



LVI Conference 2017 - Abstract

Sustainability of Open Access to Law Initiatives: “The African Law e-Library”

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1. Background

Most initiatives on the continent to capture Africa’s legal knowledge by bringing it online are either country or thematic focused, supporting technology and financing remain a challenge for the sustainability of more than 90% of them.

In 2013 the African Innovation Foundation (AIF) had launched the ongoing “African Law e-Library” (ALL) to facilitate access to legal information for ordinary people in Africa and the Diaspora through an online portal. ALL system as implemented is registration free and provides full text documents, downloadable and printable, searchable by subjects, keywords, country, type of document, free-of-charge. Documents are available in their original languages (e.g. English, Afrikaans, Amharic, French, Portuguese or Arabic). The underlying technology is a mix of proprietary development and open source digital asset management software. AIF now aims to change the current ALL system to an open software repository enabling partner governments and institutions, as content providers, to make their legal information available publicly under in sub-domain portals under a federated view, this without the need to invest massive budgets.

For the first time ever, any governmental or institutional content providers on the continent will control the full process of bringing legal knowledge online, the related spending and tap into the sophisticated networks within a unique self-serve platform.

2. What an open source approach brings

- Provide a one-stop-shop digital repository of African legal information (legislation, case law, treaties, international instruments and legal scholarships)
- Enable African countries who want to bring their legal information online and contribute to the preservation of African legal knowledge
- Create an essential resource for legal Information, for legal practitioners, jurists, the public and for civil society (in Africa and beyond)

Database: Provision of federated views of data and content, with sub-domain filtering to allow countries or institutions to have their own portals within the main portal. Source code available on a public version control repository, free of licensing or upgrade costs. Offline software mechanism that can work on a partner’s computer without requiring a constant connection to the internet.



- Contributors:* Full access to source code to make oversight, for easy review, and also open the possibility of contributions from the wider community
- Partners:* Active engagement and ability to manage the content independently in a sub-domain database
- Documents:* High level classification by type for clearer documents differentiation. Open formats to adapt to the many publication formats including richer semantic XML based formats; Digitally signed documents for the credibility of information published online
- Metadata:* Inter-connected semantic and multilingual metadata on Akoma-Ntoso standard for dynamic groupings based on user's interpretation or saved customized search

3. Building diversified funding sources and champions base

- Government, including the judiciary
- International development agencies
- Law societies
- Business sector
- NGOs
- Private donations
- University grants