

“A Quick Fix?”: The Challenges of Digitization Facing Developing Countries

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Abstract

In Jamaica, as in many of the developing countries of the world the term ‘digitization’ has become a buzz word as institutions rush to establish projects to copy and preserve their deteriorating historical collections

Digitization provides a way of ‘catching-up’ with the more developed countries and in closing the ‘information divide’ between two worlds. This activity has been fuelled in part by programmes such as Unesco’s Memory of the World Programme which has emphasized the importance of preserving the heritage of mankind. However, policy and decision makers often see digitization merely as a technical process and do not give due consideration to other factors when promoting or funding such programmes.

These factors include strategies for long term preservation, compliance with standards and the provision of adequate metadata. For example, in Jamaica and the English speaking

countries of the Caribbean, there is no clear cut policy geared at electronic recordkeeping. Not only are there no policies, but there is an absence of national guidelines and standards which should address issues such as accessibility, obsolescence, security, retention and the disposition of records in digital format.

The National Library of Jamaica, the Jamaica Archives and Records Department (Audio Visual Unit) and the Library of the University of the West Indies (Mona) are the main institutions in Jamaica with digital programmes. They have all developed their own guidelines and these will be examined to see to what extent they comply with accepted international standards. The paper will conclude with recommendations on the action which should be taken on the national level to ensure the long-term sustainability of digital programmes which are often paid for from public funds. Hopefully these recommendations will be useful to other developing countries which have developed, or are considering developing their own digital programmes.