

## THE RELEVANCE OF DONATIONS TO LIBRARY COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

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### Abstract

In recent years, libraries worldwide have faced financial constraints that limit their ability to expand and maintain diverse and up-to-date collections. As a result, donation-based resource acquisition has become an increasingly important method of building library collections. This paper explores the role of donations in library collection development, examining both solicited and unsolicited donations, their advantages and challenges, and the legal and policy frameworks that guide their acceptance and management. Drawing on recent literature and case studies, the paper highlights how donations can enhance library resources, particularly in environments with limited budgets. However, it also discusses the potential pitfalls of unsolicited donations, such as irrelevant or outdated materials, and suggests strategies for managing these challenges effectively. Special attention is given to the legal deposit laws, particularly in Nigeria, which provide a formal framework for managing donated and deposited materials. The paper further proposes practical solutions for libraries to improve their donation practices, including the establishment of clear donation policies, donor relations strategies, and the development of endowment funds. The findings underscore the importance of donations in enabling libraries to meet the growing needs of their users, despite financial limitations. Libraries must navigate the complexities of donation management to maximize their benefits while ensuring that resources remain relevant and accessible. This paper concludes that donations are an indispensable strategy in the sustainable development of library collections, especially in resource-constrained settings.

**Keywords:** Donations, Collection Development, Library Act, Solicited Donations, Unsolicited Donations, Legal Deposit Laws, Resource Acquisition

### Introduction

Libraries play a critical role in the educational and informational infrastructure of societies worldwide. They serve as repositories of knowledge, providing access to resources in various formats to meet the diverse needs of their users. Collection development, the process by which libraries acquire, evaluate, and manage resources, is at the heart of a library's operations (Ternenge, et al, 2022).. The goal of collection development is to ensure that a library's holdings reflect the needs and expectations of its users while adhering to budgetary constraints and institutional priorities.

In many countries, libraries are facing severe financial pressures, making it difficult to acquire new materials through traditional methods such as purchasing. Consequently, donations have become an important mechanism for supplementing library resources. Donations can take the form of books, journals, multimedia materials, financial contributions, and even digital resources. These

donations can significantly enhance a library's collection, especially in cases where the library is unable to afford specific resources.

However, the acceptance of donations, particularly unsolicited donations, raises several challenges. Not all donated materials are suitable for inclusion in a library's collection. Some may be outdated, irrelevant, or in poor physical condition, presenting a potential burden rather than a benefit. This paper examines the role of donations in collection development, the advantages and challenges they present, and the strategies libraries can employ to manage donations effectively.

### **The Legal and Policy Framework for Donations**

The donation of materials to libraries is often guided by legal frameworks and policies that regulate resource acquisition. In many countries, libraries are supported by legal deposit laws, which require publishers and government agencies to submit copies of publications to designated depository libraries. In Nigeria, for example, the Library Act No. 29 of 1970 empowers the National Library of Nigeria (NLN) to receive a mandatory deposit of materials from publishers and authors. This law ensures that the National Library serves as the official repository for national publications and provides a mechanism for collecting and preserving the nation's intellectual output.

Legal deposit laws extend beyond compulsory submissions to include the voluntary donation of materials. In many countries, libraries are encouraged to solicit donations to supplement their collections, especially in areas where public funding is inadequate. In Nigeria, for example, the NLN plays a key role in coordinating donations, ensuring that materials are distributed to public, academic, and school libraries across the country. This system ensures that libraries can access a wide range of materials that may not be available through commercial channels (Tinuonye, 2010).

Internationally, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) advocates for libraries to create clear and formal donation policies. The IFLA's guidelines for donation and acquisition emphasize the need for libraries to evaluate donations carefully to ensure that they align with the library's collection development goals. These policies are essential in managing unsolicited donations and ensuring that they meet the needs of the library's users (Salisu Aleiro, 2010).

### **Types of Donations**

Donations can be broadly classified into two categories: solicited and unsolicited donations.

**Solicited Donations** occur when a library actively requests materials from potential donors. These donations are typically sought from publishers, alumni, corporate sponsors, and other stakeholders who may have access to the resources needed by the library. Solicited donations are often aligned with the library's collection development policy, ensuring that the materials donated meet the specific needs of the library's users. For example, a university library may request donations of textbooks in specific academic disciplines or materials that support current research initiatives. Solicited donations offer libraries more control over the types of materials they receive and can help ensure that these resources are relevant and high quality. Solicited donations also allow libraries to establish long-term relationships with donors, which can result in ongoing support for collection development efforts.

**Unsolicited Donations**, on the other hand, are offered by donors without a prior request from the library. These donations can come from individuals, organisations, or government agencies. While unsolicited donations can be beneficial, they often present challenges for libraries, as the materials may not align with the library's needs or may be of poor quality.

As noted by Gardner (1981), unsolicited donations often include outdated or irrelevant materials that may take up valuable space in the library. Furthermore, some donations may be in languages or formats that the library cannot accommodate, or they may be duplicates of materials already in the collection. This issue is particularly common in developing countries, where libraries may be seen as “dumping grounds” for unwanted materials from international donors (Onadiran & Onadiran, 1981).

Despite these challenges, unsolicited donations can still provide valuable resources, especially if the library adopts a strategic approach to managing donations.

### **The Advantages of Donations to Collection Development**

Donations offer numerous benefits to libraries, particularly in situations where budgetary constraints limit the ability to acquire resources through traditional purchasing methods. The advantages of donations in collection development include:

- i. **Expansion of the Collection:** Donations provide libraries with additional titles and volumes that may not be available through other acquisition methods. As Gardner (1981) observes, donors often contribute materials that are out of print or otherwise difficult for libraries to obtain. These donations can significantly expand the breadth and depth of a library's collection, enhancing its ability to meet user needs.
- ii. **Access to Government Publications:** Government publications, which are often difficult to acquire through traditional means, can be obtained through donations. As Ifidon (2006) notes, these documents are often distributed unsolicited to libraries under legal deposit schemes. Government publications provide valuable resources for research and reference, particularly in areas such as policy analysis, law, and public administration.
- iii. **Financial and Time Savings:** Donations allow libraries to save on procurement costs, as materials received through donations do not require purchase. Additionally, donations can save libraries significant time, as the acquisition process for donated materials is often faster than that for purchased materials (Adedigba, 1988). This allows libraries to focus resources on other critical areas of their operations, such as user services and digital library development.
- iv. **Improvement in Library Access:** Increased volumes of materials through donations improve the availability of resources for library users. This is particularly important in libraries with high demand for certain types of materials. As Emmanuel and Afolabi (2005) explain, donations often lead to a significant increase in the number of copies of essential resources, improving access for all users.

### **Challenges Associated with Donations**

While donations offer substantial advantages, they also present significant challenges for libraries. The most notable challenges associated with donations include:

- i. **Irrelevant or Outdated Materials:** One of the primary issues with donations, particularly unsolicited ones, is that they may not align with the library's collection development goals. As Gardner (1981) notes, some donations may be outdated, in poor condition, or irrelevant to the library's mission. This can result in wasted space and resources.
- ii. **Space Constraints:** Libraries often face challenges in managing donated materials, especially when donations are unsolicited. Without a clear donation policy, libraries may receive large volumes of materials that are difficult to process and store. This can lead to overcrowding in library spaces and create challenges in maintaining an organised and accessible collection.
- iii. **Cultural and Language Barriers:** In some cases, donated materials may be in languages or formats that are not suitable for the library's user base. For example, donations from international donors may include materials in foreign languages that users cannot understand. Additionally, some materials may not align with the educational and cultural context of the library's community.

### **Managing Donations Effectively**

To maximise the benefits of donations and mitigate the challenges they present, libraries must adopt a strategic approach to managing donations. Several best practices can help libraries make the most of their donation-based resource acquisition efforts:

- i. **Develop a Clear Donation Policy:** Libraries should establish and publicise clear guidelines for accepting donations. These policies should outline the types of materials the library is willing to accept, as well as the procedures for evaluating and processing donations. A well-defined policy will help ensure that donations align with the library's mission and collection development objectives.
- ii. **Evaluate Donations Carefully:** Libraries should establish procedures for evaluating donations to ensure that they meet the library's quality standards. This may involve assessing the condition of the materials, determining their relevance to the library's collection, and considering the needs of the library's users.
- iii. **Build Relationships with Donors:** Libraries should work to establish strong relationships with donors to encourage ongoing support. This can include communicating the library's needs, acknowledging donations, and involving donors in library events and initiatives.
- iv. **Leverage Technology:** Libraries can use technology to facilitate the donation process. Online platforms and databases can help libraries connect with potential donors, track donations, and manage their collections more efficiently.

### **Donations in the Digital Era**

The digital age has significantly transformed library operations, particularly in the realm of collection development. Libraries are increasingly incorporating digital resources into their collections, which offer the potential for enhanced access, flexibility, and reach. However, the donation of digital resources—such as e-books, digital journals, online databases, and multimedia content—requires libraries to adopt new methods for receiving, managing, and distributing these materials.

### **Digital Content Donations: Opportunities and Benefits**

Digital content donations present a unique opportunity for libraries to diversify their collections without the logistical constraints associated with physical materials. The advantages of digital donations include:

- i. **Instant Access:** Digital resources can be accessed immediately, allowing libraries to rapidly incorporate them into their collections. This is particularly advantageous when compared to the traditional delays associated with processing physical donations.
- ii. **Broader Reach:** Digital resources can be shared more easily with a wider audience, including remote users, which is particularly beneficial in regions with limited access to physical libraries. This aligns with the growing demand for remote and on-demand access to library resources.
- iii. **Cost-Effectiveness:** Digital donations can reduce the financial burden on libraries, as they do not incur costs related to physical storage, transportation, or maintenance. Libraries also save on the space required to house physical collections.
- iv. **Environmental Impact:** Digital donations help libraries reduce their carbon footprint by eliminating the need for physical transportation and storage of materials.

### **Modalities for Accepting Digital Donations**

While the concept of donating digital resources is still evolving, several modalities can be put in place to manage these donations effectively:

- i. **E-Book Donations:** E-books are among the most common digital donations received by libraries. The process for accepting e-book donations typically involves the donor providing a digital file (in formats such as EPUB, MOBI, or PDF) or granting the library access to the e-book via a cloud-based platform. Libraries should ensure that these files are legally permissible for distribution and that they comply with copyright laws. Donors can also provide access to e-books through services like Amazon, Google Books, or specialized academic platforms like JSTOR or Springer.
- ii. **Open Access Journals and Databases:** Many academic publishers and organizations now support open access initiatives, where research journals, databases, and other scholarly resources are freely available to libraries and institutions. Libraries can solicit donations of subscriptions or access to such resources, particularly from organizations promoting open access publishing. The challenge lies in ensuring that the library has the technical infrastructure to integrate these digital resources into its existing systems.
- iii. **Digital Archives and Multimedia Content:** Digital archives, which may include historical documents, audio and video recordings, or collections of digital images, present another form of valuable donation. These resources can significantly enhance the library's ability to offer diverse content to users, particularly in the areas of cultural heritage, education, and research. Donations can be made in the form of digital files stored on hard drives, USBs, or cloud storage systems.
- iv. **Software and Online Tools:** Libraries can also receive donations in the form of software, apps, or online tools that can be used by library patrons. These donations may come from

tech companies, educational institutions, or developers offering access to educational software or learning platforms. However, careful consideration must be given to licensing agreements, updates, and ongoing support for these tools.

### **Managing Digital Donations**

The management of digital donations requires new strategies and tools. Here are some essential considerations for libraries in the digital era:

- i. **Copyright and Licensing Considerations:** Libraries must ensure that digital donations do not violate copyright laws. This is particularly important for e-books, journals, and multimedia content, which may be subject to restrictive licensing agreements. To navigate this, libraries should establish clear guidelines and agreements with donors, specifying the terms under which the digital content can be used, shared, and stored.
- ii. **Digital Preservation:** One of the key challenges with digital donations is ensuring their long-term preservation. Digital content can become obsolete due to changes in file formats, hardware, or software. Libraries must invest in digital preservation strategies to ensure that the content remains accessible over time. This may include migrating materials to current formats, ensuring proper metadata and indexing, and utilizing cloud storage or dedicated digital preservation systems.
- iii. **Metadata and Cataloging:** For digital materials to be useful to library users, they must be properly cataloged and indexed. Libraries should adopt best practices for creating metadata, ensuring that digital resources are searchable and easily accessible. Standardized metadata formats, such as Dublin Core for digital archives, can be used to maintain consistency and ease of access.
- iv. **Digital Infrastructure:** Libraries need the proper infrastructure to manage digital donations. This includes having sufficient server capacity, access to cloud storage, and secure platforms for distributing digital resources to users. Libraries also need to ensure that their systems support a wide variety of file formats and are capable of integrating with online library management systems.
- v. **User Access and Security:** Digital donations must be protected against unauthorized access or piracy. Libraries should implement secure access protocols for digital materials, including password protection, user authentication, and Digital Rights Management (DRM) systems where appropriate. Additionally, the library's digital platforms should be designed to allow equitable access to all users, including those with disabilities.

### **Collaboration with Digital Content Providers**

In the digital era, libraries can benefit from collaborative relationships with digital content providers, such as e-book distributors, open-access platforms, and multimedia content creators. These partnerships can lead to a steady flow of digital donations and give libraries access to a vast range of resources. Collaborative efforts could include:

- i. **Negotiating Access to Digital Resources:** Libraries can negotiate with publishers, universities, and online content platforms for free or discounted access to digital resources. In many cases, publishers are willing to donate access to electronic materials in exchange for promotion or recognition within the library community.

- ii. Crowdsourcing Digital Content: Libraries can use crowdsourcing platforms to gather digital donations, particularly in the form of content creation or digitisation. For instance, library patrons or community members may digitize their personal collections and contribute them to the library, creating a unique and valuable local archive.
- iii. Partnerships with Open Access Advocates: As the open access movement grows, libraries can partner with open access advocates to solicit donations of open-access resources. By participating in these networks, libraries can help promote the availability and sustainability of freely accessible scholarly content.

### **Ethical Considerations and Digital Donations**

Ethical considerations are important when accepting digital donations. Issues such as privacy, consent, and the potential for biased or incomplete collections must be addressed. For example, if a library receives donations of digital content related to specific communities or groups, the library must ensure that the collection is inclusive and representative of diverse voices.

Furthermore, libraries must consider the environmental impact of digital donations. While digital resources are more environmentally friendly than physical materials, libraries should ensure that they are not contributing to the overproduction of digital content that becomes obsolete or redundant. Sustainability should be a key consideration in digital donation strategies.

### **Conclusion**

Donations play a crucial role in library collection development, particularly in environments where financial constraints limit the ability to acquire new resources. While donations offer numerous benefits, including the expansion of the collection, financial savings, and access to government publications, they also present challenges that must be carefully managed. By developing clear donation policies, evaluating donations strategically, and building strong relationships with donors, libraries can maximise the benefits of donations and ensure that their collections remain relevant and accessible to their users. Donations, when managed effectively, represent an indispensable strategy in the sustainable development of library collections, particularly in resource-constrained settings.

In the digital era, the donation of digital resources presents an exciting opportunity for libraries to enhance their collections, increase access, and streamline collection management processes. However, libraries must adopt new strategies and tools to manage these donations effectively. This includes addressing issues related to copyright, preservation, metadata, and digital infrastructure, as well as forming strategic partnerships with content providers. Digital donations are a critical component of modern library collection development. Libraries can ensure that their collections remain dynamic, diverse, and relevant to the needs of contemporary users by embracing the opportunities presented by digital resources and leveraging technology.

### **Recommendations**

Here are several recommendations that could enhance the overall impact and implementation of donations in library collection development:

1. Development of Clear and Comprehensive Donation Policies: Libraries should create and implement detailed, transparent donation policies that align with their collection development

goals. These policies should define the types of materials accepted, the conditions they must meet, and the process for evaluating donations. Policies should also clarify how libraries handle unsolicited donations, ensuring that materials are assessed for relevance and quality before acceptance.

2. Encouragement of Targeted Solicitation: Libraries should engage in targeted solicitation for donations, focusing on specific needs or gaps in their collections. By reaching out to alumni, publishing houses, authors, and corporate donors, libraries can ensure that they receive donations that are both relevant and beneficial to their users. Additionally, libraries can cultivate relationships with major donors to establish long-term support that extends beyond one-off donations.

3. Strengthening Legal Deposit Mechanisms: Libraries, especially national libraries, should strengthen the enforcement of legal deposit laws to ensure they receive copies of all national publications. This would help enhance the depth and breadth of the library's holdings. In countries like Nigeria, where the National Library of Nigeria plays a crucial role, it is essential to ensure the timely receipt of publications from both local and international publishers through the compulsory deposit system.

4. Utilisation of Technology for Donation Management: Libraries can make use of digital tools and platforms to manage donations more effectively. For example, library systems can maintain a donation database that tracks the materials received, the donor's details, and the status of each donation. Automated systems can streamline the evaluation and acknowledgment process, allowing libraries to focus on more critical tasks. Libraries should create comprehensive policies that address the specific needs of digital donations, covering aspects such as copyright, format compatibility, and long-term preservation. Libraries must prioritize the long-term preservation of digital donations through regular format migrations and the adoption of secure storage practices. Libraries should actively seek partnerships with publishers, content creators, and open access advocates to receive digital donations and expand their resources. Library staff should be trained on the technical aspects of managing digital donations, including metadata creation, cataloguing, and digital security protocols. Libraries must ensure that digital donations are accessible to all users, including those with disabilities, by providing inclusive digital platforms and ensuring compliance with accessibility standards.

5. Building Strong Relationships with Donors: Libraries should prioritise relationship-building with donors by maintaining open lines of communication. Donors who feel appreciated and involved are more likely to continue their support. Libraries should consider acknowledging donations in their annual reports, newsletters, or through public events. Additionally, libraries can create donor programs or recognition schemes to further engage donors and encourage ongoing contributions.

6. Collaboration with Other Libraries for Resource Sharing: To maximise the value of donations and overcome space and resource constraints, libraries can collaborate with other institutions through resource-sharing networks or consortia. Sharing donated materials with other libraries allows for the redistribution of resources to areas of greater need, ensuring that donations benefit a broader audience.

7. Continuous Evaluation of Donated Materials: Libraries should implement a continuous evaluation process to assess the relevance and usefulness of donated materials. For instance, books or journals may become obsolete over time due to changes in academic or research focus. Libraries



should regularly review their collections and deaccession outdated or irrelevant materials, ensuring that only the most useful and current resources remain in their holdings.

8. Raising Public Awareness and Promoting Donations: Libraries should raise awareness about the importance of donations and promote them as a viable option for individuals, organisations, and governments to contribute to the intellectual and educational development of society. Public campaigns or community outreach efforts can help encourage a culture of giving to libraries and other public institutions.

9. Development of Endowment Funds: To support long-term collection development, libraries can consider the creation of endowment funds. These funds can be used to maintain the library's ability to acquire resources, including through donations and direct purchasing. Endowment funds provide financial stability and reduce the library's reliance on external funding sources.

10. Training for Library Staff: Library staff should be regularly trained on best practices for managing donations, including evaluating materials, communicating with donors, and ensuring compliance with collection development policies. This will ensure that staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to handle donations effectively, preventing potential issues such as accepting irrelevant or unsuitable materials.

Implementing these recommendations will help libraries optimise the potential of donations in their collection development efforts. By developing clear policies, engaging donors, leveraging technology, and collaborating with other libraries, libraries can build diverse and dynamic collections that better serve their users' needs. In an increasingly resource-constrained environment, donations will continue to play an essential role in enabling libraries to meet the evolving informational and educational demands of society.

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