

MO I RANA, just south of the Arctic Circle in Norway's Helgeland district, has always been a place of industry. Mining, fishing and boat-building was the business of this place from the 18th century. **In 1946 the city was selected as the site of a steel mill by the Norwegian parliament; the first steel was produced in 1955. But the mill closed in the 1980s -- and the Norwegian government decided to replace physical technology with information technology, building the Norwegian National Library's storage facility in this northern city. And so it's here** that the National Library's entire collection—books, manuscripts, newspapers, television programmes, radio programmes, audiobooks, parliamentary reports—is being digitised. It is a process which began in 2006 and is expected to take 20-30 years to complete.

But Norway has always been an outward-looking nation: and this summer the library has begun a remarkable collaboration with with the the National Library of Nigeria. The Norwegian National Library holds a collection of works in 19 different languages, designed to serve the country's immigrant population. But literature in other languages is not widely available beyond the central library's shelves in Oslo. So Aslak Sira Myhre, the Library's Director, has begun working with Professor Lanre Aina, of the National Library of Nigeria in Abuja, to digitise works in the Nigerian languages of Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo, to make them more widely available.

The project began thanks to Mr Myhre's regular visits to Nigeria. For the past seven years he has taken part in the Farafina Trust Creative Writers' Workshop at the invitation of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian novelist. The partnership between the two libraries will ensure that rights to the books to be digitised will be correctly secured; Nigeria's library will retain total control over the rights to these books. Mr Myhre emphasises the importance of this: "It is unthinkable for us to be pirates in this," he says. (Just how many books in these languages are available to be digitised has yet to be **discovered, but the National Library of Nigeria is sourcing books and other written material from the 20 branches of the library situated all over the country.**) The National Library of Nigeria hopes to establish its own digitisation programme; the Norwegians will support the institution in its effort to secure funding.

The Nigerian diaspora in Norway is not large, Mr Myhre says; he considers this a trial run for other languages and other collaborations: he mentions Somali, Hindi, Arabic and Urdu. The Nigerian experiment uses technology already available to the library in Norway, and very well established -- **the Norwegian National Library is at the forefront of the development of this technology, working with Stanford University, and other Ivy League universities in the United States, to set the agreed standard for the digital reproduction of images.** Nearly half a million books have already been digitised, the library's collection stretching back to the very first volume considered to be "Norwegian", the Breviarium Nidrosiense, a collection of psalms commissioned by the Archbishop of Trondheim in 1519. At some point next year, Mr Myhre says, every book ever published in Norwegian will have been digitised; it is the task of digitising other media that will carry on for decades.

The digital library is stored on servers using three different technological platforms for security. As for the physical collection, the library in Mo holds a copy of every book in the Norwegian National Library in in a

blast-proof vault; another copy is stored in Oslo, and a third copy is available for lending. 42 km of shelving holds 1.2m books, which are catalogued and retrieved by a robot army serving requests made at public libraries all over Norway. The storage and retrieval technology, provided by Swisslog, is similar to that used in the vast warehouses on online shopping companies, which makes it unusual in the world of academia -- as with a company such as Asos or Amazon, the library promises that there should be no more than 48 hours between request and delivery.

The addition of books published indigenous Nigerian languages to this collection may not mean a significant increase in the library's holdings: but in an era when walls are being built rather than borders broken down, this initiative offers an optimistic model for international cultural cooperation