

AVIN: Jamaica's Solution to Memorialising its Cultural Patrimony

Maureen Webster-Prince, National Library of Jamaica

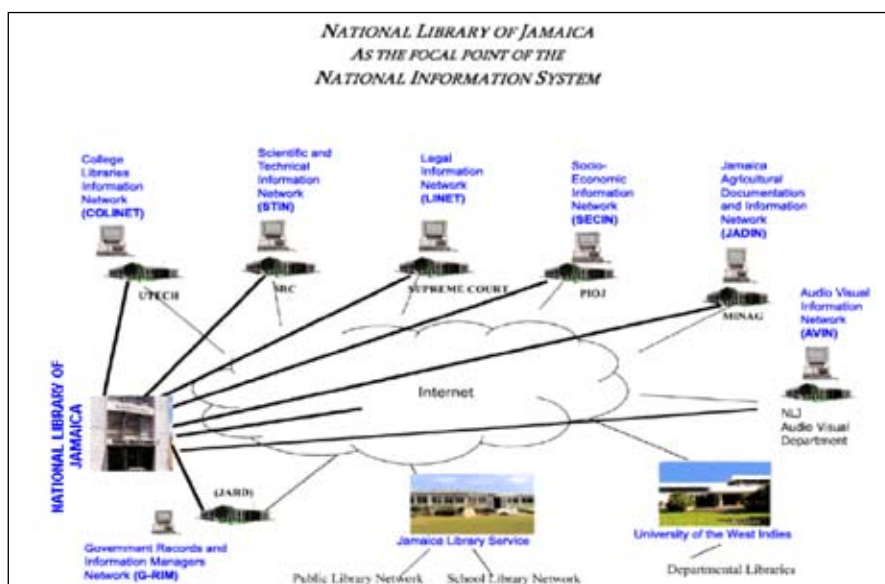
The National Library of Jamaica (NLJ), which was established in 1979, is the Government Agency that has the responsibility for coordinating the National Information System (NATIS). Formerly, this function was carried out by the National Council on Libraries, Archives and Information Systems (NACOLAIS) which was formally dissolved in September 1999. At the time of this dissolution, the Government allocated the functions of NACOLAIS to a number of ministries and agencies. The National Library was given the responsibility to:

Coordinate and advise the Government on the continued development of an integrated National Information System" in order "to ensure the orderly growth and development of the Networks which comprise the NATIS.

Collaborate with the Jamaica Archives and Records Department to develop policies and standards for proper management of information resources in the new electronic environment" in order "to ensure standardization and authenticity.

In fulfilling its responsibilities as the focal point of NATIS, the NLJ has undertaken various developmental activities, including the management of an Advisory Committee for the National Information System (ACNIS). This Committee has quarterly meetings during which specific issues are discussed, recommendations tabled and resolutions ratified. The composition of ACNIS includes representatives from various segments of the information industry, such as IT specialists, coordinators of networks, heads of the subsystems and policymakers. The networks referred to are the Socio-Economic Information Network (SECIN); Science and Technology Information Network (STIN); College Libraries Information Network (COLINET); Legal Information Network (LINET); Jamaica Agricultural Development Information Network (JADIN); and the Audiovisual Information Network (AVIN).

AVIN, the most recent formation, was officially launched in April 2003 as the sixth subsystem within the National Information System (NATIS). Originally, the mapping of NATIS revealed clusters of libraries defined by subject interests. The formation of AVIN created a new kind of dynamism in this well-defined pattern of network organisations in that, whereas membership in the first five is defined by subject interests, AVIN's membership is based on information carriers, irrespective of subject content. Thus AVIN's constituency includes representatives from all other networks as well as media institutions and practitioners, researchers, cultural historians, librarians, archivists, entertainment lawyers, producers, promoters and others with vested interests in generating, using and preserving sound and image recordings.



AVIN's organisational base and focal point is the NLJ's Audiovisual Department and its Coordinator is the Head of this Department. By virtue of its position, AVIN is the only network that falls directly within the framework of the NLJ's governance.

The National Library of Jamaica has a national mandate to collect and preserve in perpetuity, Jamaica's documented cultural heritage, including sound and image recordings. Although Jamaican music has gained international recognition and is populating the archives of individuals and institutions globally, there are numerous challenges in ascertaining what audiovisual recordings are generated, collected and archived locally. For example, over the past ten years there has been exponential growth in the number of broadcast houses and other media entities. Additionally, there are approximately 200 recording studios, including several state-of-the-art home facilities engaged in audiovisual productions. To further compound the issue, some Jamaican artists have overseas production bases. There is also no structured mechanism in place to inform the AV archiving community about new releases. This information often becomes available through the print media and TV popular music programmes as well as in incidental references in reports on related issues. As the national repository, the NLJ must tap into the various markets worldwide to ensure that the musical recordings of our nationals are caught in its collection net.

Memorialising Music

In the Jamaican context, music captures the oral expressions of the folk culture, as heard in folk tales, proverbs and *Anansi* stories. Various studies and reports, including ones from the UN agency have shown "Jamaica's music and entertainment as the best solution for economic growth, export expansion, youth employment creation and the reduction of poverty".⁷⁴ As early as the 1980s the fledgling NLJ launched an intensive campaign and established a committee to strategise how best to develop a project to collect and preserve Jamaica's musical heritage. This early sensitisation project resulted in some recording studios becoming aware of the NLJ and making periodic donations of musical items to the NLJ. One decision taken was that the NLJ's music collection would be accessible primarily for research, study and consultation by scholars, aspiring singers, song writers and other interested persons.

Living Legend

The Honourable Robert *Bob* Nesta Marley, Jamaica's world renowned musical icon, has left an extensive legacy of musical recordings that continue to impact people's lives and archives. Yet, regrettably, the national repository has very few of these recordings. Several attempts have been made to expand the holdings, but with limited success. Negotiations are on-going with some private collectors to acquire copies of their collections. Recently the Marley family donated digital copies of some early work.

AVIN

The Audiovisual Information Network (AVIN) of Jamaica provides a community for rallying the cause to develop comprehensive collections of AV productions. Thus the proliferation of Jamaican cultural industries, the potential economic and social benefits, the hundreds of audiovisual documents generated annually, the dearth of trained media librarians/archivists, combined with the continued and increasing demands for these resources by researchers are among the various factors that influenced the formation of AVIN.

The NLJ is also responsible for guiding the establishment and maintenance of national standards in the management of information resources. It is therefore not unusual that stakeholders in the AV industries consult the NLJ on issues pertaining to the management of AV recordings. There is a constant stream of enquiries to AVIN units for sound and image resources which often lead to a trail from one organisation to another in a quest to

⁷⁴ Stanbury, Lloyd. Music and Jamaica's Inner City Development Programme. http://www.jahworks.org/music/features/inner_city_development.htm

identify the resources needed. These information seeking patterns are regarded as further indicators that the nation's AV resources need to be properly documented to facilitate access. This realisation prompted the NLJ's AV Department to conduct a series of mini-surveys among persons in the industry to determine the extent to which this observation is real, as well as to ascertain how best to serve the various groups in this creative community.

Surveys conducted within AVIN units revealed certain commonalities, namely how to increase collection, standardize the organisation of information, enhance preservation and provide access to the vast wealth of much sought after Jamaican audiovisual productions. Budgetary allocations to the institutions surveyed ranged from functionally adequate to totally inadequate. The media archiving community understands that the proper execution of these activities requires access to funds, but many media managers seem unaware of how costly it is to keep the archive viable. Hence, there is a tendency to include the archive's budgetary allocation within the production activity. Some respondents referred to the misconception of some persons that AV productions do not constitute research material. The results also revealed that in some instances the keepers of these collections offered unrestricted access and in other situations the collections are locked away. In several cases the collections were inadequately organised and respondents expressed the need for assistance. The underlying reason for denial of access reflected the need to organise the collections. AVIN took on the challenge to identify a suitable system for organising the collections.

AVIDA

In September 2001, two AV librarians visited the British Library Sound Archive and in discussion with its management team was exposed to CADENSA which is used for organizing its sound collections. This system was so impressive that permission was sought and granted to use CADENSA database definitions as a basis for the development of a system for Jamaica. After many deliberations, pilot testing, refining and publicising, the Audiovisual Information Data Access system (AVIDA) was officially introduced to Jamaica, during primetime news, in March 2002, as a tool for organising and providing access to Jamaica's sound and image recordings.

The AVIDA database developed by the NLJ provides a viable option for the documentation and electronic management of audiovisual collections in a constantly evolving media environment. Over the years, the original basic AVIDA structure has evolved into expandable modules for organising photographs, sound recordings and moving images. During the process of refining the database, a number of training sessions were held with different stakeholder groups as a measure to ensure that the interests of these groups were adequately represented.

CDS/ISIS is designed as an integrated menu-driven computerised Information Storage and Retrieval System which enables easy exchange of data. NLJ has been the national distributor for this UNESCO designed database management system since 1989 and it now has over 300 registered users of the product. Cost considerations were also important and the availability of CDS/ISIS free of cost provided an additional incentive for applying it to AVIDA. Consequently, AVIDA was developed using as its platform UNESCO's CDS-ISIS system, which is widely used in Jamaica and also taught in the local Library School.

AVIDA's Flagship Project

Since 2002, when AVIDA was officially launched, various workshops have been held to refine the system and promote competency in using AVIDA. In 2007, a pilot project was undertaken by the NLJ and the Main Library of the University of the West Indies to develop as a prototype an AVIDA database of the Bennett-Coverley collection at the NLJ. This project was deemed necessary because of the repeated requests to both institutions for information related to Louise (affectionately referred to as *Miss Lou*) Bennett-Coverley's contribution to national development. Miss Lou is recognised internationally as Jamaica's foremost storyteller, folklorist and cultural icon, who dedicated her life's work to promoting Jamaican folk aesthetics.

The project was presented in January 2008 at the UWI's international conference to honour the Hon. Dr. Louise Bennett-Coverley (Miss Lou) and also at the regional Association for Caribbean Universities, Research and Institutional Libraries (ACURIL) Conference held in Montego Bay in June 2008. This project, which was presented in a paper entitled *Preserving the National Audiovisual Heritage: AVIN, AVIDA and the Bennett/Coverley Collection of the National Library of Jamaica*, received **The Albertina Pérez de Rosa Information Units Alliances and Collaborative Projects in the Caribbean Award 2008** (ACURIL, Puerto Rico Chapter). The award was given for excellence in the endeavour to preserve the national audiovisual heritage.

On October 27, 2008 the Bennett-Coverley Database was officially launched to commemorate UNESCO's AV World Heritage Day. This launch was staged in the broadcast studio of Jamaica's first TV station where Miss Lou hosted many shows. The proceedings were chaired by a media manager and attended by many persons in the media fraternity. The launch was aired on numerous occasions.

Description of The Bennett-Coverley Collection

The Bennett-Coverley Collection consists of texts, sound recordings, photographs and moving images donated to the National Library of Jamaica by Dr. Louise Bennett and her husband Eric Coverley in 1987. The Collection has been sorted into approximately 352 files and placed in 96 boxes. These items represent a valuable part of the Jamaican national heritage in that they chronicle the literary, dramatic and professional development of the Hon. Louise Bennett and Mr Eric Coverley over a fifty year period of contribution to the cultural development of the nation. These documents include personal papers of Ms Lou and her husband, literary works by Ms Lou, which reflect her social work as well as her theatre involvement. Mr Coverley's involvement in stage production is also covered in the papers. The Collection also includes correspondence, pantomimes, scripts of radio and television programmes, plays, lists of proverbs and folk songs. The aim of the project is to preserve the original material while making its content accessible to researchers in digital formats. This project consists of three complementary components. These are:

- 1) the creation of a digital repository of texts, still, sound and moving image recordings;
- 2) the compilation of a searchable bibliographic database with multiple access points. The database will include a physical description as well as a brief abstract of each item.
- 3) inclusion of hyperlinks from the bibliographic database to the digitized collection. This will enable researchers to search the bibliographic database and retrieve, by clicking on the hyperlink, files in the digital repository.

Users of AVIDA are able to search the Bennett-Coverley database by title, subject, theme, characters, date of broadcast (where available) and any combination of these fields. Retrieval produces hyperlinks to sound, video and transcript. Users can read and listen to the commentaries simultaneously.

This collaborative project between the University of the West Indies Library and the National Library of Jamaica will provide electronic access to the Bennett-Coverley bibliographic database. However, only the NLJ will provide in-house access to the digital repository. The project will facilitate use of the Collection while preserving the original documents for posterity. It will enable in-depth study of Miss Lou's invaluable literary and cultural contribution to the understanding of Jamaican culture.

In the words of Miss Lou, *Bright sun shine through little bit a key hole*. In other words, we will continue to take small steps toward the total preservation of this national treasure.

Rights Issues

Rights issues present numerous challenges for Jamaica's media librarians who in the course of their work are pressured, especially by researchers/producers who request archival material for use in commercial ventures; or to make decisions about the use of the collections they have inherited without proper documentation. In addition, failure to establish rights often impacts on the preservation measures implemented in some AVIN libraries. The NLJ, on the other hand, is allowed by both the Copyright and Legal Deposit Acts to preserve and provide access to its collections. Though the Legal Deposit Act does not include the deposit of broadcast material, the Copyright Act allows the NLJ to capture off-air broadcasts. However the NLJ does not have the resources to do extensive recordings of TV and radio programmes; it targets specific ones to add to its heritage collections. The NLJ is therefore in an advantageous position to develop a modified broadcast archive.

In its continued quest to memorialise Jamaica's cultural heritage the NLJ also purchases copies of broadcast programmes to enhance its AV collection. In some instances the conditions for managing the items are not in keeping with the NLJ's mandate to provide continued access. In the absence of a broadcast archive, the NLJ is embracing this responsibility to preserve these items. The NLJ has been in discussion with media houses to purchase items for access and preservation purposes. As a result of these discussions, through AVIN, the NLJ has been sensitising media managers to the relevance of proper archiving of their sound and image recordings both to enhance the nation's cultural patrimony as well as their own economic viability.

Among the various deterrents to the provision of access to AV items are issues related to the number of rights holders in each work and the attendant problems pertaining to identifying precisely with whom to negotiate for access rights. Illustratively, cultural institutions including archives and libraries are concerned primarily with developing and preserving collections for public use. In many instances these institutions neither own nor administer the intellectual rights for the AV items in their collections and therefore require users to obtain permission from copyright owners. Conversely, industry organizations consisting of creators in the culture industries which include producers, distributors and broadcasters, usually administer intellectual rights for their AV collections. These issues will form the basis for AVIN to establish a *Rights Registry for AV Works*.

Existing Facilities

Generally, existing AV library facilities are inadequate to fulfil their research and administrative needs. AVIN units tend to be located in available spaces that are often unsuitable or inadequate for proper archival operations. In some instances, where there is adequate space, sections are often partitioned to create additional office to accommodate other members of staff or to expand the production section.

Many libraries also have what are considered interesting titles on AV formats that are both obsolete and unknown and for which they have no replay equipment. Opportunities are created at meetings to familiarize AVIN members with the various AV formats and equipment that are available. The NLJ's AV Department often assists with the reformatting of its members' collections. For example, some members had Umatic tapes with interesting titles but are unable to access the data. The NLJ was able to assist in creating digital formats of these recordings.

The NLJ, though faced with its own space challenges, now offers very limited back up storage for two media organisations. Recently a TV studio was partially destroyed by fire which barely missed the library. When its manager was interviewed the comment was made that if there was total devastation, there would not be total amnesia because its *prestige* tapes are in storage at the NLJ. This incident caused the network members to face the reality that proper facilities for off-site storage and archival management activities need to be treated as a national imperative. This matter has become a live item on the agenda of AVIN meetings.

The NLJ, in recognition of this problem, has reactivated its Relocation Committee which is headed by AVIN's Coordinator. This Committee has identified a number of alternative venues and is now formulating strategies to expedite the acquisition of a suitable facility in the short term and the acquisition of a purpose-built facility to house the nation's AV heritage collections. It also maintains an active regime of tape and film inspection as well as monitoring the temperature in the storage area.

Training

As AVIN's focal point, the NLJ's Audiovisual Department is responsible for spearheading the setting, monitoring and maintenance of national standards for managing audiovisual archives. In light of the concerns among stakeholders about managing AV collections and the impact of Jamaican culture globally, the continued development of AVIN is regarded as a national imperative that must be energized to prevent irreplaceable data loss and to reclaim Jamaica's rich cultural patrimony. It was also recognised that strategies need to be devised to facilitate the effective management of Jamaica's audiovisual archival collections.

Within the context of the survey findings outlined earlier in this paper, the NLJ/AVIN is seeking constantly to identify and implement *best practices* in managing audiovisual collections in order to facilitate the identification, collection, organisation, preservation and access to the collections in the various audiovisual units. To this end membership is maintained in international audiovisual associations as well as networking with international service providers. Information gleaned from such encounters is filtered to colleagues within the network and to others with vested interests.

AVIN is not deterred by the fact that Jamaica's audiovisual collections belong to numerous public and private sector entities and that each unit (whether public or commercial broadcasting station or collecting institution) must conform to its organisation's mission and internal policies. To further compound the issue, those in the public sector report to different ministries. There are also tensions between users and providers of services in distinguishing between what is considered *public good* and commercial ventures. The NLJ has no blueprints to offer for wholesale resolution to these issues. Thus, it remains resolute to facilitating the formation of a dynamic AVIN as a mechanism for colleagues with like interests to collaborate in identifying mechanisms for tackling such issues. In the absence of consensus among stakeholders about critical issues, such as what constitutes a national audiovisual archive and where this should be located, Jamaican audiovisual units will continue to operate within a decentralised mode with each unit managed by the organisation's designated officer. Ultimately, each archive will apply agreed principles and established national standards for managing their collections.

Major Activities

Since the formation of AVIN, some of the major activities undertaken have been:

- **CAVIC 2003**

In November 2003 AVIN hosted the first Caribbean Audiovisual Information Conference (CAVIC 2003) in Kingston, under the theme, *Audiovisual Archiving: Our National Heritage And History*. The issues examined in the deliberations and the knowledge gained provided a stimulus that is still sustaining AVIN's developmental activities. For example, it was out of this experience that a Cataloguing sub-committee was formed and the AVIDA system developed and refined. The *Rights Group* was another by-product of CAVIC 2003. The exposure gained from the close encounters with the representatives from FIAT/IFTA, IASA, AMIA and UNESCO's umbrella group, the Coordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations (CCAAA), propelled AVIN members to a higher level of appreciation for their responsibilities for the nation's AV collections. Increasingly, members are making deposits to the NLJ as part of their contribution to nation building.

- **Business Meeting for Media Managers**

Generally, it was felt that the message to preserve AV productions was having negligible impact on Media Managers because very few were becoming involved in network activities. Another strategy was applied and on November 23, 2005 AVIN hosted a *Brunch and Business Meeting for Media Managers* at the Courtleigh Hotel in New Kingston. The room was filled to capacity and the business section, which was ably chaired by a media manager, received high commendations from those in attendance.

This Business Meeting for Media Managers also provided an opportunity for AVIN's Coordinator to propose to potential partners the network's plan to establish a **National Audio-Visual Registry**. The aim of this Registry is to provide a net for safeguarding Jamaica's diverse sound, still and moving image heritage within a contextual framework while highlighting the creativity and inventiveness of Jamaicans. Among the criteria identified for a work to qualify for inclusion is that it must have sustained cultural, historical or aesthetic significance. Additionally, each item named in this Registry will be preserved in perpetuity, either through in-house measures or collaborative efforts. Some persons were familiar with this concept and endorsed it but others felt that the existing conditions did not predispose us to undertaking this responsibility and that the idea should be put on hold until there are infrastructural changes.

As an interim measure AVIN members are encouraged to use AVIDA to document information pertaining to type of collection, description of holdings, location of items, access, and ownership and rights conditions.

Repatriation

Another activity that emerged out of the discussions between archivists and other stakeholders in AVIN was the vexed issue of film footage held in archives overseas. The lobby group for this activity includes film producers and script writers. A decision to pursue the repatriation of Jamaican film footage held in overseas archives was reached. This matter was examined in the context of affordability/accessibility. Since the announcement about the pending closure of Film Images (London) Limited, where most of the early films of the former British colonies are held, plans have intensified and have generated much communication between a senior media manager and the NLJ and also between this persona, on behalf of NLJ/AVIN, and the manager for Film Images. The dialogue was spearheaded by someone who was instrumental in the production of these films and who is keenly interested in the repatriation exercise. In the process of negotiating the most cost effective and efficient way to repatriate copies of some of the essential titles the company ceased operations.

Discussions have been held with overseas independent producers/collectors and in some instances items have been purchased. There are problems in that these items are very expensive and are often of inferior quality.

Strategies for Preservation / Access

AVIN recognises that preservation and access measures cannot be applied automatically to all documents but must conform to the internal policies of the generating institutions. These copyright and related rights issues are discussed constantly because of their relevance to the range of services that can be offered.

- **Workshops**

Over the years AVIN has hosted a number of workshops to sensitise stakeholders to their individual and collective responsibilities in ensuring accessibility and preservation of Jamaica's still, sound and moving images cultural productions that fall within the scope of AVIN. Workshops have been held to:

- (i) discuss the implications of the Legal Deposit Law for AV items;
- (ii) highlight how stakeholders can contribute to AV archiving;

- (iii) introduce the AVIDA system for providing access to AV items;
- (iv) demonstrate how to convert analogue sound recordings to CDs.

Seminar on Managing Image Collections

In August 2006 AVIN responded to another expressed need for training in the management of image collections. A three-day seminar was held on Image Collections as Cultural Heritage with the theme: "Connection Camera, Culture, Challenges and Commerce". One of the high points of this encounter was the sequential presentations on: (i) Copyright and Related Rights in Images; (ii) Challenges in Accessing Image Collections.

These presentations were enriched by the informed input from the participants, especially the legal persons working in media organisations. The discussions, though very energised and engaging, served to underscore the need for national policy guidelines to guide the processes for providing access, especially to digital productions (i.e. both born digital and reformatted works).

Digitisation

AVIN's digitisation project has been scaled down because of a number of technical problems including lack of availability of some playback equipment and inadequate staffing. During the pilot project a Sound Conservation Laboratory was set up to rescue and preserve the wealth of sound recordings on obsolete carriers. Many of our priceless sound recordings are on reel-to-reel tape. The NLJ is actively pursuing the acquisition of a functional reel-to-reel player to access sound data.

The NLJ has been digitizing its moving images, but some film footage has deteriorated beyond recovery. Fortunately, transcriptions were done for many of the earlier recordings, thus creating another type of resource. AVIN now understands that good stewardship is critical to proper AV archival management. This includes safeguarding the integrity of the item and complying with the requirements of rights management when embarking on a process of digitizing the collections in our custody.

In order to ensure that any digitization measures introduced conform to international standards, a Senior Conservation Technician undertook a three-month internship at the British Library Sound Archive, from October to December 2008. Since his return, he has been conducting workshops and advising stakeholder groups on how to proceed with the digitization of their collections.

Collaboration / Cooperation

AVIN provides a forum for media archivists and other stakeholders to share knowledge, define policies and implement measures that will foster adherence to proper archival management. The example of the NLJ/UWI collaboration to facilitate access to the Bennett-Coverley collection provides a prototype of what can result from effective cooperation.

Proposed National Audiovisual Conservation Facility (NAVCF)

The proposal for the establishment of a National Audiovisual Conservation Facility (NAVCF) always generates lively discussions about how to proceed towards the acquisition of this facility. One critical issue that is pertinent to the realisation of this facility is how to make NAVCF a viable entity, but the overriding problem concerns how to finance its construction.

NAVCF is envisaged as a solution to forging partnerships with the AV community so that all stakeholders, including media houses, photographic societies, recording studios and libraries, can pool their resources to safeguard the cultural patrimony. As AVIN continues to promote its cause it remains resolute that inputs from these various groups will strengthen the case

for the adoption of national guidelines and standards for preservation and methodologies for appraising contents. This facility will provide ideal storage conditions, adequate security and optimum access to items. This envisaged state-of-the-art facility will be equipped with fire protection devices and will have conservation operations grouped closely to maximise measures and treatments. It will offer on-going training opportunities for AV staff in areas such as documentation, preservation techniques, access options and rights management. It will also facilitate the keeping of a National Registry of AV holdings as well as the maintenance of a skills bank of technocrats and partners.

As a strategic asset, it is envisaged that NAVCF will enable income generation in various ways, including the renting of studio facilities, systematic training of clients, preservation of original formats and public outreach programmes. Another benefit is the improved capacity for electronic storage and the attendant delivery of digital image and sound to clients upon request. Digitisation is critical to the success of such a facility and if done centrally, it will relieve persons who manage individual units to optimise the services they offer. Access to digital copies will improve research and retrieval options while creating additional space as archival items are deposited, as stipulated in a retention policy, in NAVCF.

It is hoped that AVIN's constant pursuit of initiatives will facilitate the transition to a National Audiovisual Conservation Facility (NAVCF). Archival management is very costly and is more effectively undertaken by persons with expertise in the relevant area and within a purpose built facility with proper environmental conditions. Most AVIN units lack the required financial resources to undertake operational activities. The costs of data migration for preservation and access are also prohibitive.

Conclusion

The AVIN network coalesces around the collection of media houses and institutions in the music and other entertainment industries. However, the National Library sees itself as the focal point of AVIN, not by virtue of natural affinities to the media of audiovisuals, but because of the pragmatic concern of ensuring that all recorded information emanating from Jamaica or about Jamaica or by Jamaicans is systematically identified, stored, described and made accessible, within established parameters. Additionally, the strengths and biases of particular media, communications or entertainment entities in and towards particular types of audiovisual materials can be effectively coordinated by an entity such as the National Library of Jamaica, which has a national perspective within a global framework and commitment toward the development of information networks.

AVIN is more than a concept. It is a mechanism that is charting the course for the full acceptance of audiovisual recordings as crucial primary source documents. It is hoped that measures will become formalised to stem the loss of AV documents as preservation strategies are refined and appropriated by all. Individual units will continue to harvest and archive the nation's cultural patrimony of AV productions. The focal point will concentrate on getting ideas translated into actions that will yield the much anticipated overdue purpose built facility. AVIN is the vehicle that provides the solution and channel to memorialise Jamaica's rich cultural heritage. AVIN is indeed Jamaica's best solution to memorialising its cultural patrimony.