

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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1. INTRODUCTION

National libraries take on different forms in different countries and parts of the world (Line, 1990). The distinction between a national library and national library services is often not clear (Lor, 1997). In this chapter, the status of the National Library of South Africa (NLSA) as a national library will be confirmed before proceeding with a discussion of the history of the founding of the Library and its functions.

1.1 The NLSA: A national library?

Sylvestre (1987) cites UNESCO's definition of a national library, adopted in 1970 in Paris at its 16th General Conference:

Libraries which, irrespective of their title, are responsible for acquiring and conserving copies of all significant publications published in the country and functioning as a "deposit" library, whether by law or under other arrangements. They will also normally perform some of the following functions: produce a national bibliography; hold and keep up to date a large and representative collection of foreign literature, including books about the country; act as a national bibliographical information centre; compile union catalogues; publish the retrospective national bibliography. Libraries which may be called "national" but whose functions do not correspond to the above definition should not be placed in the "National Libraries" category.

Lor (1997) distinguishes clearly between national libraries and national library services by defining a national library as follows:

... an institution, primarily funded (directly or indirectly) by the state, which is responsible for comprehensively collecting, bibliographically recording, preserving and making available the documentary heritage (primarily published materials of all types) emanating from or relating to its country; and which furthers the effective and efficient functioning of the

country's libraries through the management of nationally significant collections, the provision of infrastructure, the coordination of activities in the country's library and information system, international liaison, and the exercise of leadership. These responsibilities are formally recognised, usually in law.



The imposing building of the National Library on the Cape Town campus.
(Courtesy of the NLSA)

According to these generally accepted definitions of a national library, the NLSA is indeed a fully-fledged national library, fulfilling national library functions. It is not a national library service with the role of a metropolitan, county, provincial or state library providing services to the general public of a specific city or town, region, province or federal state.

1.2 Origins

1.2.1 National Library of South Africa

The NLSA was formed on 1 November 1999 through the amalgamation of two existing institutions, the South African Library in Cape Town and the State Library in Pretoria, with the enactment of the National Library of South Africa Act of 1998.⁽¹⁾ The new institution came into existence through Proclamation No. R.109 of 1999 and regulations published as Government Notice No. R.1275 in the *Government Gazette*.

For historical reasons, South Africa had two national libraries prior to the amalgamation of these two institutions into the existing NLSA. Both libraries had public library functions, which they shed gradually after the unification of South Africa in 1910 as they took on the functions of national libraries (Westra & Zaaiman, 1991).

1.2.2 South African Library, Cape Town

The South African Library in Cape Town, the oldest cultural institution and the oldest library in the country, was established in 1818 by the Governor of the Cape Colony as the South African Public Library. The proceeds of a newly introduced tax on wine were used to finance the library, which opened its doors to the public in 1822. The core of the book stock had, in the previous century, belonged to an official of the Dutch East India Company, Joachim Von Dessin. The collection consisted of about 4500 volumes covering theology, law, medicine, philosophy, mathematics, natural history, geography and philology (Westra & Zaaiman, 1991).

1.2.3 State Library, Pretoria

The State Library in Pretoria was founded in 1887 by the Transvaal Government as a result of a donation of books from the Netherlands, with the view to advancing the use of the Dutch language. In 1893, it adopted the role of a local public library and added English books to its collections. It became a repository library for the publications of the United States Federal Government in 1898 (*Informat*, 1987; Westra & Zaaiman, 1991).

2. NATIONAL LIBRARIES: 1931–1985

The State Library became a state-aided institution in terms of Government Notice No. 66 of 1933.⁽²⁾ The administration of the South African Library under this Act commenced only in 1954, when the State-Aided Institutions Amendment Act of 1954 declared it subject to the provisions of the State-Aided Institutions Act of 1931, after it had initially been excluded. The South African Public Library Act of 1893 was repealed at the same time.

1 A list of the details of Acts and Notices referred to is given at the end of the chapter.

2 This section draws on Lor (1987).

The National Conference of Library Authorities held in 1962 suggested that the status of the two national libraries be enacted, and that they be appropriately funded to enable them to fulfil their functions. In 1964, the Coordinating Committee of the National Libraries submitted to the Department of Education, Arts and Science the request to draft a national library Act and identified points to be included in such an Act. A Subcommittee on National Libraries of the National Library Advisory Council (NLAC) carried out an investigation and recommended statutory status for the national library, which would be established through a national library Act.

However, an Act of this kind was not promulgated and the national libraries were instead grouped with other cultural institutions. In terms of the Cultural Institutions Act of 1969, later amended by the Cultural Institutions Amendment Act of 1974, the South African Library, the State Library and the South African Library for the Blind became corporate bodies, known as “declared institutions”. Each was controlled by a council appointed by the Minister of National Education.

There were both advantages and disadvantages for the national libraries to be grouped with cultural institutions. The disadvantages included limited autonomy; subjection to departmental and governmental bureaucracy; the homogenous treatment of, and inappropriate funding formulas for the highly heterogeneous institutions by the government; and government officials’ lack of understanding of the different needs of the institutions.

Thus the search for legislation for a national library continued. In 1973, the NLAC’s Coordinating Committee of the National Libraries urged the Department of Education to take action. The Minister subsequently appointed a Subcommittee on National Libraries to investigate the national libraries. The Subcommittee recommended the development of a national library structure that would clarify the role of the national libraries, and the inception of a statutory council that would coordinate and plan library and information services (LIS) and serve as a funding agency. In 1976 the Coordinating Committee suggested that the directors of the South African Library and the State Library compile a memorandum requesting a national library Act that would establish the national libraries as a statutory body.

In 1981, the Department of National Education requested the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) to undertake a scientific investigation into the aims, functions, organisation and required personnel structure for the South African Library and the State Library, and their relationship with a proposed library and information network for South Africa. The investigation did not lead to the drafting of a new Act, although the Cultural Institutions Act was amended to provide for the establishment of an advisory committee to advise the Minister on matters related to the South African Library, the State Library and the South African Library for the Blind.

In 1982, the new State Library Council identified a number of key issues and problems facing the State Library and pointed out the necessity of a national library Act. Although the Council was primarily concerned with the needs of the State Library, the issues also applied to the South African Library.

The State Library Council was then requested by the Minister of National Education to draft a national library Act. The draft went through a long process of negotiation between the Advisory Committee on the National Libraries (ACNL), the councils of the

two national libraries, the National Advisory Council for Libraries and Information (NACLI) and a newly constituted ACNL. After protracted deliberations and consultation processes, the national libraries jointly submitted draft legislation to the Department of National Education for tabling in and passing through Parliament.

3. NATIONAL LIBRARIES ACT OF 1985

The National Libraries Act was published in May 1985, albeit incorrectly, and reprinted correctly a few days later in the *Government Gazette* (Lor, 1987). It became effective in 1987 with the declaration of the two libraries as national libraries (Westra & Zaaiman, 1991).

Both national libraries focused more on national library functions after their public library functions were taken over by the respective municipalities of Cape Town in 1954 and Pretoria in 1964. Their status and the national library functions they fulfilled were formalised and enacted with the promulgation of the National Libraries Act of 1985 (Westra & Lor, 1993).

Both libraries became statutory bodies, each under the control of a board appointed by the Minister of National Education. The Minister appointed the NLAC – consisting of an independent chairman and representatives of the two boards – to advise him, and to facilitate the coordination and assignment of functions between the two libraries. The Act mandated the national libraries to “promote the rendering of information services to the population of the Republic by collecting, preserving and making accessible published and unpublished material” (Westra & Lor, 1993).

The 1987 Schedule to the National Libraries Act assigned some primary functions and responsibilities to each library and indicated which similar tasks were to be performed at both libraries. The South African Library served as the national reference and preservation library, having been a legal deposit library for the Cape of Good Hope since 1873 and for South Africa since 1916. It had the most complete collection of material published in or about South Africa, original manuscripts and iconographic material relating to local history and culture. The Library also held valuable material and collections not directly related to South Africa, including mediaeval and Renaissance manuscripts, incunabula and other rare and unique material. Based on the unique collections, the South African Library compiled retrospective bibliographies, such as the South African Bibliography (SABIB) to the year 1925. The Library was designated to act as the national preservation library and render a restoration service countrywide (Westra & Lor, 1993; Westra & Zaaiman, 1991).

The State Library in Pretoria served as the national lending library and centre for southern African and international interlending. It compiled various bibliographic tools to facilitate access to its own and national library collections, such as the Joint Catalogue of Monographs (JCM), Periodicals in Southern African Libraries (PISAL), the Index to South African Periodicals (ISAP) and the South African National Bibliography (SANB). It also compiled the Directory of Southern African Libraries and a directory of South African publishers.

As part of its collection function, the State Library extended its coverage of the national book stock through the purchase of materials not received on legal deposit and through international exchange agreements.



The National Library of South Africa holds many unique collections, among other things, photo albums, photographs and prints dating back to the 1850s.



Bound volumes of the large newspaper collection held by the NLSA.

(Both photographs by courtesy of the NLSA)

An example is the continuation of the agreement entered into with the United States Federal Government in 1898, thus building up an extensive and valuable collection of foreign official documents. The State Library maintained the Southern African Book Exchange Centre (SABEC), which is the national centre for the redistribution of surplus books and journals (Westra & Lor, 1993; Westra & Zaaiman, 1991).

Both libraries maintained reference libraries open to the general public for research purposes, and shared the responsibility for newspaper and periodical preservation through a programme of preservation microfilming the legal deposit collections. Both libraries maintained liaison with other institutions in and outside South Africa (Westra & Lor, 1993).

Funding for the two national libraries has never been adequate. A subsidy formula implemented by the government to determine the grant payable to the libraries brought some financial stability but did not enable them to plan for growth and development (Westra & Lor, 1993). The budgetary constraint limited the ability of the libraries to purchase books and journals to supplement the collections obtained through legal deposit (Lor, 1998).

4. NATIONAL LIBRARY SERVICES IN SOUTH AFRICA

National library services were established in the late 1970s and early 1980s as part of South Africa's homelands policy for the four independent homelands and six territories at the time (Lor, 1990; 1992). The national library services were structured from 1977 to 1983 according to an organisational plan developed by staff of the Library Services Division of the Department of National Education in the homelands of Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, Gazankulu, KaNgwane, KwaNdebele,⁽³⁾ KwaZulu, Lebowa, Qwaqwa, Transkei and Venda. The plan, later known as the "Vink-Frylinck model", resulted from an investigation into the establishment of library services in Transkei (Lor, 1990; Vink & Frylinck, 1978).

It was envisaged that these library services would serve as central libraries from which all library services for the homelands would be delivered and managed. In addition to building up complete collections of the publications published in the area, preserving the collections and compiling the union catalogue for the area, the libraries would also purchase and process books centrally for public and school libraries, as well as provide services to the legislative assembly (Vink & Frylinck, 1978).

These libraries were, however, mostly very poorly funded and understaffed, seldom properly housed and lacked the collections required to deliver good library services. They were further impeded by a lack of clarity on their role and functions, with some trying to perform both the functions of a conventional national library in a First World country and the functions of a national library service in a developing country (Lor, 1990; 1992).

The State Library in Pretoria was instrumental in founding the Conference of National Librarians of Southern Africa (CNLSA). It provided secretarial service to the CNLSA in order to help meet the perceived need for cooperation and sharing of exper-

³ The legislation for KwaNdebele was not promulgated. With the passing of the National Library of South Africa Act 1998, the Acts for the other nine homelands were all repealed.

tise among national librarians and the librarians of the national library services of the then self-governing states and homelands of South Africa, as well as neighbouring countries like Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. It aimed at promoting the enactment and enforcement of national library legislation where required, and to safeguard, protect and advance the interests of national libraries in southern Africa. Annual conferences were held in different locations to stimulate regional development (Westra & Zaaiman, 1991).

With the changed political dispensation in South Africa after 1994, and the formation of new provinces after the reincorporation of the homelands and self-governing states as part of the country, the national libraries were either dissolved or became part of the new provincial structures. The libraries had mostly been small and inadequately funded, staffed, accommodated and provided for, and the laws that had established them were all repealed with the establishment of the NLSA.

5. WORKING GROUP ON THE NATIONAL LIBRARIES

In the period before 1994, which brought about major political changes and resulted in the country's first democratically elected government, the South African library and information sector had been under scrutiny both from the sector itself and from the government.⁽⁴⁾ Various professional groups discussed and debated new roles for libraries in the development of the country and its peoples, the restructuring of existing library services and the need to redress the imbalances of the past in the provision of such services (Arts and Culture Task Group, 1995).

In 1996, the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) initiated a review of all the legislation it administered, including the National Libraries Act of 1985. The Minister appointed the Working Group on the National Libraries of South Africa (WGNL) to advise on how the national libraries could facilitate access to information, and provide information nationally and internationally in order to support growth and development in a cost-effective, efficient manner.

The brief to the WGNL was to clarify the role of the two national libraries in the information society and the impact of information and communication technology (ICT) and its utilisation in service delivery. The Minister requested the WGNL to advise him on the need for, and the vision, mission, functions, programmes, structures and resources of the national libraries. In addition, the possible inclusion of the South African Library for the Blind in a new structure was to be considered.

The WGNL submitted a report to the Minister in 1997. The first part of the report examined the role and value of libraries and related information agencies in South Africa, with special reference to developmental goals and why there should be a national library. The WGNL came to the conclusion that the functions of the then two national libraries could not readily be taken over by any other institution, and that a single national library was preferable to two separate institutions. It proposed that there should be a single national library, known as the National Library of South Africa, composed of the existing two national libraries.

⁴ This section draws largely on WGNL (1998).

The report also examined the functions and structures of the proposed NLSA, and models for the division of responsibilities, governance, resources and ICT. The investigation was seen as a golden opportunity to rectify the longstanding structural anomaly in the South African LIS, namely the existence of two separate national libraries.

What was needed was a process of rationalisation and transformation to create a new institution that could respond to the challenges of strategic trends at the time, such as establishing a new culture of access to information and service delivery to all South Africans and recognising information as a unique strategic resource. South Africa needed to reposition its national library as a leading institution and major role-player in the development of an informed people towards a full information society.

The WGNL concluded, and advised accordingly, that the National Libraries Act of 1985 should be amended to provide for the establishment of the proposed single, new NLSA, incorporating the two existing national libraries, to function as a statutory institution associated with the DACST. The WGNL recommended that, at that stage, the South African Library for the Blind should not be incorporated with the NLSA, as it had not been examined to the same extent that the two national libraries had been studied with a view to transformation.

The WGNL recommended that the South African Library for the Blind be established as a national library service for blind and print-handicapped readers, and that it should no longer be administered through the Cultural Institutions Act of 1969, as the cultural sector was not the appropriate environment for this library to provide a national library service. It was suggested that the South African Library for the Blind be accommodated through a separate Act.



Architect's rendering of the interior of the new building for the NLSA in Pretoria.

(Courtesy of the NLSA and Jeremy Malan Architects and Interiors)

The investigation into the role and status of the national libraries was seen as a strategic opportunity for aligning the national library with new needs; for developing a new vision to help create a culture of access to information and service delivery to all South Africans; and for recognising information as a unique strategic resource.

The WGNL also advised the establishment of the National Council for Library and Information Services (NCLIS). The report concluded with the estimated cost of amalgamation and of improved use of ICT to create opportunities for access to all citizens, and to redress the imbalances of the past in respect of access to information.

6. NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SOUTH AFRICA, 1999–

The National Library of South Africa Act of 1998 became effective on 1 November 1999. After consultation with the board of the new institution, composed of members of the boards of the two national libraries prior to the amalgamation, the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology determined that the office of the national librarian would be located in Pretoria. The two sites in Cape Town and Pretoria were maintained and are called campuses. The Centre for the Book, a special project of the Library, remained based in Cape Town (NLSA, 2001).

The NLSA is a juristic person and its affairs are controlled by a board consisting of members appointed by the Minister of Arts and Culture.⁽⁵⁾ Governance is vested in the board, with the national librarian as chief executive officer. The functions of the NLSA are performed through six core programmes headed by the deputy national librarian. Support to the line functions is provided by sections for finance, human resources, development and marketing, and ICT (NLSA, 2001).

The NLSA is funded through subsidies appropriated by Parliament. The Library may increase its income through loans (with prior permission from the Department), donations, contributions, fees, royalties, revenue obtained from the sale of certain services and products, and interest earned on investments.

The role of the NLSA as prescribed by the Act is:

... to contribute to socio-economic, cultural, educational, scientific and innovative development by collecting, recording, preserving and making available the national documentary heritage and promoting awareness and appreciation thereof, by fostering information literacy, and by facilitating access to the world's information resources.

The National Library Act sets out the functions of the National Library very clearly. The Library is tasked to:

- build up a complete collection of published documents emanating from, or relating to, South Africa;
- maintain and extend any other collections of published and unpublished documents, with the emphasis on documents emanating from, and relating to, southern Africa;
- promote the optimal management of collections of published documents held in South African libraries as a national resource;

⁵ This Department evolved from the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology.

- supplement the national resource with selected documents;
- record the documents acquired;
- render a national bibliographic service and act as the national bibliographic agency;
- promote optimal access to published documents, nationally and internationally;
- provide reference and information services, nationally and internationally;
- act as the national preservation library and provide conservation services on a national basis;
- promote awareness and appreciation of the national published documentary heritage;
- promote information awareness and information literacy;
- provide appropriate information products and services;
- provide leadership, guidance and coordination in cooperation with other LIS;
- undertake planning and coordination in cooperation with other LIS;
- present, in consultation and cooperation with appropriate educational institutions and professional bodies, courses of training and education relating to the functions it performs;
- undertake research and development; and
- liaise with libraries and other institutions in and outside South Africa.

The main focus of the Pretoria campus is collection development, bibliographic services, interlending and the management of the Southern African Interlending Scheme (SAIS). The Cape Town campus has as its main tasks the promotion of heritage and information, provision of information services and preservation of heritage collections.

At the second reading of the National Library of South Africa Bill of 1998, the Minister indicated that the new institution would be transformed to respond adequately to the information needs of all South Africans. It would have to adapt to changes brought about by the new information technology and emphasise functions related to the national heritage and nation-building (Mtshali, 1999).

6.1 Vision and focus

As part of the strategic planning process to best position the NLSA in a changing South Africa and the developing information world, staff of the Library embarked on a process of discussions to decide jointly on the vision of the NLSA.

The Library is seen as “the leading national library and information centre of excellence in Africa and the rest of the world”. The staff formulated its role as that of the primary resource for, and custodian of, South Africa’s published information heritage. The Library unlocks the past through preserving and providing access to its collections, and creates future riches in published material through the Centre for the Book by promoting the writing, publishing, reading, marketing and distribution of South African books.

The Library is regarded by the South African government as a key partner in promoting heritage and information awareness, preserving and making available rare and fragile South African and African information resources, and supporting a knowledge infrastructure in which South African citizens and partners in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) can be empowered to develop and flourish.



Handling rare books with great care at the NLSA.
(Courtesy of the NLSA)

At this stage the NLSA faces two major challenges:

- transformation of the NLSA into a cohesive and productive provider of information services relating to the national South African information heritage; and
- translation of its societal role into meaningful and relevant services and processes, which are then institutionalised through appropriate delivery mechanisms and funding.

Funding remains a major problem and challenge. The NLSA has to invest heavily in its staff and ICT to drive its processes and improve its services to reach its users worldwide. The government subsidy is insufficient for the NLSA to fulfil its basic functions. The Library is continuously attempting to increase its funding through sponsorships, grants and donor money. Strong support was obtained to fund and provide grants to develop a consortium of legal deposit libraries; to supply the new building with excellent research and information collections; to build up good collections of material published in southern Africa; and to install state-of-the-art ICT in the new building currently under construction in Pretoria (NLSA, 2006; 2007).

6.2 Accommodation

Neither of the two campuses has ever been accommodated in buildings specifically designed around the needs of a national library. The historical building of the Cape Town campus was thoroughly renovated and refurbished in the late 1980s to accommodate the changing needs of users. It is, however, too small and additional storage space had to be obtained to house the ever-growing collections (Westra & Lor, 1993).



Architect's model of the new building for the National Library of South Africa in Pretoria.
(Courtesy of the NLSA and Jeremy Malan Architects and Interiors)

Over the years, the Pretoria campus has been housed in several buildings, none of which were ever intended for specific use as a national library. This has resulted in damage to the collections and impediments to service delivery as a result of distances between buildings and inadequate climatic control. Numerous attempts were made to obtain appropriate accommodation for the State Library before it became the NLSA (Westra & Lor, 1993).

A new building is currently under construction to accommodate the Pretoria campus and the National Library Head Office. Due for completion in December 2007, it will provide the library with 14 700 square metres of purpose-built space and will accommodate 1800 seats and provide for 20 years of growth, with extension possibilities (NLSA, 2006).

6.3 Legal deposit at the NLSA

South Africa has had some or other form of legal deposit since 1842, when the British Copyright Act was made applicable to the entire British Empire. From 1982, South African legal deposit legislation designated the two former national libraries and three other libraries (the Bloemfontein Public Library,⁽⁶⁾ the Natal Society Library⁽⁷⁾ in Pietermaritzburg, and the Library of Parliament in Cape Town) as legal deposit libraries. They were entitled to receive from the publishers, free of charge, a copy of every

6 Now known as Mangaung Library Services.

7 Now called the Msunduzi Municipal Library.

book, serial, newspaper, government publication or other printed item published in South Africa (Kellerman, 1995). Extensive collections of material of great scholarly value have been built up in the legal deposit libraries and especially in the former national libraries (Lor, 2000).

The new, modern Legal Deposit Act of 1997 came into effect in 1998 and extended the scope of the legislation to materials other than books and printed materials, such as audio-visual, broadcast and electronic media and certain imported publications. The legislation includes the National Film, Video and Sound Archives as a place of legal deposit and provides for the institution of Official Publications Depositories and for depositories for material requiring special expertise.

The Legal Deposit Committee, appointed by the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (now the Minister of Arts and Culture), is tasked with the responsibility to coordinate and promote the implementation of the Act. It advises the Minister and makes recommendations on matters relating to legal deposit (Lor, 2000).

6.4 Partnerships and the leadership role of the NLSA

The NLSA plays a leadership role in the southern African LIS sector. The State Library was a founding member of the South African Bibliographic and Information Network (Sabinet) and the major contributor to the union catalogues forming the basis of the Sabinet library databases (*Informat*, 1987).

According to the Articles of Association, the national librarian was initially an ex officio member of the board of Sabinet. This was later changed, but Sabinet subsequently decided to reappoint the national librarian to the board (Späth, 2007). The national librarian serves on the NCLIS and on the Legal Deposit Committee.

The NLSA is the bibliographic agency for South Africa through the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) service it renders to publishers (*Informat*, 1987). It compiles the SANB and is the official authority for South African names in the Online Computer Library Centre (OCLC). The NLSA enables the sharing of resources among 600 members in the southern African region through the management of SAIS.

The NLSA is currently involved in a project to assist the National Library and Archives of Mali to preserve some historic African scholarship manuscripts that have survived; to provide preservation training and technical support; and to assist in the development of conservation facilities in a new building under construction in Timbuktu. This project serves as a pilot cultural project for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), a ministerial initiative led by the Minister in the Office of the Presidency and the Deputy Minister of Arts and Culture.

The NLSA has built relationships with national libraries in England, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia and Malaysia to share in the wealth of experience of these well-established national libraries. It has entered into agreements or discussions with national libraries in Iran, Cuba, Korea and China to share expertise and resources, and to benefit from training opportunities (NLSA, 2006; 2007).

6.5 Leadership in the National Library

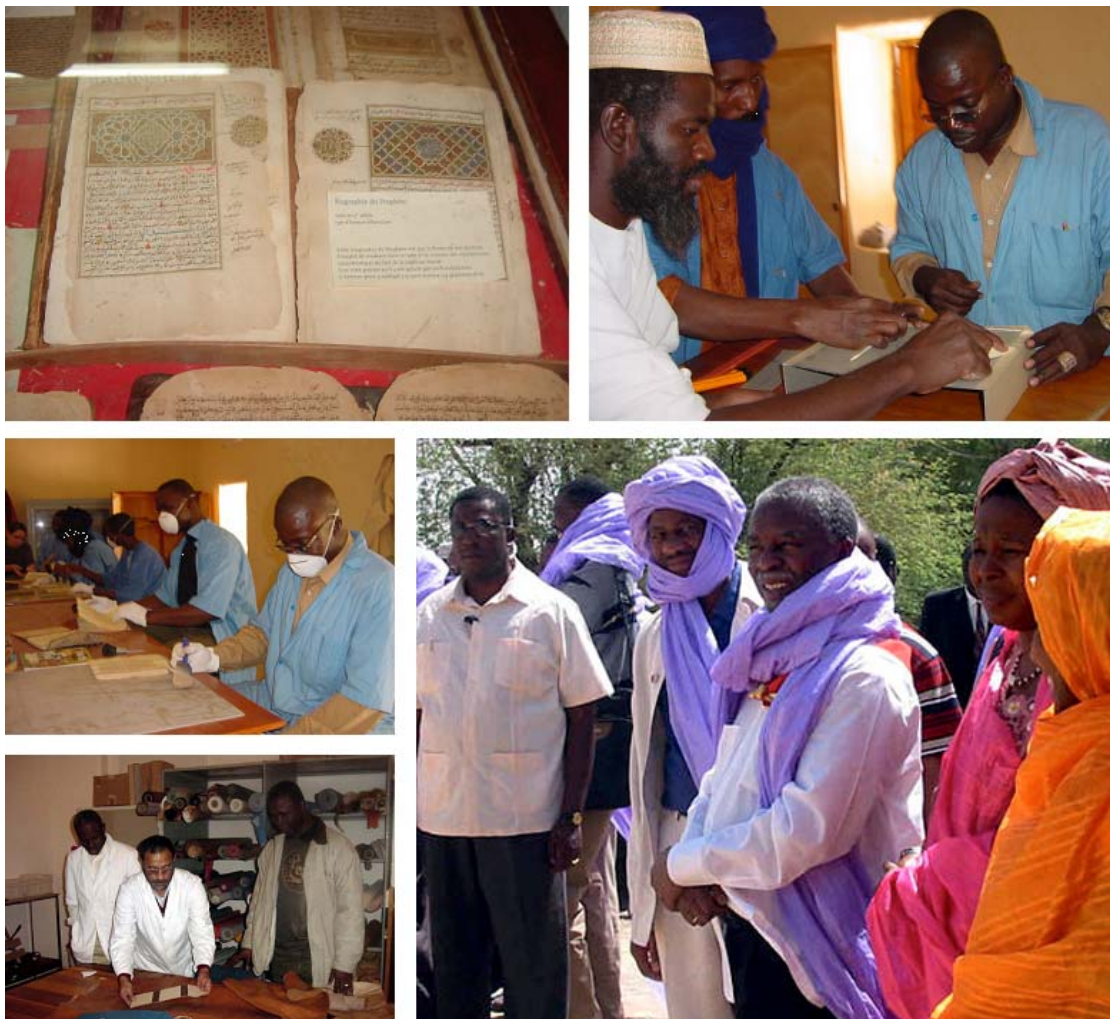
The State Library and the South African Library, the predecessors of the NLSA, had notable leadership. Some of the prominent librarians were Matthew M. Stirling, State Li-

brarian from 1931 to 1957, Hans J. Aschenborn (1965–1986) and Reginald B. Zaaïman (1987–1991).

Under the leadership of Aschenborn, first as assistant director and later as director, the State Library played a leading role in the establishment of the inter-library loan system, standardisation and bibliographic description at national and international level, the founding of Sabinet, and the implementation of the ISBN system and micrographic standards in South Africa (*Informat*, 1986).

Zaaïman continued the outreach activities of the State Library and paved the way for strategic planning for the national libraries in a rapidly changing environment. Under the leadership of Piet Westra as director of the South African Library (1981–1998), the Centre for the Book was founded to promote books, authorship, reading and literacy.

Peter Lor, director of the State Library and the first national librarian (1992–2003) after the amalgamation of the two libraries, was actively involved in the creation of the new institution. He played a leading role in the Arts and Culture Task Group, the WGNL and the formulation of legislation for the new institution, legal deposit and NCLIS.



Preserving priceless ancient Timbuktu manuscripts in the South African–Mali presidential project following on President Thabo Mbeki's state visit to Mali in 2001.

(Courtesy of the NLSA)

As the first national librarian, Lor's vision for the new NLSA was embodied in three strategic directions (Lor, 2001):

- The NLSA would hold a mirror to the nation to promote nation-building through access to the nation's published documentary heritage.
- The NLSA would serve the people of South Africa by building a bridge from the past to the present information society and thus raise information awareness.
- It would level the information playing field to ensure equitable access to southern African information resources.

The current national librarian, John K. Tsebe, continues to reaffirm the NLSA as a key partner in the government's initiatives and a supporter of national imperatives, such as the improvement of the social and economic infrastructure of South Africa, human resource development, enterprise development and poverty alleviation. The NLSA supports these government imperatives through continuous efforts to ensure equitable access to southern African information resources in South Africa and the SADC countries.

The NLSA hosted seminars on the preservation of, and access to newspapers and the use of information as a strategic resource in Africa's development. The NLSA pursues its vision to be the "leading national library and information centre for excellence in Africa [through] partnerships across traditional professional/public sector partnerships and through fully leveraging the investment opportunities which exist" (NLSA, 2006; 2007).

7. THE NLSA INTO THE FUTURE

The NLSA's future focus will be on transforming its services and products to position itself as a vehicle for socio-economic upliftment in the South African and southern African context. The NLSA identifies meaningful services, processes and delivery mechanisms to transform itself proactively through a fundamental review of structures, and to increase its visibility and influence in the LIS and information heritage sector.

The NLSA has embarked on a process of institutionalising an operational planning process; reviewing its products and services portfolio with a view to costing and valuing them fully; and reshaping the portfolio through partnerships, retirement, renewal and acquisition. A new NLSA human resource strategy is being developed according to LIS best practice to enable the Library to play the leadership role entrusted to it (NLSA, 2006; 2007).

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