

Africa needs to do more to preserve its audio-visual heritage

According to UNESCO, 80% of audio-visual archives are endangered after five to 10 years, if they are not backed up. Most radio stations started in the 1960s and most TV stations in the 1970s. However, a great deal of what they have produced has been lost, either through lack of care or appropriate equipment or limited storage space.

Balancing Act's associate editor, Sylvain Béletre, visited INA (Institut National de l'Audiovisuel) to understand the role it can play in saving this valuable audio-visual heritage.

As the world's largest digital archive, Ina holds over 3.5 million hours of television and radio recordings, dating back to the earliest broadcasts, with a further 800 000 hours of legally deposited material added each year. Such a wealth of material is fascinating enough in itself, but INA is more than just an archive facility. INA's executive team strongly believes in making INA's collections available to the widest possible audience, whether on DVD, the Internet or, more recently, on connected TV.

Several producers and broadcaster across Africa have expressed concerns about the lack of skilled audio-visual archives technicians and availability of archives in several parts of Africa. There are several ways in which INA can help African governments, broadcasters and productions develop further and there are several examples of how it has helped African broadcasters in the past.

Benefitting from INA's expert network

INA is at the cutting-edge of research in audio-visual and digital content, conducting both national and international projects. INA, via CFI, has provided several expertise and training projects on the African continent and used various media operators including INA to assist local broadcast players.

The Inathèque de France regularly organises debates, forums, seminars and workshops on the role of the media in society, in which audio-visual researchers and other professionals take part.

Training is a strong expertise of INA. INA SUP offers a range of initial education courses, from technical degrees to Master's level and including a number of INA diplomas. INA SUP is open to foreign students. Since October 2007, INA SUP has offered two specialised courses at Master's level, approved by the Ministry of Culture and Communications. In total, it offers six postgraduate diplomas.

INA Expert today brings together professionals, students and researchers working on sound and images. It is a unique

training centre at the heart of a public audio-visual company.

Can INA be consulted to support local heritage?

Since 2004, INA has been involved in the preservation of African heritage in partnership with FIAT (International Federation of Television Archives), OIF (Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie), CIRTEF (International Council of Radio-Television of French Expression) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

CFI, with INA, has been working to protect African audio-visual heritage. INA plays an active role within a number of international professional bodies, to share and promulgate their concern, knowledge and conclusions on the subject of audio-visual heritage preservation. In Nairobi, the organisation has contributed to the project "Protecting and Promoting Archives" for public TV channels in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania as part of the Plan Images Archives.

If African producers and broadcasters need audio-visual archives to build new programmes, and if nothing is available locally, INA Mediapro, a source of audio-visual content with 500 000 hours of TV programmes, is a service that provides professionals in the audio-visual sector with remote access to INA's newsreels, sounds and images. INA has been collecting programmes from Hertzian broadcasters and from the main cable and satellite channels. INA co-produces programmes with broadcasters from all over the world, which are presented at the most prestigious festivals.

Monitoring TV news

INA Stat is a statistical tool developed by INA to monitor TV news. It provides a set of quantitative indicators on the content of the major news programmes broadcast by TV channels. By making historical comparisons, focusing on certain themes and analysing the key trends in media coverage, INA Stat continually enhances the knowledge of the national media's approach to news. This "theme-based barometer of television news" can then be published on a regular basis (in France, every quarter), as part of a national media review.

In addition, INA can support digital content storage and sales in local African centres. The organisation can help use archives for the production, programming and education purposes regionally.

INA facilitates programmes exchange, for example through the creation of a catalogue of African digital content (via the OIF project). The archives will be valued beyond the African continent. In this perspective, INA may propose archive owners to participate in its archives portal, giving them international exposure, the ability to develop the commercial exploitation of digital content, and reap commercial revenues along the lines of what was done with Afghanistan and Cambodia.

Digitising archives

A software called AIME (in French "Archivage Interactif Multimédia Evolutif") was set up and allows radio and TV platforms to digitise their archives via an inexpensive but powerful system. Today, 17 national radio-television use the AIME system.

Two areas have been highlighted by Ina experts: Training on the system, and the development of a tool for remote maintenance.

In 2013, INA has acquired a unique collection of footage shot between 2001 and 2009 by French-American documentarian Anne Aghion, during the production of her series of award-winning TV and feature films on post-genocide Rwanda. INA will digitise and enhance the archive and provide global access to some 550 tapes, making up 350 hours of footage.

INA also gave a lot of audio-visual archives to various Francophone African broadcasters over the African independences' anniversary. In 2007, for example, INA provided Algeria's EPTV with 1862 TV documents equivalent to 138 hours of programmes dating back from 1940 to 1962. INA also gave the public Algerian radio 1300 sound documents. A similar project took place with Tunisia in 2010 and so on in other countries.

OIF organised a network of a dozen leaders of audio-visual archives in Francophone Africa through the FIAT. These professionals regularly attend seminars on audio-visual archives since 2004. Countries involved are: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Gabon, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal. The network should be extended in a second phase to other countries such as: Cameroon, Togo, Burundi, Congo Kinshasa, and Chad. The project will also take into account the exchange programme funds (for TV) which gathered in Nairobi at the initiative of URTNA, now called UAR (l'Union Africaine de Radiodiffusion).

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