



Date : 11/06/2007

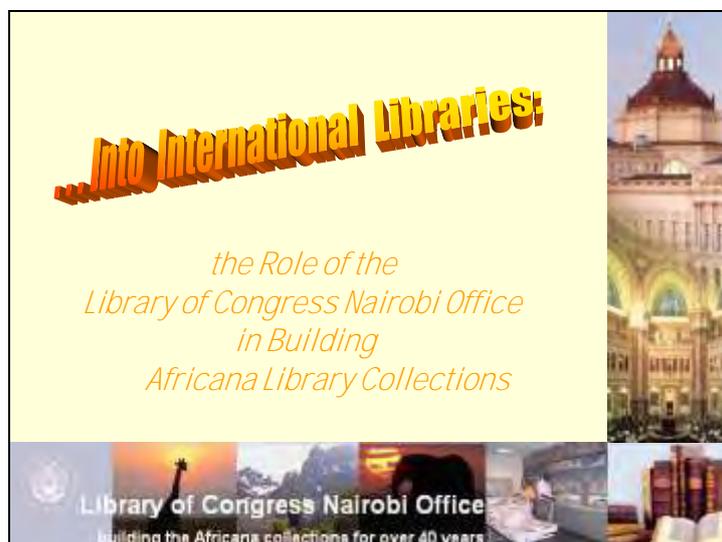
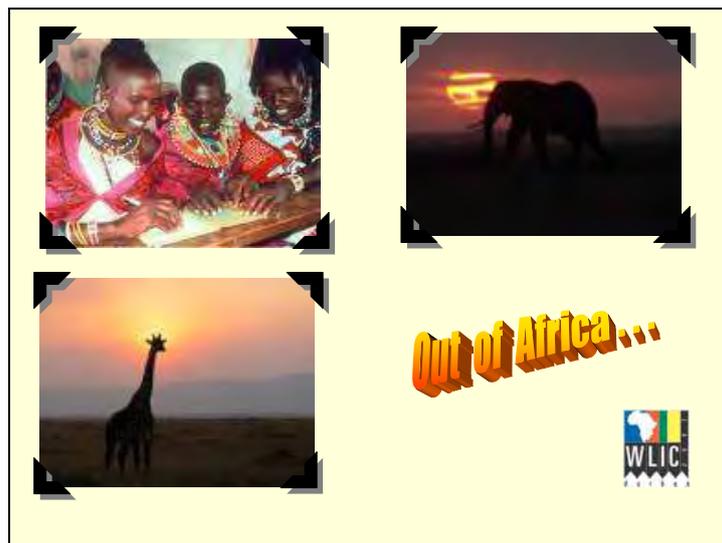
**Out of Africa...Into International Libraries: The role of the Library of Congress Nairobi Office in building Africana library collections**

**Pamela Howard-Reguindin** ✉  
 Library of Congress Office  
 Nairobi

**Meeting:** 136 Bibliography

**Simultaneous Interpretation:** No

**WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 73RD IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL**  
 19-23 August 2007, Durban, South Africa  
<http://www.ifla.org/iv/ifla73/index.htm>



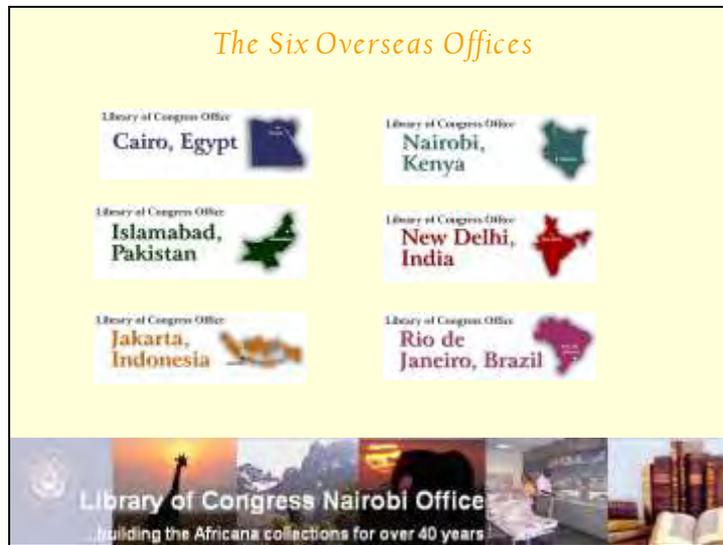
## Introduction

It may be hard to believe, but books, cardboard boxes and maps are still considered by many airport security guards and customs agents to be highly suspicious items, especially when you're traveling as a Library of Congress acquisitions librarian. Not so long ago, as one of our acquisition librarians was passing through airport security, he was mistaken for a terrorist or subversive, detained in a dark room and interrogated. His crime? Possession of a city map of an African capital marked with the US ambassador's residence in his carry-on baggage and a small bundle of flattened boxes. The map had been given to him by the ambassador's staff to facilitate his arrival at a diplomatic party. The flattened boxes were for shipping books in the next country he planned to visit. After nearly two hours of interrogation he was finally released, only to be later approached by his interrogator requesting US\$10 "for a meal." Such is just one harrowing example of the trials and tribulations librarians can go through while trying to get elusive Africana materials out of Africa and into international libraries.



This year marks the 45th anniversary of the Library of Congress's Overseas Operations offices and the 41<sup>st</sup> year for the Library's office in Nairobi. Each Library of Congress office has a cadre of intrepid, dedicated librarians whose business it is to locate and acquire all manner of publications, in any language, that are deemed to be of research and scholarly value. For the staff in the Nairobi Office, this means taking periodic acquisitions trips to some 29 sub-Saharan countries; writing letters targeted to specific organizations and agencies; attending book fairs; making personal visits to a myriad of agencies, organizations and sometimes even authors; managing bibliographic representatives; browsing

purposefully through book shops, and surfing the Internet--when it's working. All in a day's work, the quest may range from a rickety old building that hasn't seen a coat of paint for decades to an ultra modern national bank with the tightest security imaginable and on to the dilapidated headquarters of an AIDS prevention NGO. Just coming in to work can often be a challenge since our office is located in a new embassy building with local guards and US Marines that (wisely) take security measures very, very seriously.



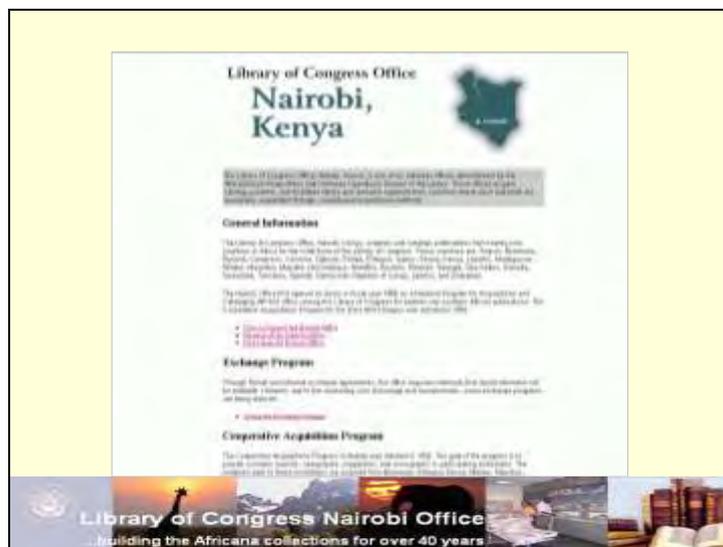
There are currently six overseas offices in Cairo, Islamabad, Jakarta, Nairobi, New Delhi and Rio de Janeiro. Combined, these offices cover 83 countries on three continents and collect materials in about 150 languages and 25 different scripts.



The primary mission of the Library of Congress is to “make its resources available and useful to the Congress and the American people and to sustain and preserve a universal collection of knowledge and creativity for future generations.” However, in reality, that mission extends to the world’s scholars as the library is open to any adult with a good reason

to use the collection. The “universal” part of the mission is possible only due to the existence of the six overseas offices and their respective networks and partnerships with other libraries, book vendors, publishers, authors, NGOS, government agencies and other denizens of the book publishing sector. Because our collecting policy is so broad and the collections contain materials in over 450 languages, the Library has become *de facto* a resource for all researchers no matter their origin or research topic. The Library of Congress not only acquires materials for three US national libraries (LC, National Library of Medicine and the National Agriculture Library), but for over 100 international institutions as well. In addition, for the benefit of the world’s libraries, the Library of Congress’s staff also catalog, disseminate our MARC records via our OPAC and its Cataloging Distribution Service, preserve images on microfilm, digitize, create online exhibits and user-friendly websites highlighting the collections, produce a variety of online guides and indexes for Africana materials and all other subjects one may find represented in the collections.

## Acquisitions work



All of the offices have regional acquisitions responsibilities and Nairobi is no exception with a whopping 29 countries from Eastern, Central, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean Islands being covered by our staff.

*Countries Covered by the Office...*

ANGOLA	BOTSWANA	Burundi	
Cameroon	Comoros	Congo	Djibouti
Eritrea	Ethiopia	GABON	Ghana
KENYA	LESOTHO	Madagascar	
Malawi	Mauritius	Mayotte	Mozambique
Namibia	Reunion	Rwanda	Senegal
Seychelles	Somalia	Swaziland	Tanzania
UCANDA	ZAMBIA	Zimbabwe	

The Library's *Collection Policy Statements* are used as guidelines for all office acquisitions. The breadth of materials acquired--mostly by purchase but also as gifts or exchange material--by the overseas offices is impressive: journals, books, newspapers, pamphlets, music and bibliographic compact discs, video cassettes (documentaries, movies and television), DVDs, maps, gazettes, posters, audio recordings, government publications, conference proceedings, children's literature and special formats that may be unique to a given country. In fact, we contact virtually any organization that is likely to issue publications. No less impressive is the quantity. From 1990 to 2006, the Nairobi office acquired and delivered nearly 700,000 items to the Library. In the same time frame, the office sent 1,018,000 items of Africana to Cooperative Acquisitions Program participants.

We have estimated that the six offices have sent approximately 22 million documents to LC alone from 1962-2006. Whereas the overseas acquisitions librarians used to collect more comprehensively, fiscal and shelf space constraints in Washington, DC obliged the selection officers to refine, revise and restrict the collecting policy guidelines not only for overseas acquisitions, but for domestic acquisitions as well. As a consequence, the overall number of items sent to LC has somewhat declined over the past decade, but the effort and time required to judge and evaluate each title and its specific merits has increased.[\[1\]](#)

Nevertheless, the Library's collections in so many subject areas are unparalleled in scope and comprehensiveness, often earning the astonished praise of scholars who exclaim "I could never find this book in my own country!" I think it is safe to say that for most African countries, LC has the largest collection of recent publications outside those countries.



For a number of years, from 1968 until 2002, the Nairobi Office published the *Accessions List of the Library of Congress Office, Nairobi* which served for many scholars and countries as a veritable substitute for a national bibliography. As technology progressed, as our staffing pattern shrank and as cataloging was done directly online in the LC public access catalog, the need for this publication diminished somewhat, although occasionally I still hear potential customers lament its demise. For more historical information about the acquisitions functions of the overseas offices, consult Alice Kniskern's article cited below [2].

In the earlier years, we maintained a thriving exchange program with a variety of African exchange partners including national libraries and archives, government agencies and NGOs. This worked to our mutual benefit even though the numbers of items we sent to other institutions often far exceeded what we got in return. Nevertheless, it was deemed important to maintain these exchanges as there was often no other way to receive the materials. Over the years though, as shipping and labor costs have dramatically increased and as more African institutions are now able and even prefer to sell their publications, our exchange receipts have dropped to a mere 5% of our intake. Currently, we prefer to purchase materials whenever possible or to receive them as outright gifts.

Increasingly, the offices, including Nairobi, are moving into the digital age acquiring bibliographic CD sets and exploring arrangements to acquire electronic journal files and databases whenever possible. We are also participating in the Library's Digital Table of Contents program to make available the TOCs for Africana materials. We started with English language tables of content as part of the pilot project, but have now expanded this to include TOCs of African language materials.

Currently, the staff of the Nairobi office comprises the field director, 25 Kenyan staff members and six contract workers who together processed about 130,000 items in 2006. A network of 25 part-time bibliographic representatives supply materials from, and reside in, 22 other countries. Countries for which we do not have resident bibliographic representatives are visited on a regular basis by our acquisitions librarians. Because of small press runs, on-the-spot collecting of African publications has been crucial to the successful assembling of unparalleled resources in contemporary African imprints. [3] The URL for the office is: [www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/nairobi](http://www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/nairobi).

# Cooperative Acquisitions Program



Although our primary role is to build our own Library's Africana collection, as early as 1944 the Association for Research Libraries approached the Library of Congress to seek assistance with foreign publications. We answered their call and have been providing international publications to academic libraries since the 1960s. The Cooperative Acquisitions Program was formally established with the goal to supply U.S. research libraries with books and serials that were otherwise inaccessible to those libraries due to inadequate international distribution practices. The idea was to take advantage of work that the overseas offices already did for Library of Congress with a minimal increase in staffing.[4] In this full cost recovery program, participating libraries pay an estimated charge up-front that covers the cost of periodical subscriptions and/or monograph profiles, shipping costs and administrative overhead. Over the years, this program has grown to serve over 100 libraries, mostly U.S. academic libraries but an increasing number of international libraries as well. By 1990, over 34 million items had been sent to participating libraries. By 2006, this number jumps to around 43 million. Currently, the Nairobi office serves 35 participants, the majority of which are US academic research libraries. We have five international libraries--York University of Canada, International Labour Organization, University of Frankfurt, and two national libraries: the British Library and the National Library of South Africa.

*Jenipher Isiji and co-workers carefully pack over 3,000 boxes annually for shipment to LC and the AfriCAP participants.*



For our AfriCAP participants, we offer 164 different profile options by country or subject in addition to newspaper and journal subscriptions. Last year, we shipped over 3,000 boxes of materials to LC and the AfriCAP participants. We try to accommodate their every bibliographic need, but at times even we may have a very hard time getting more than one copy of some titles, such as Hansards or national gazettes.

## Cataloging

The Nairobi office also fulfills a vitally important role for the cataloging of Africana materials. In each of the overseas offices, cataloging is done by host country nationals with local and remote supervision and revision. Needless to say, these catalogers are experts in their own local history, languages and cultures. The name authority work they do, which is shared via our online catalog, is a great savings to catalogers everywhere.

*African and European Languages Cataloged in the Office...*

Amharic	Chichewa	KINYARWANDA
Oromo	German	Ndebele
Shona	Portuguese	SILOZI
Somali	English	Sotho
Kiswahili	Shona	TIGRINYA
TONGA	Wolof	YAO

In our office alone, we deal with over 20 African and European languages. The level of cataloging varies depending on the training and skills of the catalogers and the type of material being cataloged. In Nairobi, it ranges from initial bibliographic control to full-level descriptive cataloging. It is our goal (and that of our directorate and its director Beacher Wiggins) to eventually do full cataloging, including subject analysis and classification in all of the overseas offices.

*Cataloging Statistics 2003-2006*

Materials Cataloged	Fiscal Year 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006
Monographs	2,178	1,425	3,225
Non-Book Materials	101	147	249
Serials	523	752	828



At present, monographic cataloging is done directly on the Library's Voyager Integrated Library System and on OCLC for serials. This cataloging is then shared via the Library's online catalog website, its Cataloging Distribution Service, and OCLC with any of our AfriCAP catalogers and indeed any cataloger anywhere in the world who has internet access. As more African libraries gain online access, the shared cataloging and name/geographic authority work we do will become an increasingly important time-saving mechanism for African catalogers.

## **Newspaper Preservation**

Preservation is central to the work of the offices, because many of the materials they acquire are printed on acidic paper that soon deteriorates. [5] The Nairobi Office has been notably instrumental in the preservation of hundreds of African newspapers.

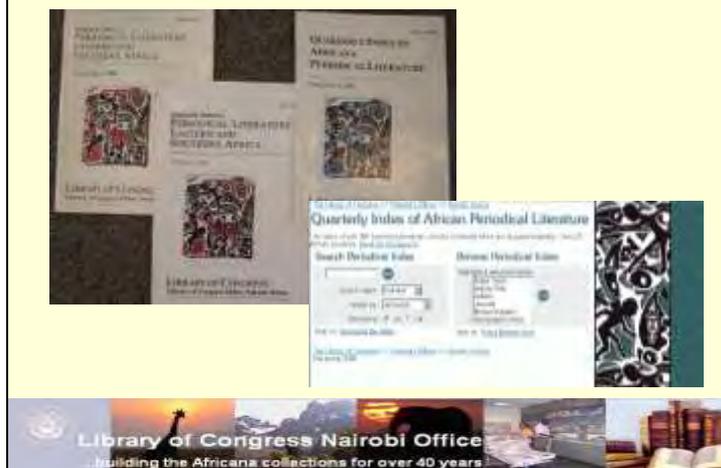


Each year about 95 African newspaper runs are sent to the New Delhi Office for microfilming and another 15 to the Library in Washington, DC. You can consult our website to see which titles are being filmed in India and which are being sent directly to Washington. In fiscal year 2006 alone nearly 600,000 pages of newspaper titles were microfilmed by the Delhi Office and Washington. However, to save Africa's older newspapers, it is becoming increasingly important to forge partnerships with other institutions. Working in concert with the Center for Research Libraries and the Cooperative African Microfilm Project the Nairobi Office received a grant last year to microfilm approximately 50,000 pages of Malawian newspapers dating from 1998-2005 that had been languishing in our office. This year we submitted a proposal to the same group to microfilm and preserve Zairois/Congolese (DRC) newspapers from 1987 through 2005. Unfortunately, we still have a backlog of several hundred titles and thousands of issues that we simply cannot afford to incorporate into our regular microfilming workflow. As time permits, we are looking into alternative funding sources and/or partnerships for microfilming these valuable research sources that are, quite literally, piling up in our office every day. We are also evaluating the microfilm output of the National Archive of Kenya to determine if we can purchase or exchange copies of their newspaper microfilm instead of doing it ourselves.

## ***Quarterly Index to African Periodical Literature***

Another very useful project in our office is the *Quarterly index to African periodical literature*. In 1991, the Nairobi Office initiated the publication of the *Quarterly Index* under the title of *Quarterly index to periodical literature, Eastern and Southern Africa* (1991-2000).

*The Quarterly Index over time... from print to online...*



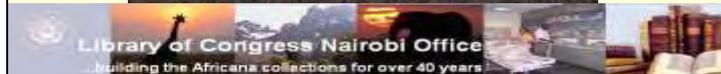
It was later changed to *Quarterly index to Africana periodical literature* (2000-2001). Currently, it is the *Quarterly index of African periodical literature* (2002- ). Over the course of time, nearly 800 African periodicals have been indexed in this source. The Office currently indexes over 300 selected periodicals which are acquired regularly from the 29 African countries we cover. On the whole, scholarly journals have been selected. However, considerations other than the scholarly nature of a journal have been taken into account. Journals have also been selected in order to cover subject areas not found in widely-available literature (e.g. prisons), to include organizations which do not frequently circulate their publications (e.g. non-governmental organizations), and some marginal journals in order to have representation for each of our countries.

Not all the selected journals are indexed exhaustively. Issues have been indexed sequentially starting with the earliest issue in hand. However, if earlier issues become available in the course of time, they will be included at a later date. The indexing is done by Nairobi Office staff and, more recently, some interested American volunteers. The URL for this index is: [www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/nairobi/qiapl/htm](http://www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/nairobi/qiapl/htm).

## Informational brochure

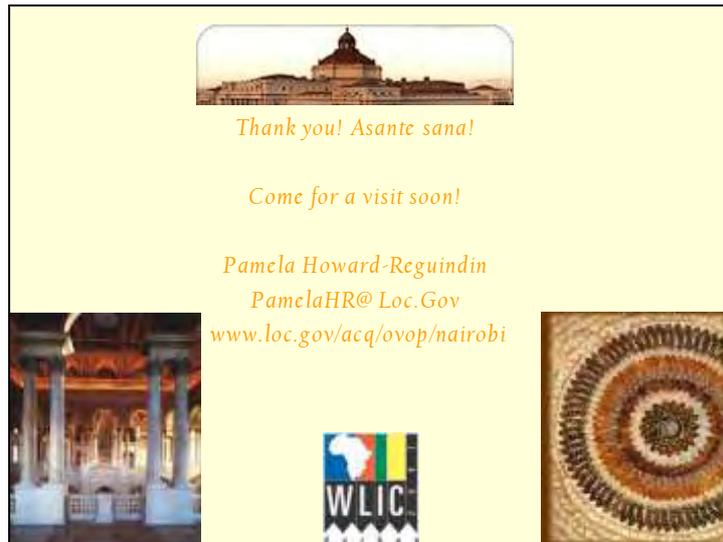
Last year, we produced an informational brochure in English, French, Swahili and Portuguese for the benefit of our exchange partners and anyone else interested in our operations. It is on our website and can be downloaded or you can obtain a copy by sending your address and an email message to [Nairobi@loc.gov](mailto:Nairobi@loc.gov). For more information about the offices you can also refer to articles by James C. Armstrong and Carol Mitchell cited below [6].

*Informational Brochures in English, French, Swahili, and Portuguese. Available online or request by mail.*



## **In closing...**

In closing, I trust that this presentation has helped to illuminate the multifaceted role of the Library of Congress Office in Nairobi, Kenya in building stronger research collections dedicated to African studies both in the U.S. and around the globe. The Nairobi Office has been instrumental in the creation of major Africana collections, the publicizing of the Library's collections, preservation of newspapers, and at the forefront in cataloging, indexing and bibliographic control of Africana materials. We are often challenged by new technologies, economic or political upheavals, and occasionally even natural disasters but we carry on with our mission to ensure the free flow of information, ideas, opinions, history and culture to the American people, Congress and the world's scholars. As the Librarian of Congress, Dr. James Billington, and UNESCO promote the new World Digital Library of unique, one-of-a-kind materials, we in the Nairobi overseas office expect to play a new role in identifying and assisting some African libraries to become a part of this new digital library.



## References

[1] P. Howard-Reguindin, “To the ends of the earth: Acquisitions work in the Library of Congress overseas offices,” *Library Collections, Acquisitions, & Technical Services*, 28 (2004) p. 410-419.

[2] A.L. Kniskern, Library of Congress overseas offices: Acquisition programs in the third world, *Library Acquisitions: Practice and Theory* 6 (1982) (2), p. 88.

[3] *Library of Congress Africana collections: an illustrated guide*. Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2001. p. 16

[4] For historical information about this program, see *Library of Congress, Special Foreign Acquisitions Programs, Overseas Operations Division*. January (1983). 2 p. brochure.

[5] C. Mitchell and J.C. Armstrong, “Understanding the world: the Library’s operations overseas,” *LC Information Bulletin*, (May 2005), p. 111.

[6] C. Mitchell and J.C. Armstrong, “Understanding the world: the Library’s operations overseas,” *LC Information Bulletin*, (May 2005), p. 107-115.