



УДК [021+002.6](688.1)

<https://doi.org/10.20913/1815-3186-2024-2-46-50>

The Status of Libraries and Information Centres in Namibia

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Abstract. In an increasingly interconnected world, understanding of cultures, traditions and systems of different countries is of growing importance. This article aims to acquaint readers of this journal with library systems in Namibia, shedding more light on its goals, history, and various branches such as the National Library of Namibia, the National Archives of Namibia, as well as special, academic, and school libraries. Through statistical data on services offered and user demographics, the author provides insights into the current landscape of libraries in Namibia. Additionally, the article addresses challenges faced by these institutions, ultimately concluding that while the library systems in Namibia has made significant strides since Namibia gained independence, further efforts are required for its continued development and enhancement.

Keywords: libraries, Namibia, National Library, National Archives, Public Library, School Library, special libraries, academic libraries. branch-libraries, computerized library systems – Symphony, KOHA, library services, Parliament Library, the library of the Namibia Institute of Public Administration and Management, information needs, types of manuscripts, types of archive records

Citation: Negumbo S. The Status of Libraries and Information Centres in Namibia. *Bibliosphere*. 2024. № 2. P. 46–50. <https://doi.org/10.20913/1815-3186-2024-2-46-50>.

Современное состояние библиотек и информационных центров в Намибии

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Статья поступила в редакцию 22.04.2024
Получена после доработки 06.05.2024
Принята для публикации 31.05.2024

Аннотация. В современном мире большое значение приобретает понимание культуры и культурных традиций разных стран. Африканские библиотеки в силу новейших политических тенденций разделяют это понимание. Цель статьи – познакомить аудиторию журнала с неизвестной для них библиотечной системой Намибии. Автор описывает и систематизирует цели национальной библиотеки и национального архива, а также историю их появления; задачи публичных, специальных, вузовских и школьных библиотек; приводит статистику услуг, предлагаемых публичными библиотеками, а также число пользователей библиотечных услуг. В статье обозначены вызовы, стоящие перед библиотеками, архивами и информационными центрами. Автор приходит к заключению, что библиотечная система Намибии развивается с момента обретения государством независимости (с 1990 г.), однако требует приложения дальнейших усилий.

Ключевые слова: библиотеки, Намибия, Национальная библиотека, Национальный архив, публичные библиотеки, школьные библиотеки, специальные библиотеки, вузовские библиотеки, отраслевые библиотеки, автоматизированные библиотечные системы – KONA, Symphony, сервисы библиотек, Библиотека Парламента, библиотека Намибийского института государственного управления и менеджмента, типы рукописей, типы записей

Для цитирования: Негумбо С. Современное состояние библиотек и информационных центров в Намибии // Библиосфера. 2024. № 2. С. 46–50. <https://doi.org/10.20913/1815-3186-2024-2-46-50>.

Introduction

The government of the Republic of Namibia has established two primary historical institutions, namely; the National Library of Namibia and the National Archives of Namibia (Fig. 1) (Republic of Namibia..., 1992). These institutions are mandated to provide equal access to quality knowledge and information for lifelong learning by developing and maintaining professional expertise and a nationwide network of archives, libraries, and information centres. Additionally, these institutions are operating under the supervision of the Directorate of Namibia Library and Archives Service (NLAS), which is complimented by three more other sub-divisions such as; Public Library Service, School Library Service, and Ministerial Library Service.

The National Library of Namibia

The library is governed by the National Library and Information Services Act, Act Number 4 of 2000. This legislation mandates the library to collect and safeguard published documents, ensuring their accessibility to the public. The primary objectives of the National Library include preservation, conservation, and appreciation of its extensive collection.

The library began its journey as the Estorff Reference Library in October 1984, primarily focusing

on delivering reference services, facilitating inter-lending, and providing professional assistance to the general public. After Namibia attained independence in 1990, the library was placed under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth, and Sport, with the aim of transforming it into a national institution.

In April 1994, the Estorff Reference Library underwent an official transformation, emerging as the National Library of Namibia. Currently, it operates as part of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and relocated to a new building in 2000, marking a significant milestone in its evolution.

The Collections of the National Library of Namibia comprises the Namibiana Collection, which includes the Rare, Manuscript, Newspaper Collections, and Government Gazettes. Additionally, there is the General Collection, totaling 279,382 records, while the Namibiana Collection contains 127,851 records (Fig. 2).

The National Archives of Namibia

The establishment of the National Archives of Namibia traces back to 1912, when Germany claimed Namibia as a Protectorate. In response, a Central Registry Office was set up, and a Filing System was developed, however, the plan to establish a fully-fledged archive did not materialize fully due to unrest and



Fig. 1. National Library & National Archives of Namibia
Рис. 1. Вход в здание Национальной библиотеки и Национального архива Намибии

wars in the country. When the South African Administration took over power, they also established their own record-keeping system, and inherited records left behind by the German Administration. These archival records were preserved in the basement of the Tintenpalast Garden, now known as the Parliament Garden.

The National Archives of Namibia was then established in 1939 under the name ‘South West Africa Archives Depot’. Initially, it housed files surviving from the German administration in Namibia, making these records among the most complete and best-preserved. This includes safeguarding archival records created by Namibian indigenous communities several decades ago, such as the Vaderlike Wette of Rehoboth, the Maharero papers, and the Hendrik Witbooi papers, among others.

The official National Archives of Namibia was then established shortly after Namibia gained its independence in 1990, through an Act of Parliament, Act Number 12 of 1992. It was mandated to collect and preserve the nation’s history and unpublished documentary heritage, supporting education and research by providing access to archival resources. To that effect, records

from the German and South African administrations are highly valuable for researching the past, and as such, they are respectfully preserved.

The National Archives plays a significant role in providing access to the entirety of Namibia’s historical records. Its archival collections encompass records spanning precolonial history, as well as courts, magistrates, and local authority records from the German colonial occupation, the South African apartheid era, and the Namibian government. Additionally, it preserves literature, including manuscripts and unpublished works such as consultancy reports, government publications, maps, plans, audio-visual records, and photographs.

The Archives houses approximately 9000 linear meters of records in total. Its database catalogs contain over 525,000 items, encompassing electronic records, photos, posters, audiovisual media (primarily oral history recordings), maps, plans, microfilms, and published materials such as books, articles, and biographies. Access to these records by the general public serves as a foundation for research, aids in resolving conflicts and court cases, and provides a valuable resource for artists and the media.

Other types of libraries in Namibia

In addition to the information centres mentioned early on, Namibia also boasts numerous special libraries across the country, including those housed within various organizations, academic institutions, archives, and records centres. Notable examples of special libraries include the Parliament Library and the library of the Namibia Institute of Public Administration and Management (NIPAM). These specialized libraries cater for the specific information needs of their respective organizations and provide valuable resources and services tailored to their users.

The country is further enriched by the presence of academic libraries associated with various universities and colleges nationwide. These libraries, typically located in the capital city, and they are supplemented by branch-libraries in regions where universities and colleges have campuses. Specialized libraries and university libraries alike play a pivotal role in providing students and community members with access to information essential for personal and academic development, thereby contributing to the enhancement of their lives.

Moreover, under the auspices of the Directorate of Namibia Library and Archives Service within the Ministry of Education, Arts & Culture, there are currently sixty-six (66) public libraries spread across the country (Fig. 3–5). Out of these, sixty-two (62) are equipped with computers, offering free internet access and e-resources to their local communities. These public libraries play a crucial role in providing invaluable services, including free internet access and e-resource availability, fostering ICT skill



Fig. 2. Publishers & Writers Workshop, 05 October 2023
Рис. 2. На семинаре издателей и писателей 5 октября 2023 г.



Fig. 3. Okongo Public Library
Рис. 3. Публичная библиотека в г. Оконго

development through training programs, and aiding in online job applications. This support is particularly beneficial in regions with limited access to electricity, serving to empower underserved communities.

Currently, several public libraries have adopted computerized systems such as KOHA and Symphony, to effectively manage their collections and resources. These libraries have evolved into vibrant community hubs, catering to the changing needs of their users. They are providing a diverse array of digital resources, such as e-newspapers, e-magazines, free access to social media platforms, basic ICT training, artificial intelligence services, library automation, and open-source software solutions.

Services offered by public libraries

Public libraries are offering a diverse range of services tailored to meet the needs of their communities. These include both basic and advanced ICT training, assistance with poster designs, CV writing workshops, support for online job applications, and mobile library services to reach underserved areas.



Fig. 4. Mobile Library Services conducted by Oshana Public Library
Рис. 4. Мобильное библиотечное обслуживание в публичной библиотеке в Ошане

They also provide homework help for students, organize reading activities to promote literacy, and host information sessions on topics like agriculture, health, and crafts. Additionally, libraries offer programs to develop entrepreneurial skills such as sewing, soap making, and beads making, as well as guidance on university applications and career paths. Furthermore, public libraries are facilitating book clubs, girls' guides, and career guidance sessions led by Human Resources professionals and industry experts further enrich the offerings.

Number of library-users accessing library services

The number of readers and users accessing various library services has shown a steady increase over the past years, indicating a growing demand for access to library resources within the community. Below are some of the key services (Fig. 6) (Namibia Library..., 2022; Republic of Namibia..., 2000).

Challenges experienced by libraries, archives and information centres

Libraries, archives, and information centres in Namibia face significant challenges, including a shortage of staff members and deteriorating infrastructure that poses risks to the country's cultural and literary heritage, as well as to users and staff safety. Low internet connectivity and the high cost of internet services and bandwidth are common issues, hindering access to digital resources. Budgetary constraints present major challenges, limiting the ability to renew subscriptions for newspapers and electronic resources, procure necessary equipment, and unable to fund digitization projects. There is also a critical need for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and in-service training to enhance the skills of library and information practitioners.



Fig. 5. Learners at Aussenkehr School Library
Рис. 5. Ученики в школьной библиотеке в Осенкере

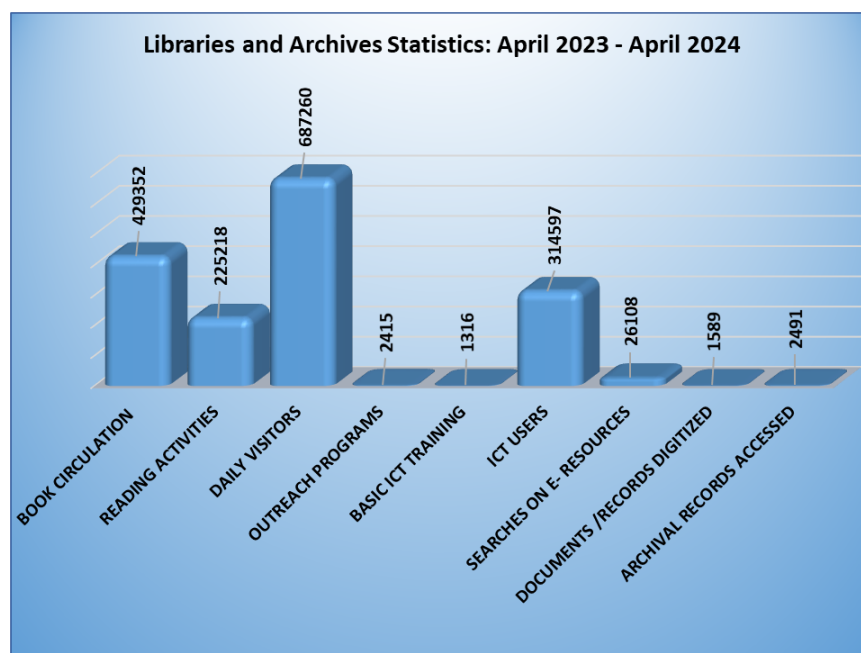


Fig. 6. Key library services in Namibia
 Рис. 6. Основные библиотечные сервисы в Намибии

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that library and information centres in Namibia are gaining momentum, yet further efforts are needed. Securing funding to renovate infrastructure and to support Continuous Professional Development for staff members remains a priority. Additionally, implementing effective marketing strategies for library resources and services is essential to address underutilization of facilities and advocate for increased funding

to procure library resources. Vigorous collaboration with external stakeholders could play a pivotal role in realizing these objectives.

The author has read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of interest. The author declares that the article has no conflicts of interest.

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