

Historical practice in managing theses and dissertations at African universities and university libraries

**Presentation at the Association of African Universities
DATAD workshop on Intellectual Property, Governance,
Dissemination and Funding Strategies,
Accra, Ghana, February 19-20, 2004.**

Elizabeth Kiondo
Director, UDSM Library Services

ABSTRACT

This paper presents practice in managing theses and dissertations in selected African Universities. It analyzes the life cycle of a thesis/dissertation paying particular attention to the circumstances surrounding the production process and use. Therefore, the paper investigates whether there are written guidelines on how the life cycle of a thesis/dissertation should be managed and how this information is made accessible to all concerned parties. What are the contents of the guidelines in terms of thesis development and supervision, approval processes, intellectual property rights and use of the final product including deposition in information retrieval systems, borrowing, copying and reproduction? Preliminary investigations indicate that there are similarities and differences among African universities on the way theses and dissertations are managed. These are identified and discussed in this paper highlighting strengths and weaknesses in the management processes. The paper further investigates the audiences of these theses/dissertations and how the use varies among the different category of study such as humanities, social sciences and science and technology. In conclusion, the paper summaries the major issues in the management of theses and dissertation in African universities in the context of intellectual property issues and the formulation of an appropriate business model.

Historical practice in managing theses and dissertations at African universities and university libraries

1.0 Introduction

To advance frontiers of knowledge worldwide, it is critical that those in the forefront of knowledge generation build upon the knowledge that has been generated by other researchers in a particular discipline. In order to be able to build upon the knowledge generated by others, generators of knowledge need to access carriers of knowledge, that is the avenues where new knowledge is made available. This is where the role of knowledge managers and information professionals becomes critical. They collect the generated information and knowledge, organize them and make them accessible to the scientific and research community. Knowledge carriers such as scientific publications that promote scholarly communication have been organized and disseminated through indexes, bibliographies, abstracts, reviews and in Advances in Knowledge in various disciplines. We all know how Garfield of the Institute of Scientific Productions (IPI) has gone to the extent of formulating an innovative way of indicating the relationships between different contributions in the process of knowledge generation and use and knowledge regeneration through citation indexes.

Developments and applications of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the management of information and knowledge has to a great extent facilitated dissemination and accessibility of information as sources of information such as indexes, abstracts and others are made accessible through computerized international networks either commercially or otherwise. But what about knowledge generated from Africa by African scholars? How is the knowledge made accessible to the community of other knowledge generators and consumers worldwide? Unless those intellectual contributions have been published International journals and indexed in major indexing and abstracting services, African scholarly and intellectual contributions are rarely exchanged among African scholars themselves. For instance, it is difficult from a scholar from a west African University to know what has been done by other researchers in East African as

network of African scholars tend to be regional in character e.g. the Organisation of Social Science Research in East Africa In a nutshell, more often than not intellectual contributions from Africa lack wide accessibility within African and beyond. To a great extent, this is due to lack of major abstracting and indexing services and initiatives such as the Database of African Thesis and Dissertations (DATAD) aimed at organizing and disseminating information and knowledge generated from Africa. It is important however, to take note of other similar initiatives such as that of the International Network for Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) which supports African journals by making its contents accessible through its WebPage and encouraging subscriptions to African Journals and promotion of document delivery services, Kwetu.net, an Africa's largest resource service, SABINET (South African Bibliographic Network) provides access to a Union Catalogue of Theses and Dissertations at South African Universities (UCTD) which provides bibliographic records of theses and dissertations at masters and Doctorate levels submitted to Universities in South Africa since 1918 (Ubogu 2003, <http://aclib.sabinet.co.za/sacat.html>, 2004). SABINET intends to venture into the creation and maintenance of full text database of theses and dissertation

The DATAD and other similar initiatives mentioned above are partly responding to this glaring problem of promoting visibility of African scholars in generation of knowledge. These initiatives intend to promote access and dissemination. However, the question of copyright and intellectual property rights for African intellectual contributions remains fluid. In the digital age, the question of copyright has generated intense debate among scholars mainly because of the way information technologies have facilitated easy global accessibility and dissemination of full text documents which if not well protected can be abused and misused through modification, alterations etc.

Visibility of African scholars in the international scene brings forth issues and challenges that need to be given due attention. I believe that, we the experts who have gathered here for this particular conference will consider the circumstances surrounding the management of theses and dissertations in African universities, identify best practices, scrutinize the various options available for protecting the intellectual property rights of

producers of knowledge. On the other hand formulation of an appropriate business model for dissemination of theses/dissertations will promote sustainability of these management processes and my ultimately benefit the generators of knowledge. The major issue that this paper addresses is; how best should we make African scholarship in the form of theses and dissertations contribute to the wealth of world knowledge while protecting intellectual property rights of generators of knowledge in a commercially viable mode.

This paper explores the practice of managing theses/dissertation in African Universities and University libraries in order to enrich our understanding of the processes and procedures which may have a direct bearing on our efforts to identify among alternatives the best way to protect intellectual contributions of African scholars in a commercially viable mode of information dissemination. This presentation is divided in four sections; the first section is the introduction, which set the framework of the paper. The second section describes the life cycle of theses/dissertation production processes in selected African Universities. Section three discusses intellectual property rights and copyright issues pertaining to African theses and dissertations. Section four describes uses of theses and dissertations and identifies any variations among categories of discipline. The fifth section analyses and discusses major issues in the management of theses/dissertations in African Universities and the last section concludes the paper.

2.0 Theses/dissertation production: the life cycle

This section describes the life cycle of a thesis/dissertation in an African University. It discusses guidelines, processes and procedures from conception of and research topic to the production of the final product.

2.1 Guidelines on the management of the production process

Most African Universities do produce guidelines to guide students, supervisors, departments and faculties in the management of production of theses and dissertations. These guidelines describe the various stages in the production processes and the role and

responsibility of all role players in the production processes. It may also spell out other requirements such as length of the thesis/dissertation and abstract, number of copies required, formatting of the hard copy and deposition of the soft copy and the format required. In case of PhD dissertation progress reports may be required to the either the Graduate School or the Directorate of Postgraduate Studies in the case of University of Dar es Salaam. For instance the Addis Ababa University has guidelines for the management of thesis/dissertation that are distributed through a catalogue produced by the School of Graduate Studies and distributed to all departments and faculties.

2.2 Theses development, supervision and approval processes

In most Universities the life cycle of a thesis/dissertation begins with the conception of a researchable topic by a graduate student in consultation with a supervisor or a potential supervisor. Upon agreement the student is normally requested to develop a research proposal under supervision of an academic staff member within the department. The proposal is then presented in an oral presentation at a seminar convened by the department where other members and experts in the field are welcome to participate. Comments are made and the candidate is requested to integrate them before submitting the proposal for approval to the Faculty Higher degrees committee in the case of the Universities of Dar es Salaam, Makerere and others.

There are two stages in the approval of theses and dissertations. The first stage involves the approval of the research proposal for the intended programme. In this case it has to be approved by the Faculty Committee before it is submitted to the Senate Higher Degrees committee chaired by the Directorate of Postgraduate studies and finally it is sent to the University Senate for final approval. For instance in the case of Makerere University “Each Faculty’s Higher degree and Research Committee vets the proposal for its suitability for research at the relevant levels, e.g. PhD or Masters degree, then makes recommendations to the Universities Board of Graduate Studies for approval of theses/dissertations” Tibenderane (2004). At Addis Ababa University, for example, the research proposal approval process goes through at least four stages. First the supervisor approves the thesis, then it goes to the Department of Graduate Committee, after that the

Faculty Academic Commission and finally the School of Graduate Studies. After the approval processes it is only that the student is allowed to proceed with subsequent activities such as data collection. The second stage is the approval of the final product that is the theses itself. In this case when a student finishes his/her report to the satisfaction of the supervisor, the theses/dissertation is sent to an external examiner for external evaluation of the work, after which a committee made up of several competent members of the University within the field of student's research and the students' supervisor plus the external examiner are called upon to examine the student. This is called the *viva voce*. After the *viva*, if there are any issues raised by the examining committee, the student is required to make corrections and submit the final copy to the supervisor who will check whether the student has complied with the recommendations for change. It should be noted that this practice differs from University to University - in other Universities, *viva voce* may not be required at both masters and PhD levels, other Universities the *viva* is reserved for PhD students only, and yet in other Universities it is up to individual department to decide whether they need a *viva* at masters level but it is a requirement for PhD level.

2.3 Thesis production and deposition in information retrieval system

After the theses dissertation has been approval for deposition, dissemination and use the student is required to make a number of copies available the number of copies as required by the University system as follows:

TABLE 1: Deposition and distribution of theses and dissertations in selected African Universities

University	# of copies to be deposited	Distribution of theses/dissertation			
		Library	Department	Faculty	Other
Addis Ababa University	07	02	01	01	03
Makerere University	04	02	01	01	01
University of Dar es Salaam	04/06	02	01	01	--
Kenyatta University	04	02	01	--	01
Ibadan University	04	02	--	--	--
University of Zimbabwe	02	02	--	--	--

Source: Survey and Secondary Sources of Information: <http://www.piac.org/datad.htm>

Table 1 above shows that the requirement of the number of copies varies from University to University. In Ethiopia for instance, there are copies that are submitted are deposited outside the University system. For instance, one copy is deposited at the Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission (ESTC) and the other at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) Library.

2.3.1 Format of thesis deposition

In the past theses/dissertations were deposited to the information retrieval system in manually typed or cyclostyled in stencils and bound using soft paper. Recently there have been some improvements in the appearance of hard copies submitted by students thanks to the word-processing technology. When DATAD started to create a database of abstracts of African theses and dissertations a number of challenges came to light how best should the activities of the DATAD proceed after the initial stage of digitizing abstracts. The need for submission of electronic copies of theses and dissertation became so real but there was need for rules and regulations as well as issues of technical formats and presentation. However, most Universities have been very slow in coming up with a

policy regarding how best to implement submission of soft copies of theses and how these will be approved.

Some Universities have started to take initiatives towards the right direction of either demanding submission of both hard and soft copy or hard copy and abstracts in soft copies. For instance, in response to the needs of DATAD, of late Makerere has started to demand submission of hard copies of theses/dissertations and copies of theses and dissertations abstracts only. Right now most Universities are contemplating requesting submission of theses and dissertations in both hard and soft copies. These include the Universities of Zimbabwe, Makerere and Dar es Salaam (Rioga 2004, Tibenderane, 2004 and Katundu 2004). Addis Ababa University has already started demanding submission of soft copies mostly in Microsoft word format and sometimes in PDF (Animut 2004)

2.4 Intellectual property rights

Most African countries lack copyright laws that protect the innovations and contributions of its citizens in various fields. For instance, African artists and musicians have suffered due to lack of legal and other measures to protect their art and music. The same can be said of African Intellectual property, it is only recent that the debates on copyright and intellectual property issues have started. In most cases, majority of African people lack awareness on what really constitutes copyright and intellectual property rights, what should be done to protect and how are innovators and other contributors are supposed to benefit from copyright.

The situation is not different when it comes to copyright of African theses and dissertations. The burning issue has been who should hold the copyright of these publications, is it the student or the University. As such you will find that copyright practice differ from University to University. However, assigning copyright to theses and dissertations has not been something that has been there most of the theses and dissertations produced in African countries in the 50s, 60s and 70s. The practice of assigning copyright to theses and dissertations has emerged mainly in the 1980s as a response to demands for theses and dissertations through inter library loans as well as

through reproductions of copies. One thing that has been noted is that although there is no official copyright policy, in some Universities, theses and dissertations are copyrighted by a statement and this is a requirement in some Universities such as the University of Dar es Salaam, University of Dar es Salaam where by students are required to make a declaration and a copyright statement as follows;

Illustration 1: Declaration and copyright: Example from the University of Dar es Salaam

<p>I, “name of candidate”, declare that this thesis is my own original work and that it has not been presented and will not be presented to any other University for a similar or any other degree award.</p> <p>Signature-----</p> <p>The thesis is copyrighted material protected under the Berne Convention, the Copyright Act 1999 and other international and national enactments, in that behalf, on intellectual property. It may not be reproduced by any means, in full or in part, except for short extracts in fair dealing, for research or private study, critical scholarly review or discourse with an acknowledgement, without the written permission of the Directorate of Postgraduate Studies, on behalf of the author and the University of Dar es Salaam</p>

Source: University of Dar es Salaam: General Regulations and Guidelines for Postgraduate Study Programmes, 2001

The inclusion of a copyright statement, which allows for limited reproduction of theses/dissertations, also varies from University to University. Other Universities do not demand inclusion of a copyright statement but do have some guidelines that are observed regarding fair use of theses and dissertation. University of Makerere for instance does not have in place policy and intellectual property policy. In this case permission to reproduce theses or part thereof normally rests on the library, which is expected to observe the policy of fair use and naturally protect the material from misuse and abuse.

2.5 Borrowing, copying and reproduction

2.5.1 Borrowing

In most cases theses and dissertations are restricted materials and in most Universities are regarded as part of the national heritage as such their use are closely guarded with regulations governing the use of most national collections. Theses and dissertations are either placed in the reference or national collection sections of the library where their use are restricted to consultation within the library only. This is the practice in the Universities of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia, Makerere University in Uganda, Natal University in South African and many other Universities in Africa and elsewhere. In Addis Ababa University access to theses and dissertation is strictly limited to a short loan service within only the library premise (Animut 2004). The same applies at the Universities of Zimbabwe, Dar es Salaam and Makerere.

2.5.2 Copying and reproduction

As Urs (2004) points out “libraries are the enablers and facilitators of the exercise of user’s right to access to copyrighted as well as public domain works”. As such for a long time they have practices this role by allowing limited copying of copyrighted work for research and private study as a way of ensuring the generation of new knowledge and promoting scholarly communication. Historically, in most African Universities, with or without copyright statements, the library has assumed the role of the guardian and in most cases the library gives permission to users to reproduce theses or part of theses on behalf of both the University and Author. At Makerere, it is the library that gives the permission. At the University of Dar es Salaam, although the granting of the permission has been placed on the Directorate of Graduate Studies, however in practice this role has been delegated to the library where the librarian gives permission. The practice is that users should not photocopy more than 10% of theses/dissertation or any copyrighted materials. This practice is also undertaken in other African Universities such as Kenyatta, Ibadan and Zimbabwe (Materu and Levy 1998). At the Addis Ababa University, the University office of Research Programme permits such copying (Animut 2004).

To date the situation is much the same as Universities and University libraries request to be guided on copyright and intellectual property issues.

3.0 Use of theses and dissertations

Theses and dissertations have been considered valuable source of research information for prospective graduate students, researchers, policymakers and other practitioners who are the beneficiaries of research findings contained in these documents. As Eaton (2004:2) notes ‘... may contain results of preliminary studies or discussions of future research directions that would be very valuable to the researchers and scholars to follow’. However, the problem area has been that these sources of information has been grossly underutilized because of the difficulty in obtaining widely available, free access to them either through University libraries or through other organizations (Eaton 2004).

Examination of access and use of theses and dissertations in Africa indicate that the use is mainly restricted to the University where the University was submitted and these mainly and shows the following pattern:

Table 2 Users of theses/dissertation in African Universities

N=10

Users	Extent of use		
	More often	Often	Occasionally
Students	10	-	-
Researchers	4	6	
Academics	-	4	6
Other (journalists. policy-makers. musicians etc)	-	-	10

Source: Questionnaire Survey 2003/2004

Table 3: Overseas requests for theses/dissertations

N= 10

Place	More often	Often	Occasionally	No Response
Europe	02	04	02	02
Africa	-	03	04	03
United States	03	03	02	01
Others			06	04

Source: Questionnaire Survey 2003/2004

The table above shows that more often that note requests arte received from Europe and United States rather than from other African Countries indicating limited circulation of these documents within African. Occasionally requests would be received from other countries.

There are variations in the way these requests are handled and satisfied. In some Universities access is restricted to bibliographic information and abstracts only, others use their discretion as there are no means to satisfy remote users since the process of getting permission for copying theses materials is difficult (Animut 2004). In the case of the University of Dar es Salaam, either a loan can be provided for a limited period of time and if permission is granted by the Director, of Library services or Director of Graduate Studies, entire thesis may be reproduced and sent as long as the requesting institution is ready to pay for reproduction, postage and handling costs. No attempts have been made to send electronic version of theses and dissertations to requests either within or outside the country.

3.1 Uses of theses and dissertations among various categories of study

Statistics on use of theses and dissertations in most African Universities are not readily available, however preliminary findings indicate that theses/dissertations in the humanities and social science are more often used than those in the Science, Math and Technology (SMT) and the main reason given for this variation in the use is the mostly theses/dissertations hosted in collections which focus on humanities and social sciences. For instance, at Addis Ababa University the library's copies of theses of dissertations are

housed in the main library, which mainly serve the students of the main campus that is the Faculties of Social Sciences, Law and language studies (Animut 2004).

4.0 Management of theses and dissertations in African Universities: major issues, strength and weaknesses

Most African Universities have guidelines on managing the life cycle of a thesis/dissertation, mainly produced by either School of Graduate Studies/Directorates of Post Graduate Studies. These guidelines are distributed to the all departments and faculties and holds information expected from the School Graduate Studies. This booklet includes information about admission procedures to Graduate School, programmes offered, regulations on thesis/dissertation phase, examination of theses/dissertation and submission of theses/dissertation including the format for presentation of final product. These guidelines include issues of supervision, preparation and presentation of higher degree theses and dissertations, requirement for a copyright statement and number of copies required for submission. There are several stages in the lifecycle of a thesis/dissertation, which include; approval of research proposal, conducting of the research and approval of the final product. The main issue is that these processes in the management of a lifecycle of a theses/dissertations act as quality assurance indicators. In this case the quality of the final product may at least be assured and this is one of the strength in the management of African theses/dissertations.

4.1 Policy issues and Intellectual property right

Although there are guidelines guiding the process of managing the life cycle of a thesis/dissertation from the conception of the idea to the dissemination of the final product, the main weakness is that policy documents on copyright and intellectual property issues are still lacking in most African Universities. A survey done by Levy and Materu (1998) indicated that the following Universities lack copyright statement on thesis and dissertations. These include the Universities of Cheikh Anta Diop, Makerere, Eduardo Mondlane, Ghana, Ibadan, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Addis Ababa among others. This situation exacerbates the problem of accessibility and use of theses and dissertations.

In most cases librarians as facilitators of accessibility and use of information and knowledge are left to use their discretion and experience in facilitating access and use of theses. This weakness has been identified and efforts are being made by most Universities to address it. For instance, Makerere has submitted a paper on “Copyright issues with regard to Theses/Dissertations submitted to Makerere University” Where the need for a copyright policy has been clearly stipulated and this awaits institution of the Universities and Tertiary Institution Act. In most institutions the author and the Institution jointly own the copyright. In extreme cases students are compelled to sign over the copyright to the institution (Ubogu 2001).

There is general feeling that in the current setting it is difficult to entertain IPR issues in most African countries. The main suggestion is that Institutions should be encouraged to develop their own IPR policy that guide them in the process of handling individual creations in general and theses and dissertations in particular. Another view that there should be free accessibility of full text ETD but ensuring that Intellectual property Rights should be safeguarded. This view does not take into consideration the costs involved in the process of ensuring accessibility and use of the various documents.

4.2 Audience and use of theses/dissertations

The survey conducted for this paper indicates that the main audience of theses /dissertations are students of the host institution where the documents have been deposited are the main users followed by researchers and academics. Occasionally requests for theses/dissertations are received from other institutions both within and outside the country. Most African Universities indicated that more often they receive requests from either Europe or United States but the satisfaction of these requests vary from African University to African University and access may be limited to bibliographic information and abstracts and in some cases permission to provide access may prove difficult and cumbersome and in some cases the requesting institution may be called upon to bear the reproduction and handling charges.

There are also variations in the use of thesis/dissertation among various categories mainly attributed to the way the documents are made accessible. In most African institutions, they are placed in local collections, which are mainly focused to the humanities and social sciences. The main weakness is that accessibility of theses/dissertations still remains restrictive due to lack of clearly spelt out guidelines and visibility of the community of researchers. Another problem there are no mechanism to monitor usage of these documents rendering it difficult to gather data on variation of use as most of the theses/dissertations are also deposited in departments and faculties where it is difficult to gauge use unless extensive research is done.

4.3 ICT in the management of African theses and dissertations

Until recently, theses and dissertations were mainly produced in hard copy and stored in library shelves and made accessible only through manual driven information retrieval systems. However, since the early 1990s most libraries in African countries have started applying ICT in the management of their library collections. Most collections in African Universities Libraries can be searched through online public access catalogues, which are web based, and thus availability is made visible at both national and international levels. Theses/dissertations as part of University library collections have been accessible through the OPACs. Recently, Universities participating in DATAD project have managed to make their collections accessible through the DATAD database. Most of these Universities are contemplating the best way of moving one step forward towards managing electronic thesis and dissertation (ETD) and are in the various stages of moving towards the direction. For instance, Addis Ababa University hopes to provide ETD through DATAD and ETD, at the University of Dar es Salaam and the Makerere University are in the process of proposing submission of softcopies. What should be noted is that in most Universities of African countries the infrastructure for the production of ETD exists, in most cases what are lacking are the policy guidelines and skills on managing ETDs and this is another weakness.

4.4 Business model for African theses and dissertations

There is need to develop a business plan to accessibility and use of African theses/dissertation. In this paper, we are not going to identify and discuss the various business models, as other presenters will cover this. What we want to emphasize is that given environment upon which most African Universities and libraries operate with regard to availability of financial resources and skilled manpower, it is important to develop a business plan that will consider issues of sustainability of the provision of information to intended audience and also compensating those institutions working towards ensuring that access to the documents. In managing digital collections these institutions have either to rely on donor funding or to overwork existing staff to undertake extra workload. The best business plan would that which would ensure that management and handling costs are accrued and any profits accrued should compensate the Institutions contributing information to the system and to some extent originator of the contribution.

There are several issues that have been raised in the literature on the issue such as creating a balance of rights in the provision of these documents whereby the interests of the authors, publishers, and users are taken into consideration (Urs 2003). On the other hand Britz and Lors (2003) argue that there are legal and moral obligations that should be considered in making accessible digitized African documentary heritage. They propose broad principles to be considered which include recognition of cultural, moral and ownership rights, economic interest, sharing of information and knowledge, the right to control and mechanisms for protection of the rights of African people. These are some of the broad issues, which we may wish to consider when deciding the best business model for African theses and dissertations (Britz and Lors, 2003: 8-9).

5.0 Conclusion

This paper has examined the practice of managing theses/dissertations in African Universities and African Libraries. It has identified some strength and weaknesses in the lifecycle of these documents. However, the most important aspect is that with new developments brought forth by developments of application of ICT in the management of

library collections and in the dissemination of information, there is willingness among African Universities and University libraries on the need to ensure wide accessibility and use of African scholarly work. The main weakness is lack of skills and knowledge on how to go about handling wider accessibility, monitoring usage of these documents. The UNESCO guidelines for ETD provide African Universities and opportunity to move towards total electronic version. Most of the Universities and libraries understand the importance of protecting intellectual property and facilitating access and fair use of information and knowledge as such they are in the various stages of attempting to formulate the same. They would therefore benefit from the second phase of the DATAD project, which focuses on Copyright, Governance, Intellectual Property and Information Dissemination.

REFERENCES

Britz, J. and P. Lors (2003). *A moral reflection on the digitization of Africa's documentary heritage*. *World Library and Information Congress: 69 IFLA General Conference and Council 1-9 August 2003*, Berlin.

Materu, M. and L. Levy (1998). *The Project for Information Access and Connectivity*. <http://www.piac.org/datad.htm>

Ubogu, F. N. (2003). *ETDs in South African: Current Status*, Paper presented at the Fifth International Symposium on Electronic Theses and Dissertations, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. May- June 2002.

University of Dar es Salaam, *Guidelines for Postgraduate Studies at the University of Dar es Salaam*, Dar es Salaam: Directorate of Postgraduate Studies.

Urs, S. R (2003). *Copyright and libraries: Balancing the rights of stakeholders – authors, publishers and libraries in the digital age*

Animut, N (2004), Tibenderane, P (2004), Katundu, D. (2004) Rioga, C (2004) Information supplied through survey questionnaire and /or interviews.