

**WORKSHOP ON THE**  
**“Models for Digital Data in Africa**  

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**and**  
**Digital Repositories as Open Educational**  
**Resources”**

University of Education Winneba, Ghana

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North Campus of the University of Winneba, Ghana.



## Oral Archives of the Research and Documentation Division, NCAC

### **“Digitization of the NCAC/RDD Oral Archive of The Gambia: Experiences, Challenges, Outlook”**

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## Introduction

### **The National Centre for Arts and Culture:**

- Established by Act of Parliament in 1989
- Previous legislation dates back to 1974 Monuments and Relics Act
- A semi-autonomous government Institution

### **Mandate:**

- Preserve, Promote and Develop Gambian Arts and Culture
- Also charged with the administration of Copyright Act, 2004



# The RESEARCH and DOCUMENTATION DIVISION (RDD)

[Formerly Cultural Archives started as an institution by Alh. Bakari Sidibe in the 70s]

- ▶ Supports the research activities of the NCAC - museum development, publications, research permits & deposits. CAS, library, oral archive audio-visual collections, etc.

## Scope of Collection

Collection of about 5000 tapes of Oral traditions and History covering the Greater Senegambia (Gambia, Senegal, Guinea Bissau)

Records dates back to the late 50s - mainly interviews with Griots and the Elders- folklore- tales, riddles, proverbs ,legends, myths, music, genealogies, Kaabu Empire, etc.

Also old and current newspaper collection



# RDD contd.

**Library Service:** Heritage management and conservation, traditions, musicology, museology, archaeology, history, etc.



**Routine work:** Field research and collection, translation, transcription



## Challenges & Threats

1. Age of collection
2. Environment
3. Resources- technical, financial, human



# Collection Methodology

- ▶ The collection methodology were: informants' interviews of renown and knowledgeable persons, focus group discussions, griots as traditional custodians of tradition, music and cultural knowledge passed on from one generation to another or other identified informants who possess knowledge in the topic under discussion.
- ▶ These interviews are mostly recorded on tapes with different format over these period of time since started in the late fifties pioneered by Alhaji Bakari Sidibe, who became the first head of the Unit under the then Oral History and Antiquities Division (OHAD).

# Collection Methodology Cont...

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- ▶ Other research methodologies were the Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRP) and its subsequent successor, the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) which are efficient and useful research methodology tools for tapping information with active participation of the beneficiaries as stakeholders.
- ▶ At the end of the field trip, recorded tapes were labeled with mainly the name of the informant/s, date of the interview, time and place or site of the recording including the topic/subject of the research matter being discussed, with a temporal accession number allocated to each tape/cassette in chronological orders from the recording scene.

# Storage

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- ▶ Cassettes/Reel to reel/VHS/CDs
- ▶ The RDD created a space purposely for storage of its collected and obtained research materials in cabins with row of shelves which are used for their deposit.
- ▶ They are preserved for posterity and to be utilized by students and researchers visiting the center. Though, from experience it becomes clearly understood indeed of how complex it is to preserve materials in this nature in an archive. However, thanks to the digitization projects of the RDD archive holdings funded by our esteemed partners in development.

# Data Processing

- ▶ The data processing starts after several field research collections, by allocating accession numbers to each tape or material collected from the last entry of tapes and files in the catalogue.
- ▶ Labeled the leaflet provided in the tape jacket. Also copy the information in the catalogue, kept in a secured place and taken out only when researcher comes, to be allowed to browse through and search topics of interest.
- ▶ Step two is transcribed and translated the collection as most of the interviews are usually conducted in local languages, since people would choose to speak in their own languages.
- ▶ After transcribing/translating, a file or folder for the transcripts and labeled accordingly, taking the reference information from the transcribed/translated.
- ▶ The data is finally stored for posterity or further summarized for writing a report for subsequent publication to disseminate the information for educational purposes and for sharing the information with the wider public. This stage of processing the data requires special skills and techniques to effectively do it efficiently.

# RDD RECENT IMPROVEMENTS/INTERVENTIONS

## British Library Endangered Archives intervention

- ▶ Digitisation of most endangered tapes and files
- ▶ Training
- ▶ Equipment
- ▶ Improve storage conditions



## Music Development & Heritage Sweden intervention

- ▶ Continuation of digitization
- ▶ Production of promo materials

## University of Hamburg /Gerda Henkel Stiftung, Germany,

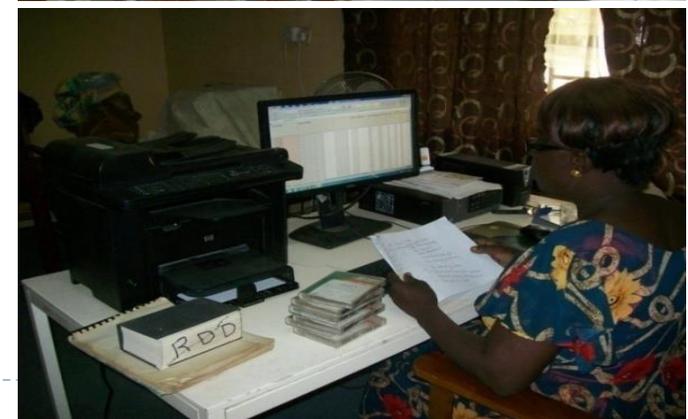
- ▶ Add value to what has already been achieved
- ▶ Facilitate access to the collection through internet



# RDD contd.

## Status-Quo (Current State)

- About 5000 tapes digitised
- Digitization of translated and transcribed files ongoing
- New catalogue with all carrier details (British Library Standards)
- Storage improvement with tapes cross-referenced to files
- Improved access and ease of use
- Increased scope for dissemination through world wide web (www)



# NCAC – NATIONAL DIGITAL ARCHIVE OF THE GAMBIA

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- ▶ Being aware of the importance of preserving, promoting and developing oral sources which forms a considerable part of the RDD collection, a grant was applied for and received from Gerda Henkel Foundation, Germany, entitled ‘NCAC - National Digital Archive of The Gambia’.
- ▶ In view of the granting the funds to carry out the project, a memorandum of understanding was signed in September 2016, between NCAC and the University of Hamburg, Germany, which aimed at making the oral collections of the Research and Documentation Division (RDD) more accessible to students and researchers.

# DIGITAL PROJECT CONT...

- ▶ It is envisaged that the project will promote our efforts of inter-cultural dialogue and international cultural exchange for the promotion of peace and understanding between the people of the world, and will also recognize the importance of safeguarding the audio and visual collections of the RDD because of its national and international significance.
- ▶ The primary aim of the grant is to provide and facilitate access to the audio-visual collections of the RDD for students and researchers through digitization and host it securely in The Gambia and at The Center for Sustainable Research Data Management (FDM), Germany.

## **The Project consists of the following work teams:**

- Digitization of written materials
- Re-digitization of audio tapes
- Scanning and documentation of the scanning
- Catalogue Improvement
- Indexing of those materials



# DIGITAL PROJECT CONT...

- ▶ This project, when completed as planned will make access to the archive easy and will safeguard the materials from inappropriate and mishandling of research materials during visits by students and researchers, and will also serve as a control to the loss of materials during transfer of the archive from one location to another as previously experienced.

## **Access and Copyright**

- ▶ The NCAC - National Digital Archive of The Gambia considered the copyright license to researchers according to the provisions of the National Copyright Laws of The Gambia. Therefore, research access shall be granted by the implementation of an online research permit with conditions, including payment of fees for accessing particular corpus of data.



# Purpose

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- ▶ A comprehensive digital preservation of the NCAC/RDD and private collection
- ▶ Implementation of a multi modally annotated Digital Archive, implemented and mirrored at FDM centre, Germany.
- ▶ Providing digitized documents to a wider academic and regional as well as public under regulated legal conditions
- ▶ Promoting history & culture of The Gambia in a global context

# Challenges/Constraints

Archive preservation in any form prove to pose a lots of threats and challenges from the way materials are handle and retrieve for use by researchers, scholars and the general public. This is in addition to other threat posed by natural factors beyond our control such as dust and humidity, insects and inappropriate storage conditions which as a result makes archive preservation challenging.

- ▶ The desire to preserve the collection for posterity the records of what that generation of masters and elders had to offer. The problem before 1971 there was no financial provision available or expertise to start a systematic collection. The only ones who seemed to have enough interest and money and work with oral traditions were foreign scholars, but they were not leaving behind copies of materials they took. The Public Records Act promulgated in 1969 states that every foreign scholar must deposit copies of taped materials as gesture of scholarly courtesy to deposit such works with one's host country", this is also a challenge.
- ▶ Other challenges are lack of professional expertise or skills, equipment and accessories to ease up some of the challenges experienced in archive works and preservation as the job requires special training and skills to effectively perform the desired duties needed.

# THE WAY FORWARD/ACHIEVEMENTS

- ▶ In the face of the obstacle and constraints, difficulties and problems involved in the archive work as mentioned earlier, the future still remain bright and promising of bringing positive changes as the previous and the current digitization project of the archive holdings is a clear testimony to that prospect.
- ▶ This can be logically justified by looking from where it all began and where we stand today. It is promising despite all the challenges encountered; we were able to manage and came all this far, with all financial obstacles and limited funding for archive development/improvement.
- ▶ Today, we can proudly boast of getting closer to having a complete digital archive, and a studio created to do the digitizing works for the archive holdings. The projects have provided for up to date art of equipment and accessories for the digitizing work to be easier and efficient.

# CONCLUSION

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- ▶ On this note, we must thank our German partners of the University of Hamburg, Gerda Henkel Foundation, The Center for Sustainable Research Data Management, Germany for a job well done. We are still optimistic in securing more funds to continue the digitization of the RDD oral archive collection until the last word and sound is available to the global community with a single mouse click.

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**THANK YOU**