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# Preservation and dissemination of women's cultural heritage in Nigerian university libraries

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472

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the preservation and dissemination of women's cultural heritage in selected university libraries in Nigeria.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The descriptive survey research design using questionnaire to collect data was employed.

**Findings** – The study revealed that non-print materials constitute an average of about 28 per cent of the forms in which cultural heritage materials for women are obtained and preserved in some Nigerian leading academic libraries. Over 50 per cent of the respondents in their views agreed that the benefits are accruable when women's cultural heritage materials are kept including enhancement of public perception of women, improvement in accessibility to information about women, improvement in the visibility of women as essential contributors to the development of the society, fostering of tourism among others. The most prominent barrier that the respondents believed could hamper the preservation of women's cultural heritage materials was the adverse tropical climatic conditions.

**Originality/value** – It encourages information experts to engage in capacity building for effective preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage information that are gender related. It also stressed the need for networking and collaboration among information experts as an essential strategy in promoting women's cultural heritage information system. All stakeholders are urged to prioritize and demonstrate fiscal commitment towards the preservation of cultural heritage resources. This paper was presented at IFLA Women, Information and Libraries Satellite Conference, 2012.

**Keywords** Women, Culture, University libraries, Preservation, Dissemination

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Human societies have always created objects and records describing their activities, achievements and progress. Nwagbu *et al.* (2011) reported that Nigeria possesses rich cultural heritage which is observed to have been scattered within diverse ethnic nationalities. These collections of cultural heritages symbolise the past. They should



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therefore be treated as gold gems that should be collected, documented and preserved in depositories that are easily accessible to researchers, educators and students because of their utility. Manaf (2006) believes that these objects and records serve as statements of achievement and progress of society. Additionally, they could be used as resources for research and learning, means of protecting rights (individual, collective and corporate) as well as instruments of public accountability.

A major part of the society's collective memory is women's cultural heritages. Women's cultural heritages are collections of archives, family papers, oral histories, and artifacts that are preserved to document and honour the contributions of women (Tagliavini, n.d.). Women on average constitute about half of a given nation's populace (Leahy and Yermish, 2003). They have been playing important roles in the development of society. Women represent three quarters of all heads of households in developing nations (UNICEF, 2001, cited in Leahy and Yermish, 2003). In Africa, the role of women is closely linked with the status of women in society. Culturally, women, according to Madumere-Obike and Ukala (2011) are conceptualised as not being equal to men and as such they are expected to prepare themselves for lesser roles than men. Primarily, women play nurturing roles in the family. As mothers, they raise babies, nurse and teach them the norms and values of the society (Sani, 2001). As wives, they care for the welfare of the entire household and sometimes the extended family (Sani, 2001).

Apart from bearing the burden of childbearing and upkeep of the home, women engage in economic activities. Studies have shown that direct responsibilities for household food production rest largely on women (Munonye, 2009; Sani, 2001). They constitute well over 50 per cent of the labour force and are producers of agricultural products meant for the furtherance of societal economies (Otunu-Ogbisi, 2011). In Africa, it is known that women provide some 60-80 per cent of the food for the family consumption (Aina and Salau, 1992, cited in Achunine, 2009). Similarly, in Nigeria about 70 per cent of the economically active populations involved in agricultural production are women and they produce 80 per cent of the country's food (Osondu, 2009).

Politically, women in African indigenous societies held many positions before the advent of colonial powers (Oni, 2001). Today, women in Africa and most especially in Nigeria remain politically under-represented. Research findings revealed that out of the 779 local government chairpersons in Nigeria, nine are women. Only 3.3 per cent of members of the Federal House of Representatives are women, and 2.7 per cent of members of the Senate (Balogun-Alexander, 2003). It is obvious that the number of Nigerian women in political leadership is below the globally advocated standard. This indicates poor or low visibility of women in public affairs of the nation.

Driscoll and Goldberg (1993) opine that visibility involves personal repositioning or being repositioned by someone else. In a similar way, Vinnicombe and Singh (2003) pointed out that an individual's visibility may lead to their public approval and success. Several authors (Adler and Izraeli, 1994; Morrison *et al.*, 1992; Driscoll and Goldberg, 1993; Vinnicombe and Bank, 2003) emphasised that visibility is increased by being involved in challenging assignments, participation in social events, professional events and networks.

In Nigeria, there were the legendary Inikpi, Moremi and Daura who took charge of state affairs and formed a foundation of formidable communities of their time (Otunu-Ogbisi, 2011). Similarly, Late Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo led the Aba women riot, Professor Dora Nkem Akunyili was the former Director General of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control of Nigeria, and former Nigerian

Minister of Information and Communications, Dr Oby Ezekwesili, was the Minister of Solid Minerals and Minister of Education under President Obasanjo's administration, among others. Currently, women such as Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Minister of Finance for the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Professor Ruqayattu Rufa'I Bala Mohammed, Minister of Education, and Mrs Diezani Alison-Madueke, the Minister of Petroleum, are making a significant impact in the socio-political development of Nigeria.

In spite of the multiple roles and contributions of women towards socio-economic development, they are relegated, suppressed, neglected and treated as a non-issue. Unfortunately, records of women's contribution to the development of the society are oftentimes not documented and preserved. It is, therefore, important that the roles played by women in the past are recorded, preserved and disseminated as living heritage which could serve as a springboard for future generations of women to build on.

Information about women's cultural heritage is not commonplace. That which is available could be found in homes, palaces and other places of historical interests. With the advent of civilisation and the development of knowledge these cultural heritage materials are kept in museums, archives and libraries, among others.

Libraries are institutions that are concerned with the collection, preservation and dissemination of cultural information. Okerulu (2002) affirms that libraries are an important part of the social, cultural and educational history of any nation. Traditionally, the mission of libraries is to preserve and disseminate knowledge and cultural treasures. By so doing, libraries preserve cultural identities, bridge the past and the present and shape the future. Some university libraries have vital collections of oil paintings, artefacts, objects, and large collections of photographic materials and albums (Olatokun, 2008). In fact, university libraries in Nigeria have been repositories of valuable works of art (Barber, 2008). The University of Lagos Library is being used by the Federal Society for Arts and Humanities as a depository for their collections. Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife also has a collection of works of artists like Ben Enwonwu, Akinola Lasekan, Agbo Folarin and a host of others (Barber, 2008). Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan is a preservation centre for cultural heritage collections (Odogwu, 2010). Against this backdrop, this paper therefore examines the preservation and dissemination of women's cultural heritage in selected university libraries in Nigeria. The specific objectives were to ascertain the types of women's cultural heritage that are being preserved in Nigerian university libraries and the strategies for collecting, preserving and disseminating them. It also aimed at investigating the benefits and challenges of preserving women's cultural heritage in the twenty-first century. The following research questions guided the study:

- RQ1.* What are the types of women's cultural heritage that are being preserved in the selected Nigerian university libraries?
- RQ2.* What are the strategies for collecting, preserving, and disseminating women's cultural heritage in the selected Nigerian university libraries?
- RQ3.* What are the benefits of preserving women's cultural heritage in the selected Nigerian university libraries?
- RQ4.* What are the challenges of preserving women's cultural heritage in university libraries in Nigeria?

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*Cultural heritage defined*

The definition of cultural heritage is quite contentious. It is often used synonymously with such terms as cultural property, cultural patrimony or cultural resources. From a broad perspective, The World Bank (1994) defined cultural heritage as a record of humanity's relationship to the world, past achievements, and discoveries. It is the present manifestation of the human past. Cultural heritage refers to sites, structures, and remains of archaeological, historical, religious, cultural, or aesthetic value.

UNESCO, in its Draft Medium Term Plan 1990-1995 (UNESCO, 25 C/4, 1989, p. 57, as cited in Jokilehto, 2005), has defined cultural heritage:

[...] as the entire corpus of material signs – either artistic or symbolic – handed on by the past to each culture and, therefore, to the whole of humankind. As a constituent part of the affirmation and enrichment of cultural identities, as a legacy belonging to all humankind, the cultural heritage gives each particular place its recognizable features and is the storehouse of human experience.

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) (Brooks, 2002) also defined cultural heritage as an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values. According to Odogwu (2010) cultural heritage is the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that was inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of the future generations.

Brooks (2002) maintained that cultural heritage consists of tangible and intangible aspects of culture. The intangible cultural heritage is made up of all forms of traditional and popular or folk culture, the collective works originating in a given community and based on tradition. These creations are transmitted orally or by gesture, and are modified over a period of time, through a process of collective re-creation. They include oral traditions, customs, languages, music, dance, rituals, festivals, traditional medicine and pharmacopeia, popular sports, food and the culinary arts and all kinds of special skill connected with the material aspects of culture, such as tools and the habitat. While the tangible cultural heritage encompasses the vast created works of humankind, including places of human habitation, villages, towns and cities, buildings, structures, art works, documents, handicrafts, musical instruments, furniture, clothing and items of personal decoration, religious, ritual and funerary objects, tools, machinery and equipment, and industrial systems (Brooks, 2002).

Cultural heritage therefore is acts, ideas, and artefacts which are handed down from one generation to another through oral, behavioural and material traditions. It is a way of life of a given people either in social perspective such as language, morals, behaviours, etc. or in physical representation such as monuments, artefacts, carvings, natural geographical landscapes and so on.

*Problems of preservation of cultural heritage in Nigeria*

Preservation is the specific actions taking to prolong the useful life of individual objects or entire collections within a particular institution (Cloonan, 2001). It is the action taken to anticipate, prevent, stop, or slow deterioration. Preservation can also be described as the art of anticipating and preventing decay (Baker, 1981). Literature has established that librarians, archivists and curators are currently facing the problem of effective preservation of cultural heritage in cultural institutions in Nigeria.

Anasi (2010) pointed out that there were a number of factors which constitute obstacles to the preservation of valuable heritage in Nigeria. These include absence of preservation policy; ignorance and low level of awareness of preservation practices; dearth of skilled and trained manpower and inadequate funding of cultural institutions. Asogwa and Ezema (2012) also affirmed that under-funding of libraries, absence of a professional preservation librarian and continuous changes in computer hardware and software are the greatest threats to preservation practices in the electronic environment. A study conducted in higher education libraries in Nigeria by Ovowoh and Iwhiwhu (2010) reveals that there is no written policy on preservation and conservation in the libraries studied. The study also identified lack of funds, lack of qualified conservation librarians, non-committal attitude of staff, and lack of adequate and dependable storage facilities as major constraints to proper preservation and conservation in academic libraries. Akor (2010) investigated the preservation of archival materials in Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, Kaduna Library. The study established that lack of trained personnel and inadequate funding hamper the proper preservation of archival materials. Another study conducted by Olatokun (2008) on preservation and conservation practices in Nigerian university libraries revealed that the greatest constraint to effective preservation of library materials was inadequate funding. Alegbeleye (1996) also observed that librarians' ignorance of the agents of deterioration serves as a major constraint to the preservation and conservation of library and archival materials in Africa. UNESCO (2004) also submits that "many people are not truly knowledgeable about cultures and this problem of ignorance is further compounded by questions of orality, tradition and world vision". The danger is that Nigeria and indeed Africa stands the imminent risk of losing so much of its valuable documented heritage in consequence of ever increasing deterioration of paper and other media on which they have been stored (Popoola, 2003).

#### *Efforts towards the preservation of cultural heritage in Nigeria*

In Nigeria, cultural heritage is widely recognised as the most important input in defining the national and ethnic cultures (Institute for Cultural Democracy, 1998). There is also a growing awareness of the need for cultural heritage preservation by government at all levels, notwithstanding their political backgrounds and developmental orientations. The National Archives, the National Museum, the National Library and all the existing universities have taken over the task to work on research, restoration and preservation of the cultural heritage. As regards funding, all federal and a few state agencies working in this field are fully supported from the federal funds (Institute for Cultural Democracy, 1998).

The National Library of Nigeria as the apex library is empowered by law to collect, preserve and disseminate Nigeria's cultural heritage. Act No. 29 of 1970, Section 4 (1) states among other things that a private publisher of any book in Nigeria shall within one month after publication deliver at his own expense three perfect copies of such book to the National Library of Nigeria, the state government should deposit ten while the Federal Government or its agencies should deposit 25 copies. A copy of each document deposited with the National Library of Nigeria must be sent to the University of Ibadan for preservation (National Library of Nigeria Act of 1970).

In 1954 the National Archives of Nigeria was established. The holdings of the National Archives are kept at the three major repositories located in Ibadan,

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Enugu, and Kaduna. The holdings include consular dispatches, records of the protectorate administrations, records of civil secretary offices, provincial and district offices records, native administration records, judiciary and ecclesiastical records. Printed materials, tapes, discs and records from various ministries and parastatals as well as civil war collections are preserved in the National Archives (Odogwu, 2010).

In March 1988 the African Heritage Library was established in Adeyipo village in Lagelu local government area of Oyo State in Nigeria. The library was founded by Dr Bayo Adebawale. The head of the library is an Afro-American woman, Yeye Akilimali Funua Olaide. It was designed to serve the public. The library has a collection of over 100,000 volumes of books and tapes on various subjects on Africa and African cultural heritage. It serves as a depository of all publications on Africa and Africans in diaspora. In the opinion of the Nigerian Library Association (2009) the library meets the educational and socio-cultural needs of both researchers and the local community people.

In 1987 the Women's Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC) was established at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. It is a national centre for research, training and dissemination of information for women and men who carry out studies on gender issues in all sphere of life. Fijabi and Opeke (2001) reported that the library arm of the centre systematically collects documents and disseminates materials on women and women's studies to researchers and the general public.

There are 36 national museums, 63 national monuments and two UNESCO world heritage sites in Nigeria. These sites, as expected, are opened to the public. The 1953 antiquities ordinance gave birth to the establishment of Museums in Esie (1945), Ife (1954), Lagos (1957), Owo (1958) and Benin and Oron (1960). After the Nigerian civil war, the Federal Government in quest of lasting unity created Museums of National Unity which include Enugu and Ibadan. These museums contain a number of treasures and cultural relics of great interest (National Commission For Museums and Monuments, 2010).

The Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC) is a multi-dimensional documentation institution established in 1979. It has a library where the rich African and Black cultural heritage such as Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC'77) materials that were showcased through colloquium, drama, music and dances, and which were recorded on audio-visual and celluloid tapes, are professionally arranged and preserved (Asobele, 2002).

Although a lot of work has been done in research, systematisation and preservation of cultural heritage, there is a need for well-established documentation on cultural heritage, as well as a need for a well-organised service for its preservation and dissemination.

#### *Benefits of cultural heritage*

Cultural heritage is of great value to man and its society. It contributes to artistic, educational or social development. Cultural heritage is a source of esthetical value, experience value, existence value, historic value, economic value and knowledge value (Nypan, 2003). Alegbeleye (2002), corroborating this view, submits that the:

[...] thoughts, ideas and discoveries of great men, the eye witness account of great events and the prose and poetry of civilization and what has been rightly described as our intellectual capital are priceless treasure.

The importance of cultural heritage is captured vividly by Scott (2000) thus:

[...] culture and places of cultural significance play an important role in the development of contemporary cities. They represent not only sources of identity and meaning for individuals and communities but now constitute an important economic resource for post industrial cities. There is an increasing link between culture and the economy, as cultural resources become strategic tools for economic growth and development.

Similarly, the paper of Europa Nostra, the Pan-European Federation for cultural heritage to the EU institutions by the Executive President of Europa Nostra, Otto von der Gablentz (2005) stressed that cultural:

[...] heritage is a visible expression of our common European culture and history, a tangible testimony of our roots without which our present would be impoverished and our future would become sterile. As such, it is an essential element of our local, regional, national and European identity.

He further emphasised that “cultural heritage contribute fundamentally to the development of a sense of European citizenship and a sense of belonging, as indispensable cohesive factors in the on-going process of European integration”. Cultural heritage therefore has an important political significance for Europe today.

From social economic perspective The World Bank President Zoellick (as cited in Nypan, n.d.) states that:

[...] conservation of cultural heritage assets, regeneration of historic cities, as well as the protection of natural heritage are resources for economic and social development. Investment to conserve and integrate them in the sustainable development of local communities can generate income, create employment, reduce poverty, stimulate enterprise development by the poor, foster private investment and leverage additional resources for conservation.

Indeed, rapid socio-economic development could be achieved within a short period of time with the aid of cultural heritage as demonstrated in Japan, North Korea and Egypt (Obaseki and Odion, 2010). Cultural heritage is increasingly seen as a strategic tool for employment creation. It has the potential to increase job opportunities. In Europe, historic rehabilitation creates 16.5 per cent more jobs than new construction, and every direct job in the cultural heritage sector creates 26.7 indirect jobs (Nypan, 2003). According to the National Heritage Training Group (2005) an estimated 86,000 people are employed to preserve nearly 4.5 million historic houses and another 550,000 historic commercial buildings in England.

Cultural heritage also has educational value. Cultural and historical records and artefacts preserved in libraries, archives and museums are often consulted by humanities researchers to obtain much of their research data (Cathro, 2006). Therefore, providing access to works of arts, artefacts, collectables, historical treasures and similar items is essential to the advancement of research, teaching and learning (Manaf, 2006).

### **Research method**

The study adopted a survey research design. The population comprised university libraries in Southern Nigeria. The universities in this part of the country constitute over 60 per cent of the number of universities in the universe of the expected respondents. Purposive sampling was adopted in selecting the university libraries which have

appreciable collections of diverse women's cultural heritage from first and second generation universities (Table I).

By international age standards these universities cannot be said to be old. However, by the Nigerian standard they are the foundational academic institutions with well-established libraries. They can therefore be considered as local best practices in archival information collection preservation and dissemination. While this is an assumption, it is not unfounded and unexpected.

The target participants in the survey were professional librarians. We premised the survey on these librarians as information providers who should be abreast of all classes of information in their respective library's holdings. The extent to which they are aware of the cultural information available in their libraries is an indicator of how they would be able to provide or assist in providing women's cultural heritage information to seekers. However, this study is limited to women's cultural heritage in the form of archival and museum collections in university libraries in Southern Nigeria. Further research on women's cultural heritage collections in archives, museums and special libraries in Nigeria may be investigated to make the study more comprehensive.

The instrument used for the study was a structured questionnaire distributed through a network of librarians based in the institutions (Table II). The questionnaire sought to obtain information on different domains of the inquiry. These are the preservation and dissemination models adopted by each library, strategy for collection development, evidences of understanding of the benefits derivable from preserving women's cultural heritage materials and barriers to effective preservation.

Nigerian geo-political zone	University libraries	Year of establishment	Generation
South-east zone	Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka	1960	First
South-west zone	Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan	1948	First
	University of Lagos Library	1962	First
	Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife	1962	First
South-south zone	John Harris Library, University of Benin	1970	Second

**Table I.**  
List of selected university libraries

Name of the university library	Number of questionnaires distributed	Number of questionnaires returned	Response rate (%)
University of Lagos Library	20	17	85
Nnamdi Azikwe Library, University of Nigeria	20	14	70
Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan	15	10	67
Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library	10	6	66
John Harris Library, University of Benin	15	10	67
Total	80	57	71

**Table II.**  
Questionnaire distribution and the response rate



Table II shows the distribution of the questionnaire among the respondent librarians in the selected universities. An overall response rate of 71 per cent was obtained. This is considered to be acceptable, going by the general apathy of respondents to requests to supply information to researchers in the Nigerian context.

The analysis of the information collected was done using descriptive statistics to capture the measures of central tendency of the variables in all the libraries. Mean item score method of analysis was used to generate quantitative values to describe the extent to which some identified or hypothesised barriers are likely to hinder the attainment of the collection, preservation and dissemination of cultural information peculiar to women.

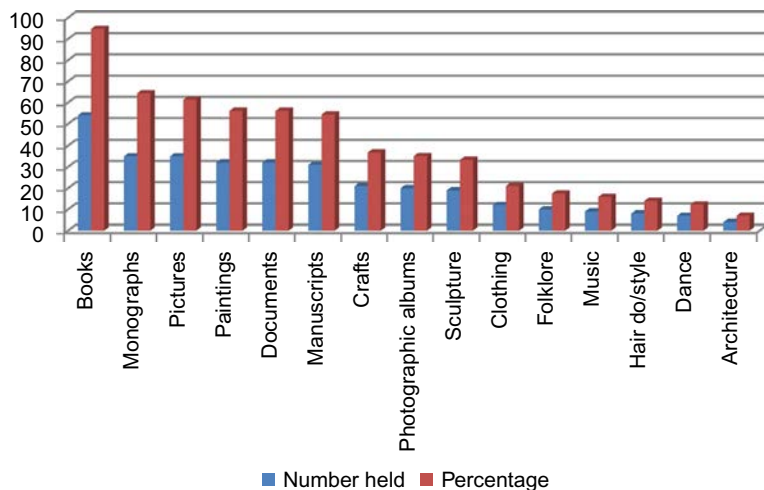
**Results, analysis and discussion of findings**

*Types of women’s cultural heritage in Nigerian university libraries*

*RQ1.* What are the types of women’s cultural heritage that are being preserved in the selected Nigerian university libraries?

Cultural heritage materials are acquired and preserved in the university libraries. However, the types of such collections for women in particular have not been a subject of inquiry by researchers. From the results obtained from our survey of leading old university libraries in Nigeria we have been able to characterise the types of collection as shown in Figure 1. It shows the summary of the various cultural materials related to women in the libraries sampled. The results identified 15 forms in which women related cultural items are kept and preserved. It is apparent and also expected that the women’s cultural heritage information is mostly preserved in book and monograph forms. Other forms related to books are documents and manuscripts (about 55 per cent).

Non-print materials constitute an average of about 28 per cent of the forms in which cultural heritage materials for women are obtainable and preserved in the sampled libraries. This is in line with the assertion of Barber (2008) and Olatokun (2008) that



**Figure 1.**  
Types of women’s cultural heritage information available in the academic libraries in Nigeria

apart from print materials the university libraries in Nigeria have non-print materials in their collection. Some of the artefacts illustrating the different aspects of Nigerian women's pasts have been captured in sculptures and paintings. The samples of women's cultural artefacts are shown in the Plates 1-3.

The painting of Moremi Ajasoro (the pre-colonial Yoruba Amazon who saved Ile-Ife from invaders) is located at the entrance of the university librarian's office at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife, Nigeria. Akinola Lasekan in this work portrays Moremi Ajasoro, a Yoruba Princess as a very beautiful and unruffled woman. She was adorned with royal apparel and beads.

The African mother sculpture by Isiaka Osunde is located at the Reserved Book Room, University of Lagos, Nigeria. In this work, Isiaka Osunde portrays the suffering and troubles that the average African mother has to go through in performing her multiple roles. The composition comprises three characters, the mother with a water pot on her head, her older son standing in front of her, and the baby at her back. The woman is depicted as a beautiful young woman, battling with the pains of fetching water for her household chores and at the same time she has to take care of her children.

Mother's feeling, an oil painting by Tonny John Kamen located at the Main Library, University of Lagos. Tonny John Kamen's painting captures the nurturing role of a mother as a nurse. In this portrait, the mother is in a bad mood because her baby is sick.

*Collecting, preserving and disseminating women's cultural heritage in the Nigerian university libraries*

RQ2. What are the strategies for collecting, preserving, and disseminating women's cultural heritage in the selected Nigerian university libraries?

The means by which these cultural heritage materials were obtained is a subject of interest. Articulated strategy is often required for effective collection development of any resource material worth preserving. Figure 2 shows the percentage distribution of



**Source:** Obafemi Awolowo University library

**Plate 1.**  
Portrait of Moremi  
Ajasoro



**Source:** University of Lagos library

**Plate 2.**  
The African mother

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the methods of acquisition of cultural heritage materials. It is apparent that the majority of the materials were acquired through donations or gifts. This is true for all the institutions except Obafemi Awolowo University where the number of materials acquired through direct purchase is more than those acquired through donation or gift (Table III).

In Table IV 11 common methods of preserving materials were indicated. As expected binding, cleaning and dusting, shelving, provision of security and air conditioning of library space account for over 70 per cent of the methods of preserving women's cultural heritage. The respondents indicated that methods of preserving women's cultural heritage such as digitisation, photocopying, lamination, among others, are of lesser use.

But Chigbu and Ezema (2011) argue that the digitisation of Nigerian cultural materials will increase the lifespan of the documented information on Nigerian culture. They also stressed that digitisation will make cultural information resources available and easily accessible to everyone. IFLA/UNESCO (n.d.) supports digitisation, access to and preservation of cultural and scientific heritage. It is to be noted that the



Source: University of Lagos Library

Plate 3.  
Mother's feeling

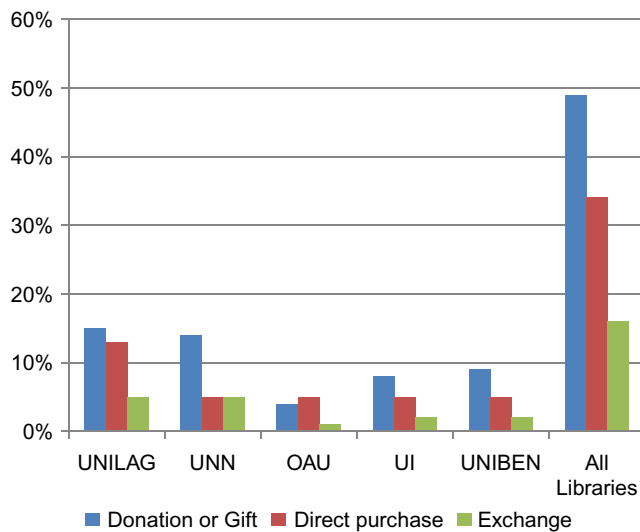


Figure 2.  
Methods of acquiring the  
cultural heritage materials

preservation of the women's cultural heritage materials are at the lowest level of preservation. The materials were not given any special environmental conditioning and treatment as is normally done in museums and archival collections. This is not unconnected with the fact that these libraries were seldom designed for this purpose.

*Benefits of preserving women's cultural heritage in the selected Nigerian university libraries*

RQ3. What are the benefits of preserving women's cultural heritage in the selected Nigerian university libraries?

Table V indicates the benefits derivable from preserving women's cultural heritage materials. On the average, about 50 per cent of the respondents agreed to the fact that all the six benefits are accruable when cultural heritage materials which are women focused are kept. The respondents (about 88 per cent) opined that the enhancements of public perception about women as well as the accessibility to information about women are the leading benefits that can be derived. IFLA/UNESCO (n.d.) affirmed that access to the cultural and scientific heritage of mankind is every person's right and helps promote learning and understanding of the richness and diversity of the world, not only for the present generation, but also for the generations to come. About 75 per cent of the respondents see the potential of improving women's visibility as possible benefits of keeping such materials in their library collections. UNESCO (2001) also advancement of knowledge is not possible without consistent and reliable access to information sources, past and present. It is therefore crucial for cultural heritage

**Table III.**  
Comparative methods  
of acquiring cultural  
heritage materials

Method of acquisition	UNILAG (%)	UNN (%)	OAU (%)	UI (%)	UNIBEN (%)	All libraries (%)
Donation or gift	15	14	4	8	9	49
Direct purchase	13	5	5	5	5	34
Exchange	5	5	1	2	2	16
	33	25	11	15	16	100

**Notes:** UNILAG – University of Lagos; UNN – University of Nigeria, Nsukka; OAU – Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife; UI – University of Ibadan; UNIBEN – University of Benin

**Table IV.**  
Methods of preservation  
of women's cultural  
heritage materials  
in Nigerian university  
libraries

Method of preservation	Frequency	%
Binding	45	79
Cleaning and dusting	43	75
Shelving	42	74
Provision of security	41	72
Installing of air conditioner	40	70
Digitisation	22	39
Photocopying	21	37
Lamination	15	26
Use of insecticide and repellent	13	22
Microfilming	6	11
Encapsulation	3	5
De-acidification	3	5

information, in all its forms, to be valued, preserved and disseminated for reference purposes in all generations.

In agreement with previous studies, preservation of cultural heritage is of great benefit to every nation (Figure 3).

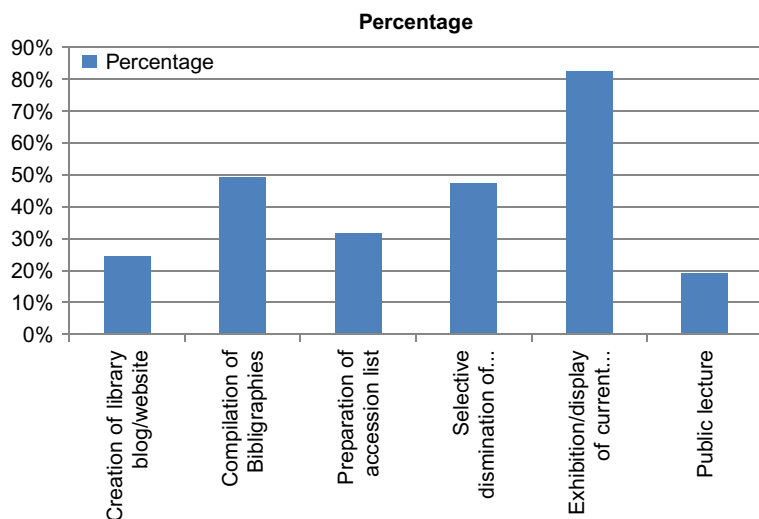
*Challenges of preserving women's cultural heritage in university libraries in Nigeria*

*RQ4.* What are the challenges of preserving women's cultural heritage in university libraries in Nigeria?

The study further explores what the librarians observe as barriers to the preservation of women's cultural heritage materials. The results of their positions are indicated in Table VI. Table VI indicates that climate is the leading barrier to preservation of women's cultural heritage materials. The respondents believe that the unfavourable tropical climate to a great extent poses a challenge to preservation of women's cultural heritage materials. This position has earlier been observed by Olatokun (2008). The tropical climate is highly humid with variable temperature and dusty air. In Table IV over 70 per cent of the respondents had noted that cleaning and dusting as well as installation of air conditioners are needed for effective preservation of these cultural heritage materials. Understandably, climatic conditions are common

Benefits of cultural heritage preservation	Frequency	%
It enhances public perception of women	50	88
It improves accessibility of women information	50	88
It improves the visibility of women	43	75
It fosters tourism	31	54
It creates opportunity for commercialisation of women's cultural heritage	30	53
It attracts more funding opportunities	27	47

**Table V.**  
Benefits of preserving women's cultural heritage in Nigerian university libraries



**Figure 3.**  
Strategies for dissemination of women's cultural heritage

**Table VI.**  
Barriers to preservation  
of women's cultural  
heritage materials

Barriers to preserving of women's cultural heritage materials	Mean item score
Unfavourable tropical climate	2.52
Belief system	2.43
Shortage of skilled manpower	2.19
Absence of collaboration among cultural institutions	2.00
Underfunding of libraries	1.98
Lack of awareness of the existence of software for digitisation of cultural heritage	1.96
Absence of preservation/cultural policy	1.96
Inadequate ICT facilities	1.85

**Notes:** 4 – to a very great extent; 3 – to a great extent; 2 – to a small extent; 1 – to a very small extent

phenomena worldwide. Experts have taken this factor into consideration in designing preservation system for libraries.

### Discussion of findings

The results indicate that non-print materials constitute an average of about 28 per cent of the forms in which cultural heritage materials for women are obtainable and preserved in the sampled libraries. This is very low and it indicates that materials on women's cultural heritage are not available in large quantities in virtual forms. This is not unusual because the libraries sampled are not special libraries devoted, primarily, to collection, preservation and dissemination of such information. Incidentally, cultural materials are domiciled in the archives of such libraries. Each of the libraries sampled in this study are leading academic libraries in Nigeria. They have established documentation and archives departments/units. Such departments/units would have a good stock of cultural heritage materials. Granted that they have such non-print cultural related information materials, the collections that are related to the female gender is very low as indicated by the results obtained in our survey. Anasi (2010) aligned with UNESCO (2004) by observing that ignorance and low level of awareness are areas to confront fundamentally when considering solutions to the problems of collection and preservation of cultural heritage information. This, logically, calls for the need to create more awareness of the need to stock such documentation and archives department/unit with more materials targeted at women's cultural heritage.

In agreement with previous studies, preservation of cultural heritage is of great benefit to the human society. On the average, over 50 per cent of the respondents in their views agreed that the following six benefits are accruable when women's cultural heritage materials are kept:

- (1) enhancement of public perception of women;
- (2) improvement in accessibility to information about women;
- (3) improvement in the visibility of women as essential contributors to the development of the society;
- (4) fostering tourism;
- (5) creating opportunity for commercialisation of women's cultural heritage; and
- (6) attracting more funding opportunities.

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The value of such recognition of the benefits derivable from the preservation of women's cultural heritage materials is the motivation and impetus it provides in pursuing further enquiries on the subject. It could also help information providers to pay attention to the issue of preservation of women's cultural heritage materials.

The study concluded that the most prominent barrier that the respondents believe could hamper the preservation of women's cultural heritage materials is the adverse tropical climatic conditions. It becomes imperative therefore that the issue of climatic conditioning is put into consideration in the preservation strategy of cultural heritage materials.

Other barriers of note that the respondents believe exert impact "to a lesser extent" are:

- belief system;
- shortage of skilled manpower;
- absence of collaboration among cultural institutions;
- underfunding of libraries;
- lack of awareness of the existence of software for digitisation of cultural heritage;
- absence of preservation/cultural policy; and
- inadequate ICT facilities.

These barriers call for developing appropriate strategies to confront them. While this study has not delved into how to confront the challenges but rather identified them, it is necessary to suggest some path to follow in ameliorating the effects of these barriers. For instance the belief system will require a sensitisation and enlightenment campaign about the value and the relevance of cultural heritage materials in national development and human progress. There is a need for capacity building to address the problem of shortage of skilled manpower to handle digitisation, use of ICT facilities and engaging policy makers in policy formulation that promotes women's cultural heritage development. Building network and collaboration system among professionals could be a focus of local and international conferences and seminars on issues related to cultural heritage information systems. Librarians should also work together with curators in order to adopt appropriate preservation strategies for cultural heritage artefacts in libraries.

This study also identified inadequate funding as a constraint to the preservation of cultural heritage resources in university libraries. This finding is not at variance with similar studies by Olatokun (2008), Anasi (2010), Akor (2010), Ovowoh and Iwhiwhu (2010) and Asogwa and Ezema (2012), and numerous others who indicated that inadequate funding is a major challenge to the preservation of library resources. However, this result is not in agreement with the assertion of the Institute for Cultural Democracy (1998) that agencies involved in cultural heritage preservation are fully supported from the federal funds. Funding is the lifeblood of university libraries. Therefore, all stakeholders should prioritise and demonstrate fiscal commitment towards the preservation of cultural heritage resources.

### **Conclusion**

This study has highlighted the issues that are of fundamental importance to an aspect of cultural heritage: the preservation of women's cultural heritage materials in



academic libraries in a developing economy like Nigeria. The study has reported that non-print materials constitute an average of about 28 per cent of the forms in which cultural heritage materials for women are obtainable and preserved in some Nigerian leading academic libraries. This figure is low, indicating that materials on women's cultural heritage are not available in large quantities in virtual forms. Consequently, there is need to create more awareness of the need to develop mechanisms to collect and preserve women's cultural heritage information materials.

Drawing from previous studies, preservation of cultural heritage is of great benefit to the human society. Our study has shown that, on average, over 50 per cent of the respondents agreed that the six benefits listed in the study are accruable when women's cultural heritage materials are collected and preserved for the purposes of information dissemination. The study concluded that the most prominent barrier that the respondents believe could hamper the preservation of women's cultural heritage materials is the adverse tropical climatic conditions. It becomes imperative therefore that appropriate environmental control is put into consideration in the preservation strategy of cultural heritage materials. There is need also for capacity building for information experts on how to develop, preserve and promote cultural heritage information that are gender related. The need to network and collaborate among information experts becomes an essential strategy in promoting women's cultural heritage information system. More so, all stakeholders should prioritise and demonstrate fiscal commitment towards the preservation of cultural heritage resources.

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