution**

The problems can be solved if a working definition of government documents is adopted. Secondly, legal depository laws must be effective so as to make the publications easily available. In both developed and developing countries such laws assist in harnessing publications. The current Legal Deposit Act in Nigeria needs to be amended to include government publications and then strictly enforced to ensure compliance, with penalties stipulated for non-compliance. Regional administrative offices should be designated as depositories as well as all university libraries.

Also, government and libraries have to come together to devise a long-lasting method of controlling and making government publications easily available to users. There is the need to have a clear information on who publishes what, that is, the Government Printer, departments or commercial publishers. These needs to be identified and a list made of them and circulated to depository libraries.



Finally, the production of comprehensive lists, as well as catalogues is of utmost importance. This should be done regularly and effectively distributed. Nigeria should learn from the HMSO in Great Britain, which produces several lists and catalogues. It produces the *Daily List of New Publications*. The cumulative monthly catalogues is indexed. An annual catalogue which is a accumulation of the monthly catalogues is also produced. These annual catalogues are cumulated into consolidated indexes every 5 years. In addition to these, it issues a monthly newsheet. *Advance Information on Government Parliamentary Publications* which lists important new publications. Every week, a list of non-parliamentary publications sent for printing in the preceding week, called *List of Non-Parliamentary Publications* sent to the press, is issued. More useful to libraries and booksellers is the *Catalogue Amendment Service*, issued weekly to assist libraries and booksellers to update their catalogues, lists of retrospective publications and several bibliographies on different subjects covered by the British government and its agencies (Smith, 1978).

In order to achieve the above laudable goals, libraries need set aside funds in their annual budgets to cater for purchases of government documents and to undertake tours to acquire such documents. This will ensure that gaps are not created in library.

### **Conclusion**

Government publications are primary sources of information and very useful for accurate information transfer and for research. Its acquisition in Nigeria is tedious and sometimes impossible especially when one attempts to do a comprehensive collation of government documents. This is because there is no effective system for publication, distribution, indexing or listing. The legal deposit law does



not cover government documents, and there is no comprehensive list of departments, offices or agencies that publish such documents.

## **References**

- Marley, Branson S (1877) Foreword In Vladimir M Palic (Ed.) *Government Publications: A Guide to Bibliographic Tools*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Lass, Hans Detlef (1971). Acquisition of African Government Publications In *Proceedings of the Standing Conferences of African University Librarians, Eastern Area Conference*. Addis Ababa: SCAULA Eastern Area 63p
- Smith, Barbara. (1978) British Official Publications – 2 – Publications and Distribution. *Government Publications Review* 5(1). 2