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World Bank virtual tools and learning program on archives and records management in development

Elisa Liberatori Prati, Susan O'Neill Johnson , and Andrés McAlister

The World Bank
1818 H St., NW
Washington, DC 20433-002
E-mail: Sjohnson3@worldbank.org

Abstract:

As part of its commitment to transparency and to making development knowledge available, The World Bank is opening its own, unique archives to public access for items that are 20 years old or more, pending Board approval. The entire Archives contains over 135,000 cubic feet of development information related to World Bank Group member countries dating from 1946 to the present. As archives of a development institution, the World Bank has put in place a Learning Program to promote good governmental archival practices. These practices are essential in fighting poverty and corruption, and building transparent public administration practices.

Founded in 1944, the World Bank Group is the world's largest source of development assistance. The Bank, which provides loans to its client countries, brings a mix of finance and ideas to improve living standards and eliminate the worst forms of poverty. As part of its commitment to transparency and to making development knowledge available, the World Bank is about to open its own archives to public access for items that are 20 years old or more, pending Board approval.

The half century old World Bank Archives is a rich source of information on more than one hundred economies (both developed and developing) since 1947--the year the Bank made its first loan. The Archives holds 135,000 cubic feet of original source material dealing with development issues--from general country files to lending project files, from economic reports and sector studies to non-textual records such as photographs and films related to development projects, and oral history interviews. The Archives also represents the Bank's corporate memory. It explains what it has done and why. It documents the Bank's successes and its failures and its complex relationships with clients and partners.

The Bank first established a separate Records Center (which became the Archives) for older documents and records in 1969--after operating 23 years. The Archives maintains two repositories, one at headquarters in Washington D.C., and another in western Pennsylvania, a five hour drive from headquarters. The headquarters' repository--where most of the Archives' 25 staff are located--hosts the reading room. This repository has space for about 11,000 cubic feet of material. The repository in Pennsylvania is much larger, underground, and is in leased space in a former limestone mine (alkali-buffered walls!). Currently, the leased space of 45,000 square feet holds over 120,000 cubic feet of records. The Bank has five full-time staff employed at the "mine", and an overnight courier service can ship up to 42 cubic feet of records daily in either direction. Generally, Bank staff find that documents requested by 2 p.m. are available at headquarters the next morning.

The Archives went on-line in 1998, and built the Archives website in 1999. Designed by Clive D. Smith, the World Bank Group Archivist, and produced by MadWolf Technologies, the Archives site contains a catalog of the holdings of the World Bank Archives in variable levels of detail, and enables the user to search for material relating to topics of interest. Comprehensive search tips, and information about how to use the Bank's archival resources are provided. The need for an on-line catalog was highlighted by the Archives Advisory Board, first funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, in its first meeting in early 1998 in view of the possible opening to wide public access that was first discussed at that time. The nature of our institution, which operates in more than 100 countries--and consequently of the archival collections--makes it imperative that we provide solid preliminary information on our holdings to a wide range of remote users who are unable to come to our headquarters to access the Archives.

The catalog provides descriptions of records at several levels: organizational unit, record series, file, item (or file volume), and report (or document). Included in the catalog, but searched separately, are summaries of oral history interviews. The catalog is populated with metadata drawn from our main internal database that was created for management of current records and archives. Consequently, the descriptions, originally composed for the use of the professional records and archives staff only, are uneven in quality, and may be obscure to researchers. Work is ongoing to enhance the descriptions and make them more meaningful for public use, but we decided to make them available now with the view that *some* information is better than *none*. We are also working to make the catalog search options more user-friendly, and are adding a browse function. We hope that future enhancements will include links to the catalog from other related Bank databases on the internet (such as the database of Bank development projects, World Development Sources), and links from the catalog to the full text of documents and publications where these are available online. We would also like to include a means of requesting copies of documents or more information at the click of a button. We welcome any feedback! The on-line catalog is at: <http://archives.worldbank.org> .

To raise awareness, for advocacy, and to improve communication, the Archives Learning Program is offered on the same website as the on-line catalog. This activity is consistent with

efforts sustained by the Archives for the past three years between the institution and its client countries. When the users get to the website homepage, they are immediately given a snapshot on the full range of products the Archives offers in addition to the catalog: from exhibits to a oral history program, from details on the Learning Program to proposed future initiatives such as the Archives of Development. Since the website was launched, the monthly visits have grown from the initial 3,000 (registered in April 2000) to the current average of 7,500 (registered from October 2000 on).

The Learning Program is a side-activity to the opening of the Bank's Archives and is targeted to managers of development projects in the Bank and in the countries. The message conveyed by the Learning Program is that good governmental archival practices are essential in fighting poverty, corruption and building democratic public administration practices. The Program's objective is to advocate the inclusion of archives and records management components in civil service reform, decentralization, legal/judicial reform, tax policy and administration, public expenditure analysis and management, and anticorruption and governance projects—all thematic areas identified by the Bank Poverty Reduction Network (PREM) in their sector strategy in operations. Accordingly, the Learning Program offers a range of learning opportunities on the impact of current records and historical archives on economic and social development. We also offer checklists to evaluate records management capacity at the country and agency level.

On June 6, 2000, the first multi-site video-conference workshop for Africa on archives and records management, poverty reduction, and corruption control took place as part of the Learning Program. The workshop inaugurated the Global Distance Learning Network classrooms in Ghana, Tanzania, and Uganda. It provided a forum for high-level civil service officials, World Bank task managers, senior managers, anti-corruption specialists, and the International Records Management Trust, to share their views and exchange experiences on archives and records management as key tools in development strategies. The Bank is currently implementing the recommendations made by the workshop participants to further develop the Learning Program. Proceedings of the workshop are available in our website (Learning Program, What's New page) at <http://archives.worldbank.org>. The Archives--in partnership with the Poverty Reduction Network--has just presented a proposal for a five-year follow-up program to the Grant Facility of the Bank ("Evidence based governance in the electronic age").

The Learning Program, under World Bank coordination, is a joint collaboration between the World Bank, the International Council on Archives (ICA) in Paris, the International Records Management Trust (IRMT) in London, the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) in Rome, and the Fundación Histórica Tavera in Madrid. The official approval of the partnership by the World Bank Managing Director in February this year has given the program high level institutional endorsement. The Learning Program is available at: <http://archives.worldbank.org>.

Right now, researchers may conduct a preliminary search in the on-line catalog, contact the World Bank Archives, and come to Washington to work on Archives material in the Reading Room. They will receive assistance locating further information from the team there. However, more detailed finding aids are needed in the catalog before researchers can know exactly what is contained in the Archives by using the on-line catalog. Until that happens, researchers will be assisted by the archivist in finding out what material is available. We are also considering the possibility of digitizing on demand and providing online access. We are now collaborating with students from local universities. They will work in the Archives this summer and fall. They will each complete a paper on contents of the Archives in the sector they select. This paper will be placed on the web site as a guide for other researchers.

The access to data from the past contained in the Archives has emerged as a principal need from sector specialists in academia. Special emphasis will be placed on holdings which contain data sets. The old data sets can now be looked at from a different perspective. Special notes indicating data contained in the Archive will be placed in the finding aids.

Once the finding aids have been enhanced, a faculty team would manage approaches to having students develop research projects for credit. The projects results would be more predictable thanks to the finding tools. In addition to the student-researchers idea, George Washington University Global Management and Research School of Business and Public Management has expressed interest in putting together a consortium of local universities to do research in the Archives. The consortium would be one way to access the Archives for these institutions, but it would not be restrictive. It is also hoped that funds can be identified to provide some subsidies for interns and graduate students in the future to do substantive research in the Archives, in collaboration with World Bank specialists.

In conclusion, we invite you to visit our web site, <http://archives.worldbank.org>, and to contact Elisa Liberatori Prati, eliberatoriprati@worldbank.org. We enthusiastically look forward to having researchers and students come to the Archives in Washington D.C., to pursue research and study on a short or long term basis. This vast resource of the history of development is unique in the world. We are interested in collaborating with universities and research institutes in publishing research from the Archives, and welcome your ideas.