



SPEECH

BY

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AT

**THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE DIGITAL
NAMIBIAN ARCHIVE (DNA) SUB-REGIONAL
WORKSHOP**

20 JULY 2010

WINDHOEK

Mr. Jaco du Toit, *UNESCO Representative*

Mr. Mike Harper, *Utah Valley University (UVU) Project Specialist*

Mr. Michael Wisland, *Audio Specialist from UVU*

Werner Hillebrecht, *Director: Namibia National Archive*

Distinguished Delegates from Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland

Faculty and Students

Ladies and gentlemen

Members of the Media

All Protocol observed

Firstly let me thank Unesco for organising this important workshop, an opportunity to investigate and document history through technology. And the partners in the Digital Namibia Archive (DNA) project – the Polytechnic of Namibia, Utah Valley University and the National Archive, are happy to share with experts from neighbouring countries and farther afield. Secondly let me warmly welcome all the participants to this workshop in the hope that collaborative links will be established for the benefit of development.

The DNA is the foundation for this workshop; it is was initiated in 2006 to preserve and make the cultural heritage of the Namibian people accessible by digitizing archival images, documents and audio-visual materials and to make it available to the public through the Internet. This project has an academic component. Faculty and students from the UVU spend a month at the Polytechnic each year, where they work together with Polytechnic faculty and students on the project. During this time, students are given workshops on various digital media and the importance of preserving culture and history, which they then get to apply within the DNA Project.

This project addresses the many facets of technology. The rapid growth in the creation and dissemination of digital objects by authors, publishers, corporations, governments, and even librarians, archivists and museum curators, has emphasised the speed and ease of short-term dissemination with little regard for long-term preservation of digital information.

Advances in technology have brought many useful tools to scholars, teachers, students, and others, but these advances have also brought significant challenges. Digital information is not durable, and in the rush toward technological advancement, many in higher education have ignored the need for digital archiving and preservation.

Only recently has attention been increasingly paid to preservation in library and scholarly circles. Among the first kinds of resources to receive such attention are electronic journals, which have grown dramatically in number and importance.

Archiving and preservation do not just happen. Digital materials are surprisingly fragile in ways that differ from traditional technologies, such as paper or microfilm. Digital information is more easily corrupted or altered without recognition. Digital storage media have shorter life spans, and digital information requires access technologies that are changing at an ever-increasing pace. Some type of information, such as multimedia, are so closely linked to the software and hardware technologies that they cannot be used outside these proprietary environments. Because of the speed of technological advances, the time frame in which we must consider archiving becomes much shorter. The time between manufacture and preservation is shrinking.

It is for this reason that archivists and librarians are meeting at this SADC sub-regional workshop to learn from the expertise and experience of the DNA, which serves to develop digital archiving capacity through collecting, capturing and organizing historical and cultural artifacts, documents, visuals and audio recording.

The training workshop will focus specifically on critical elements in establishing digitization projects such as selection policies, conversion policies and techniques, the use of the software Greenstone and the importance of metadata.

The field trip by 10 members of the Digital National Archives project will contribute towards the extension of archival material from the region that concern children storytelling, genealogy and regional histories. The Team will use the infrastructure of the Multi-Purpose Community Centre in Okanguati and will also share their experience with the community in recording techniques and collecting intangible heritage and store it as user generated content in the centre.

Going back to the technology, the viability of digital materials depends on technologies that rapidly and continually change. Many valuable paper resources that have been acquired by individuals or organisations and stored in little-visited recesses remain viable decades later. That will not happen with digital material. Changes in technology will ensure that over relatively short periods of time, both the media and the technical format of old digital materials will become unusable. Keeping digital resources usable for future generations requires conscious effort and continual investment.

While there are traditions of stewardship and best practices that have become institutionalised in the print environment, many of these traditions are inadequate, inappropriate or not well known among the stakeholders in the digital environment. Originators are able to bypass the traditional publishing, dissemination and announcement processes that are part of the traditional path from creation to archiving and preservation.

Groups and individuals who did not previously consider themselves to be archivists are now into the role, either because of the infrastructure and intellectual property issues involved or because user groups are demanding it. Librarians and archivists who traditionally managed the life cycle of print information from creation to long-term preservation and archiving, must now look to information managers from the computer science tradition to support the development of a system of stewardship in the new digital environment. There is a need to identify new best practices that satisfy the requirements and are practical for the various stakeholder groups.

In an effort to advance the state-of-the art and practice of digital archiving, the International Council for Scientific and Technical Information (ICSTI), a community of scientific and technical information organisations that includes national libraries, research institutes, publishers, and bibliographic database producers, sponsored a study in March 1999.

This study is the most recent in a series of efforts on the part of ICSTI to highlight the importance of digital archiving. The topic was first raised in the joint UNESCO/International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) Conference on Electronic Publishing in 1996. It was again highlighted at the technical session of the June 1997 Annual ICSTI meeting and a working group was formed. The Electronic Publications Archive Working Group presented a white paper of the major issues in December 1998 which was approved by the ICSTI Board.

Ladies and gentlemen,

All this goes to show where the world is heading in terms of digital archiving and we in Namibia, and indeed in the SADC Region, cannot afford to be found wanting in this important field. We need to catch up and we need to do so very soon. That is why the DNA project is commendable.

In the first year, the project was established and a needs assessment was done with regard to the equipment that would be necessary for the project.

In the second year, the UVU team brought some equipment with them. Polytechnic students were then taught how to scan archival images and a basic work process was established. Various negative formats were identified and extensive tests were carried out to determine the correct procedures for scanning and

digitization. It was decided to start off with the most vulnerable material, negatives from the Ottilie Nitzsche-Reiter Photo Collection.

During the third year, the Greenstone software was installed and the UVU/Polytechnic group started to work on the audio recording of oral history in the Maltahöhe district.

In July 2009, a part-time Archivist was appointed by the Polytechnic Library to work on the project. She sorted out a number of hardware/software and workflow problems before starting to scan images and adding metadata. Up to now more than 3000 images have been added to the DNA website, which can be viewed at: <http://dna.polytechnic.edu.na>

This year the group will continue with the digitization of the audio recordings at the National Archives. Mr. Michael Wisland, audio specialist from UVU, will be giving training on the digitization process. This will not only teach students how to go about it but also enable the staff of the National Archives to continue with the process. After the Digitization Workshop the UVU & Polytechnic students and staff, together with Mr. Jaco du Toit of UNESCO, will be travelling to Okanguati to make recordings of oral history in the region.

Finally, let me welcome you all once again and thank the stakeholders in this project – UVU, National Archive, and now Unesco, as well as the participants from other countries. With these few remarks it is my honour to declare this workshop open and I wish you fruitful deliberations.

I thank you for your attention.

Notes:

- 1. Flecker Dale, *Digital Archiving: What is involved?*, E-Content, 2003.**
- 2. Hodge Gail M, *Best Practices for Digital Archiving*, D-Lib Magazine, Volume 6 Number 1, January 2000.**