Union Catalogue: an information resource sharing tool for the Association of Parliamentary Libraries of Eastern and Southern Africa (APLESA)

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the theme of the conference "Networking through Information sharing, communication and use of technology; a way forward for parliamentary library and research services". This paper points out reasons why APLESA needs a union catalogue; a way forward regarding the development of a union catalogue and finally the paper suggests the adoption of Koha integrated library system as a shared library system by the association.

1.0 Introduction

The Association of Parliamentary Libraries of Eastern and Southern Africa (APLESA) established in 1994 is now comprised of parliamentary libraries from 14 countries including: Angola, Botswana, Ethiopia., Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Standing Committee of IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments, 2007). A key factor among the reasons that led to the formation of APLESA was the realization that parliamentary libraries in the sub-region did not have all the resources needed in order to enable parliaments make informed decisions and that users will require information on where to obtain a copy of the required material (Standing Committee of IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments, 2007). Due to this, APLESA seeks to enable Parliaments, make informed decisions through networking and information resource sharing (Standing Committee of IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments, 2007). One means by which APLESA may realize this mission is through the development of a union catalogue and the establishment of an effective document delivery service.

This paper seeks to contribute to the theme of the conference "Networking through Information sharing, communication and use of technology; a way forward for parliamentary library and research services". This paper points out reasons why APLESA needs a union catalogue; a way forward regarding the development of a union catalogue and finally the paper suggests the adoption of a shared integrated library system by APLESA.

1.1. What is a union catalogue?

According to Cole, (1981), a union catalogue is "a centralized finding list of books in more than one library" and it is a tool that facilitates interlibrary lending services, coordinated acquisition of resources and it is a source of cataloguing records. According to Harrod's librarian's glossary (1995), a union catalogue is "a catalogue of stock of the various departments of a library or a number of libraries, including locations" The International encyclopedia of information and library science (1997), states that a union catalogue is "a catalogue that contains not only a listing of bibliographic records from more than one library, but also locations to identify holdings of the contributing libraries". According to Martin, (2006), a union catalogue is basically a catalogue that lists the holdings of more than one library. Gorman, (2007) states that a union catalogue is, a collection of catalogue records from two or more libraries that is mainly intended to facilitate inter-library lending and other forms of resource sharing. He, however, adds that the primary purpose of a union catalogue is to provide listings of the collections of libraries e.g. books, sound recordings, videos, etc to a distant library user through a document delivery service. A union catalogue is "a catalogue that lists, completely or in part, the holdings of more than one library or collection" (Taylor as cited in Brown, 2007). From the above, it is fitting to say that a union catalogue:

- Presents the bibliographic records of holdings of two or more libraries,
- Indicates locations (libraries) where the items it presents can be found,
- Its primary objective is to support resource identification, and sharing through interlibrary lending and,
- It targets a distant user.

Although it may seem that a union catalogue is simply a bibliographic list of two or more library holdings, I would like to add that this list may in some cases contain links to the full texts of the resources listed and APLESA should consider this direction in the event that the idea of a union catalogue is agreeable to its membership. It's important to note that a union catalogue without an effective document delivery service will amount to an insignificant undertaking.

1.2. Union Catalogue models

Union catalogue models refer to the approach/method by which the union catalogue may be implemented. There are two main models by which a union catalogue may be designed i.e. Centralized or physical and distributed or virtual union catalogues (Marshall, 2002). The centralized model consists of a centralized database into which records may be added either directly (where records are created in the central database) or indirectly (where the local catalogue is first updated, then uploaded to union catalogue), or both (Hider, 2003). According to Dovey, (2000) the centralized model may be implemented in four different ways i.e. the union catalogue may be developed to serve as the main catalogue for the participating libraries and in this case all the participating libraries subscribe to single library system and catalogue; secondly, records may be exported from local catalogues to the union catalogue, in this case, its assumed that the participating libraries have their own online catalogues or library systems; thirdly, records may be catalogued on the central catalogue and imported to the local catalogue; and finally, records in the local and central catalogues may be updated simultaneously.

This model offers high precision and recall of items; it centralizes the cost of technical support rather than each library tackling the same problems independently
(Dovey, 2000); it reduces/eliminates storage of multiple/duplicate copies of the same data

and it reduces duplication of cataloging effort. It however possesses the following disadvantages: there are usually challenges in merging libraries which already have their own library systems – depends on implemented method; it may not support situations where a library may be a member of more than one union catalogue – depends on implemented method; with this model, a failure in the system affects all libraries.

On the other hand, the distributed model which is also known as the virtual catalogue is characterized by each participating library having an independent catalogue system (Breeding, 2002). In this model the individual catalogues are linked through their servers (Hider, 2003). In this model, the user is presented with a single user interface which "cross-searches" the participating catalogues in parallel and merges the results which are then presented to the user (Dovey 2000). Proponents of this model point out that it is more resilient, i.e. failure in one library does not affect all libraries; it is easily scalable – however may be limited by bandwidth and number of parallel databases that can be searched (Dovey, 2000). This model possess the following disadvantages: precision and recall of items is less effective; it duplicates records and effort; it distributes the cost of technical support; it may not support situations where a library may be a member of more than one union catalogue requiring different configurations; it is more expensive and possesses slower response times (Hider, 2004 & Dovey 2000).

According to Martin (2006), union catalogue models include: the geographic model, i.e. where the union catalogue may comprise records of libraries within a particular geographic region, e.g. within a country, within a region etc; the thematic model, i.e. where the union catalogue presents the collections of a particular subject e.g. Agriculture, medicine, etc; library type, i.e. where the

union catalogue presents the collection of a particular type of library, e.g. academic libraries, public libraries, parliamentary libraries etc; medium type, i.e. where the union catalogue presents the collection in a particular medium, e.g. serials, music, manuscripts etc of two or more libraries.

2.0 Why should APLESA need a union catalogue?

Looking at the mission APLESA seeks to achieve, one appreciates that information resource sharing is central. According to the International Encyclopedia of Information and Library Science (1997), a union catalogue must the considered in the context of networks (such as APLESA) because it enables readers inspect the holdings of the libraries in the network from a single interface. The development of a union catalogue will enable users of parliamentary libraries that subscribe to APLESA identify more information resources and if supported with an effective document delivery service as well as provision of electronic resources, it will lead to the fulfillment of APLESA's mission.

The development of a union catalogue by APLESA will provide the association with an opportunity to supply other libraries in the region and the world at large with cataloguing records of their unique collections and this in turn will raise the status and contribution of APLESA at the international stage. However, its important to note that this will highly depend on the quality of the union catalogue.

The development of a union catalogue will also result in stronger ties among members of the association. The development of a union catalogue dictates that participating libraries should cooperate in developing a collection on a shared basis. With a union catalogue in place,

participating libraries will be presented with the opportunity to work together more frequently given that they will share one system and will be required to co-operate more towards the development of the union collection. The union catalogue will become another uniting factor for the association's survival.

Depending on the model implemented, the union catalogue will enable the participating libraries reduce the duplication of cataloguing records and effort. With a union catalogue (centralized model) in place, the participating libraries will share a common bibliographic database. This implies that there will only be one copy of a given record in the database, the participating libraries will then only have to add their local holding details to this copy. Secondly, the staff in the participating libraries will be saved from the effort of capturing such records.

3.0 The way forward

APLESA needs to develop a union catalogue in order to provide access to the entire library collection of its members at on place. It is therefore my suggestion that APLESA considers creating a committee to spearhead the development and later on the maintenance of the union catalogue. This committee should be tasked with:

- The assessment of users needs.
- The development of relevant policies/standards/guidelines that will provide a framework for the operation of the union catalogue, i.e. cataloguing standards, access method, fines etc
- Securing funding for the development and maintenance of the union catalogue
- Initiate and oversee the development of the union catalogue and,
- Market the union catalogue in order to promote its utilization.

In addition to the above, it is my suggestion that APLESA considers adopting a shared library system which should be implemented by all its members. A shared library system is an integrated library system shared by a group of libraries (Lynch, 1997).There are several systems that may help achieve this; however, it is my proposal that APLESA considers adopting the utilization of Koha Integrated Library System by all its members. This will be a huge step towards standardizing the services offered by the participating libraries.

3.1. What is KOHA?

Koha is the world's first open source Integrated Library System (ILS) (Koha Development Team, 2009). Koha ILS, is capable of supporting the functions of a wide range of library types, from small special collections, within a single location, to large state-wide library catalogues with dozens and even hundreds of locations ("Koha Developer Wiki : Configuring Location Independence with Koha 3," 2007). Koha being a feature rich ILS will be able to support the management of the individual member library collection as well as the shared/union collection.

The adoption of Koha as a shared library system by all participating libraries will enable APLESA develop a union catalogue for the resources of all its members while at the same time improve the provision and execution of services offered by the individual libraries. With Koha implemented, the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) module will automatically serve as the union catalogue which will enable users from the libraries that subscribe to APLESA search the entire combined collection of all the participating libraries from one interface. In addition, registered users will be able to check their borrowing details, reserve and/or request for items, make purchasing suggestions and update their personal details.

The implementation of Koha as a shared library system will enable all participating libraries capture and store bibliographic records in one central database. This will eliminate duplication of records and effort, for example where the same records may be maintained in library of the parliament of Uganda and the library of the parliament of Kenya. With a centralized database, once a book has been catalogued by one participating library, the others will not need to catalogue the same book in the event that they acquire copies of the same book. All the will need to do is to add local holding information to the already captured bibliographic record about the book. In addition, the cataloguing effort and time will also be made much easier and reduced respectively because the Koha cataloguing module conforms to the MARC format and has an inbuilt z39.50 search feature. With this module staff of the participating libraries will be able to directly import cataloguing data from other catalogues which conform to the MARC format.

The circulation module of the suggested shared library system will enable each participating library to perform all tasks related to the circulation of items in the library independently. This module will enable participating libraries eliminate the need for using borrowers' cards during issuing and return of items. With Koha, this transaction will be automated which will also lead to a reduction in the amount of time spent and the inaccuracies that may accrue with the manual system, e.g. users providing wrong names, wrong signatures etc. With the suggested shared library system in place, individual libraries will be able to specify their own unique circulation rules as well as whether to allow or disallow users from other member libraries to borrow items. This module will also enable member libraries have better control of the management of their patrons.

In addition, the systems, acquisition and serial management module will enable both the individual member libraries as well as APLESA have better control in the management of acquisitions and serials respectively. The system is also capable of generating various reports relating to the utilization of resources and the activity of staff. Another key feature of the system is that it supports spine labels and barcodes generation which are readable by any standard barcode reader. It is also important to note that the system offers an extensive set of easy to configure systems preference options. And above all the system is user friendly and totally free.

3.2. Requirements for Implementing KOHA ILS as union catalogue and shared library system for APLESA

In the event that APLESA chooses to implement Koha in developing its union catalogue and shared library system the following resources will be required.

- Dedicated High-end server and fast internet connection link. It's necessary at this point to note that the union catalogue and the shared library system which I propose here should be capable of being available 24/7 and that it will be accessed and used by a large number of users simultaneously. Therefore if the system is to serve its purpose efficiently and effectively the equipment acquired should be robust hence the need for a dedicated high-end server (a server that is built to provide 24/7 mission critical services) and fast internet connection. However, this requirement can be met in two ways

  - In the first approach APLESA has the option of purchasing its own dedicated high-end server, obtaining a public IP address for it and paying for high speed internet connection. With this in place the union catalogue and shared library system may then be hosted within the

premises of one of the member libraries subscribed to the APLESA thereby giving APLESA full control over the system.

- o The second approach is the involvement of professional hosting services. These services have dedicated servers and their systems are designed to support large numbers of users simultaneously.

- Installation of Koha ILS on the dedicated server.

- Money to finance the establishment and maintenance of the entire system, i.e. purchase of equipment and services

3.3. Summary of steps that need to be taken to achieve a union catalogue and shared library system for APLESA using Koha ILS

- Designation of an individual or committee to lead the project as well as to oversee its it's operation once established

- Feasibility and user needs assessment study should be conducted to ascertain whether the system will serve a worthwhile purpose

- Development of policies, standards, guidelines and services that will support and provide an operational framework for the system

- Acquisition and installation of necessary equipment and software

- Transfer of catalogue records from individual member library catalogues to the union catalogue including retrospective conversion for those libraries without an automated catalogue

- Training of users in the utilization of the system and training of library staff in the utilization and management of the system

- Complete adoption and implementation of the system by each participating library.

- Periodic evaluation of the system.

4.0 Conclusion

The development of a union catalogue will play a central role in enabling APLESA realize both its vision and mission. The union catalogue will enable parliaments in the region to make informed decision by enabling parliamentarians identify more information resources from one single location. If properly managed the union catalogue has potential of becoming a source of cataloguing records in Africa and thereby raising the credibility of APLESA in the region and world over. The development of the union catalogue and adoption of a shared library system will strengthen the bond between member libraries given that they will share a single resource – the union catalogue - for which they will be equally responsible. Finally the development of a union catalogue and adoption of a shared library system will standardize the practice of all the member libraries.

5.0 References

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