



CONNECTING THE DOTS

Ron Nixon

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A Global Guide to Documents and Databases for African Investigative Journalists

Ron Nixon

Cover photograph by Bernard Voges

FOREWORD

Investigative journalism distinguishes itself from regular journalism by its depth and by a rigorous research process that never merely describes issues or events, but seeks to better serve the public by getting answers to the key questions of ‘why?’ and ‘how?’ For this reason, its subject matter often involves crime, political corruption or corporate wrongdoing.

Thus, investigative journalism can make a vital contribution to a country’s governance by keeping corporations and governments accountable. As an association of African investigative journalists, FAIR’s mission is to improve investigative reporting and facilitate publication of social justice issues by media in Africa.

This guide follows a regional conference hosted by FAIR during September 2012 in Nairobi (Kenya) where more than 40 journalists, editors and media representatives discussed issues around ‘War on Terror in East Africa: security, elections and transparency. The programme also combined regional case study presentations with technical skills training.

Ron Nixon (New York Times and founder of the Ujima project) provided insight on ‘how to follow government spending through public information’. His session demonstrated there is a lot of data about African state spending freely available on the internet, such as US department databases, service contracts, legal documents and US aid agency websites. Although termed ‘classified’ by some Ministries, data on government programmes can be obtained via the US Freedom of Information Act, for example.

The selection of websites and documents presented by Ron Nixon at the Nairobi workshop, and also contained in this guide, is meant to enable investigative journalists to dig deeper using various tools and sources without getting into trouble.

The ultimate objective is to show how data from external sources can be used by African journalists to expose forms of secret lobbying and foreign aid that do not help development.

FAIR is therefore grateful to Ron Nixon for authoring “Connecting the dots: A Global Guide to Documents and Databases for African Investigative Journalists”, which will be made available on our website.

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Abdullah Vawda, FAIR Executive Director
22 September 2013, Johannesburg, South Africa

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the time you have worked through this chapter, you should be able to:

- Locate international documents and data that are of use to African investigative journalists
- Utilize the documents for local stories
- Understand how information is gathered and compiled by international governments and non-government organizations.
- Distinguish between official sources of information and unofficial sources.
- Understand and use open record and freedom of information laws in developed countries to pry loose information relevant to African countries.
- Organize all the documents and databases you have acquired and see patterns and relationships.

USING GLOBAL DOCUMENTS FOR LOCAL STORIES

A Library for the Nigerian President

In 2007, Nigerian journalists became curious when Andrew Young, a former US ambassador to the United Nations begin showing up in the country in the company of President Olusegun Obasanjo.

Young, who had fought alongside Martin Luther King Jr., during the 1960's for the rights of blacks in America, was trying, among other things, to build library named in honor of the outgoing president.

Nigerian journalists wondered just who was Young and what was his relationship to the president. After consulting an American colleague they were directed to a website at the U.S. Department of Justice. The site, <http://www.fara.gov>, contained information about American lobbyists who are paid by foreign countries and individuals to whitewash their images or to help secure economic or military aid from the US government.

In Young's case, the reporters were able to see that he was being paid by Obasanjo's government to represent the country in the United States and to build a positive image for the Nigerian president. What's more, the documents that they downloaded from the website showed the exact amounts that the Nigerian government was paying Young's firm and there was even a copy of the contract. The Nigerian government had refused to provide the information.

Along with lobbying for Nigeria, Young's firm GoodWorks was also paid to represent many major companies like Chevron and that sought big contracts from the Nigerian government, other lobbying records the reporters found showed. These same companies were being asked for money to help fund the presidential library.

In addition, executives at GoodWorks had investments in Nigeria's oil industry, the country's main source of wealth. And several years before, the firm's chief executive, Carlton A. Masters, had started an American company with close relatives of President Obasanjo that bought an expensive Miami property with Mr. Masters's money, Florida business records showed.

With documents in hand, reporters produced a steady stream of stories about the president's relationship with the American lobbyist. The exposure forced both Young and Obasanjo to publicly address the nature of their relationship and it gave the Nigerian people a rare look inside the workings of their government. None of it would have been possible without the access to the lobbying documents freely available on the web, if a reporter knows where to look.

The internet provides access to millions of online documents. Search engines such as Google and Yahoo put much of that information at the fingertips of reporters. But despite these tools information can often be hard to come by in developing countries.

Many lack open records laws that grants access to public finances or activities by elected officials. Local politicians

are often unwilling to provide the information for fear of how it might be used or because it would shed an unflattering light on their lavish lifestyles or use of public money for personal use.

The lack of transparency is not just a factor in examining local politicians though. In many African countries foreign companies operate with little or no oversight. And there are few ways for ordinary citizens or journalists to find out exactly what they are doing in the country.

The same goes for the hundreds of NGOs that operate in the countries providing everything from education to health care. But what do these NGOs do? Is the money being spent wisely? Do their activities actually benefit local population or highly-paid consultants in Washington, London or Brussels?

Foreign aid, for years, has also been a source of concern. Does it help local populations or foreign NGOs and governments. All this information and more can be found in the thousands of websites and database of foreign governments. Mining these sites can pay off in great stories by African journalists and help shine a light on the often secret workings of African governments.

Why concern yourself with foreign websites and databases from the United State or Europe? As the Nigerian example shows, a significant amount of information about African countries can be found in the archives, databases, documents in the files of government agencies in other countries.

One of the issues with many African countries is that they rely heavily on foreign aid. But for journalists that can work to your advantage. While government bureaucrats in your country might be reluctant to provide you with the information you want, more times than not, the information you want can be found elsewhere, because these same bureaucrats have to provide that information to donors if they want to keep getting funded. That information is often freely available in donor countries.

So how does an African investigative journalist go about finding the information he or she needs? Famed American business investigative reporters Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele of Vanity Fair magazine preach what they call a “Documents State of Mind.”

A “Document State of Mind” is a mental attitude that assumes that there is a document, database or website somewhere with exactly the information you need. You just have to adjust your thinking from assuming that you can't find what you need to thinking about who might have the information you need.

EXERCISE 1

Where would you find it?

What if an American company such as Walmart or a British company like BP announced that it was going to begin operating in your country. Where would you find basic information about the companies?

Write down five places you might find information about these companies activities to see what you might expect if they start operating in your country?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Case Study 1 Whitewashing Genocide

The lobbying database mentioned above is not just a great tool for looking at current events, it can also be used to examine historical injustices as well.

For example, during a 2009 seminar at the Great Lakes Media Center at the National University of Rwanda, as a class project journalists reviewed documents from U.S. Justice Department showing how the previous government paid the American firm of von Kolberg and Associates, well known for representing oppressive governments, \$20,000 to help improve its image in the United States.

FINDING WHAT YOU NEED

While the internet is a great tool, too many reporters start out by doing broad searches on Google or another search engine and become overwhelmed with the information. The key to hunting down the exact documents or database that you want involves a number of steps.

The first thing is to identify who might have the information you need. For example, lets say there is an NGO working in your community providing antiviral drugs or an international corporation is about to begin a mining or drilling operation.

How do you go about finding out what they are doing? Can the information be obtained locally, if so, then you are well on your way. But in most cases, this information cannot be obtained locally.

What follows is a strategy of locating what you need.

Step 1

Where do NGOs, governments or companies report

Good reporters know that although NGOs or corporations might operated in many African countries with little oversight, that is not the case in developing countries.

They typically have to report to some authority and that information is usually public. For example, with the NGO dispensing antiviral drugs in a country, they would have to report their operations to several places.

The first to start is with a tax return. By law, in the United States all NGOs have to report financial information to the Internal Revenue Service. The information contained in these reports can be illuminating. The tax returns, called a 990 form, will contain info about an NGOs revenues, expenditures, assets, liabilities, and salaries.

The source of its funds (How much comes from government vs. public donations), how much its top five employees make in salaries and other compensation and who are its top five vendors.

(With this information you could see if they are employing local companies or individuals or if they only use vendors and individuals from their home companies).

And many NGOs also report how much money they send to local NGOs they support. The 990 form will also gives a bit of a summary history of the amount of money the NGO taken in over the last few years and spent. It also contains in it — although it's buried deeply in the report — what their mission is. What you're supposed to be accomplishing. That's basically the reason the NGO exists: what you're trying to do and how that can benefit the public.

So what do you have to do to get this information? A reporter simply has to ask for it.

By law, the information have to be provided to the public or the NGO could face severe financial penalties.

Below is a screenshot of the form 990 for World Vision, an international NGO that works in a number of African countries.

Form 990 Return of Organization Exempt From Income Tax
 Under section 501(c), 527, or 4947(a)(1) of the Internal Revenue Code (except black lung benefit trust or private foundation)
 Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service

OMB No. 1545-0047
2009
 Open to Public Inspection

A For the 2009 calendar year, or tax year beginning **OCT 1, 2009** and ending **SEP 30, 2010**

B Check if applicable: Address change Name change Initial return Termination Amended return Application pending

C Name of organization: **World Vision Inc**
 Doing Business As
 Number and street (or P.O. box if mail is not delivered to street address) Room/suite
P.O. Box 9716
 City or town, state or country, and ZIP + 4
Federal Way, WA 98063-9716
 F Name and address of principal officer: **Lawrence K Probus**
 same as C above

D Employer identification number: **95-1922279**

E Telephone number: **253-815-1000**

G Gross receipts \$: **1,033,438,947**

H(a) Is this a group return for affiliates? Yes No
H(b) Are all affiliates included? Yes No
 If "No," attach a list. (see instructions)
H(c) Group exemption number: **8170**

I Tax-exempt status: 501(c)(3) (insert no.) 4947(a)(1) or 527

J Website: **www.worldvision.org**

K Form of organization: Corporation Trust Association Other

L Year of formation: **1950** **M** State of legal domicile: **CA**

Part I Summary

1 Briefly describe the organization's mission or most significant activities: **World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization serving children and families globally.**

2 Check this box if the organization discontinued its operations or disposed of more than 25% of its net assets.

3 Number of voting members of the governing body (Part VI, line 1a) **3**

4 Number of independent voting members of the governing body (Part VI, line 1b) **4**

5 Total number of employees (Part V, line 2a) **1469**

6 Total number of volunteers (estimate if necessary) **60573**

7a Total gross unrelated business revenue from Part VIII, column (C), line 12 **-209,426.**

7b Net unrelated business taxable income from Form 990-T, line 34 **-258,475.**

	Prior Year	Current Year
8 Contributions and grants (Part VIII, line 1h) 1,214,420,264.	1,214,420,264.	1,020,904,962.
9 Program service revenue (Part VIII, line 2g) 709,449.	709,449.	1,245,613.
10 Investment income (Part VIII, column (A), lines 3, 4, and 7d) 4,881,812.	4,881,812.	3,498,324.
11 Other revenue (Part VIII, column (A), lines 5, 6d, 8c, 9c, 10c, and 11e) 1,371,199.	1,371,199.	1,007,888.
12 Total revenue - add lines 8 through 11 (must equal Part VIII, column (A), line 12) 1,221,382,724.	1,221,382,724.	1,026,656,787.
13 Grants and similar amounts paid (Part IX, column (A), lines 1-3) 1,020,502,503.	1,020,502,503.	805,876,368.
14 Benefits paid to or for members (Part IX, column (A), line 4)		
15 Salaries, other compensation, employee benefits (Part IX, column (A), lines 5-10) 92,047,026.	92,047,026.	89,857,334.
16a Professional fundraising fees (Part IX, column (A), line 11e) 716,030.	716,030.	4,312,596.
b Total fundraising expenses (Part IX, column (D), line 25) 104,310,975.	104,310,975.	
17 Other expenses (Part IX, column (A), lines 11a-11d, 11f-24f) 92,621,461.	92,621,461.	101,753,473.
18 Total expenses. Add lines 13-17 (must equal Part IX, column (A), line 25) 1,205,887,020.	1,205,887,020.	1,001,799,771.
19 Revenue less expenses. Subtract line 18 from line 12 15,495,704.	15,495,704.	24,857,016.
20 Total assets (Part X, line 16) 297,792,501.	297,792,501.	296,416,153.
21 Total liabilities (Part X, line 26) 166,838,889.	166,838,889.	122,014,892.
22 Net assets or fund balances. Subtract line 21 from line 20 130,953,612.	130,953,612.	174,401,261.

Part II Signature Block

Under penalty of perjury, I declare that I have examined this return, including accompanying schedules and statements, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, it is true, correct, and complete. Declaration of preparer (other than officer) is based on all information of which preparer has any knowledge.

Sign Here
 Signature of officer: **Lawrence K Probus** Date: **6-15-11**
 Lawrence K Probus, Senior VP Strategic Solutions, CFO
 Type or print name and title

Preparer's Use Only
 Preparer's signature: **Sauad C. Mij** Date: **6-15-11** Check if self-employed: Preparer's identifying number (see instructions)
 CAPIN CROUSE LLP
 972 EMERSON PARKWAY
 GREENWOOD, IN 46143
 EIN: Phone no. **317-885-2620**

May the IRS discuss this return with the preparer shown above? (see instructions) Yes No

932001 02-04-10 LHA For Privacy Act and Paperwork Reduction Act Notice, see the separate instructions. Form 990 (2009)

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This next screenshot shows the salaries for the top employees of World Vision.

Part VII Compensation of Officers, Directors, Trustees, Key Employees, Highest Compensated Employees, and Independent Contractors

Section A. Officers, Directors, Trustees, Key Employees, and Highest Compensated Employees

1a Complete this table for all persons required to be listed. Report compensation for the calendar year ending with or within the organization's tax year. Use Schedule J-2 if additional space is needed.

- List all of the organization's **current** officers, directors, trustees (whether individuals or organizations), regardless of amount of compensation. Enter -0- in columns (D), (E), and (F) if no compensation was paid.
 - List all of the organization's **current** key employees. See instructions for definition of "key employee."
 - List the organization's five **current** highest compensated employees (other than an officer, director, trustee, or key employee) who received reportable compensation (Box 5 of Form W-2 and/or Box 7 of Form 1099-MISC) of more than \$100,000 from the organization and any related organizations.
 - List all of the organization's **former** officers, key employees, and highest compensated employees who received more than \$100,000 of reportable compensation from the organization and any related organizations.
 - List all of the organization's **former directors or trustees** that received, in the capacity as a former director or trustee of the organization, more than \$10,000 of reportable compensation from the organization and any related organizations.
- List persons in the following order: individual trustees or directors; institutional trustees; officers; key employees; highest compensated employees; and former such persons.

Check this box if the organization did not compensate any current officer, director, or trustee.

(A) Name and Title	(B) Average hours per week	(C) Position (check all that apply)						(D) Reportable compensation from the organization (W-2/1099-MISC)	(E) Reportable compensation from related organizations (W-2/1099-MISC)	(F) Estimated amount of other compensation from the organization and related organizations
		Individual trustee or director	Institutional trustee	Officer	Key employee	Highest compensated employee	Former			
Rudy Carrasco Board Member	1.00	X						0.	0.	0.
Rev. John Crosby Board Member	1.00	X						0.	0.	0.
Dr. Leighton Ford Board Member	1.00	X						0.	0.	0.
Rev. David Gibbons Board Member	1.00	X						0.	0.	0.
Joyce Godwin Board Member	1.00	X						0.	0.	0.
Dr. Stephen A. Hayner Board Member	1.00	X						0.	0.	0.
Dr. John Huffman, Jr. Board Member	1.00	X						0.	0.	0.
Lynne Hybels - part yr Board Member	1.00	X						0.	0.	0.
Deborah Pegues Board Member	1.00	X						0.	0.	0.
Paul Nelson Board Member	1.00	X						0.	0.	0.
Dr. Joan Singleton Board Member	1.00	X						0.	0.	0.
Dr. Horace Smith Board Member	1.00	X						0.	0.	0.
Joanna S. Mockler Chairman	1.00	X		X				0.	0.	0.
Kevin Jenkins Board Member	1.00	X						0.	0.	0.
Katie Smith Milway Board Member	1.00	X						0.	0.	0.
Gary T. Duim Secretary/Treasurer	1.00	X		X				0.	0.	0.
James F. Bere, Jr. Vice Chairman	1.00	X		X				0.	0.	0.

932007 02-04-10

Form 990 (2009)

Finally, a screenshot that shows the top five vendors paid by the NGO.

Section B. Independent Contractors		
1 Complete this table for your five highest compensated independent contractors that received more than \$100,000 of compensation from the organization.		
(A) Name and business address	(B) Description of services	(C) Compensation
Mediasmith Inc, 274 Brannan St, Ste 601, San Francisco, CA 94127	Internet Marketing	9,775,946.
Kaye Smith Business PO Box 956, Renton, WA 98057	Marketing	7,170,745.
Russ Reid Company 2 N Lake Avenue #600, Pasadena, CA 91101	Marketing	5,779,498.
Family Christian Stores, 5300 Patterson Ave SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49530	Sponsorship	2,988,998.
Women of Faith 5300 Democracy Dr Ste 120, Plano, TX 75024	Artist Associates	2,060,285.
2 Total number of independent contractors (including but not limited to those listed above) who received more than \$100,000 in compensation from the organization ▶		68
See Schedule J-2 for Part VII, Section A Continuation		Form 990 (2009)

As you can see the 990 contains a great deal of information. But the reports can sometimes run into hundreds of pages. Brant Houston, an investigative reporter and Knight Chair of Investigative Reporting in the Journalism Department at the University of Illinois, offers the following advice for using the form 990:

I really study the first page. That is your summary. To some degree, every page after that is some subdivision or subset of what you're looking at. I start from the bottom up, to see what the net assets are. See if there's been a big change. That doesn't always tell you everything, but it gives you an idea of whether they're losing their total value comparatively, over a number of years, or gaining. Further down, more buried in the form, is a list of the compensation of the five highest-paid individuals. They're only required to list individuals who make more than \$50,000.

Case Study 2 Fraud and mismanagement in an African Development Fund

Shortly after the apartheid government fell in South Africa, several black American leaders, including Andrew Young, mentioned above, convinced then-US President Bill Clinton to create a fund to help finance projects for economic development from Tanzania to South Africa. The mission of the fund was to help start or expand businesses in Southern Africa in sectors including finance, manufacturing, communications and drilling by providing loans or other types of financing. The US government pumped million of dollars into the fund.

Using the form 990 and other documents, reporters from the New York Times found that the fund had become involved in controversy or internal disarray because of insider dealings and mismanagement. Around 2008, for example, fund directors learned that an official of the group had solicited \$100,000 in personal loans from the developer of the Mount Meru Hotel, a resort in Tanzania underwritten by the fund. The official then allowed the developer, a local businessman, to withdraw unauthorized funds from the hotel's account.

But even after an internal investigation determined the official's actions had violated federal regulations and fund policies, he was not fired. Instead, Mr. Young decided to overlook the man's actions and left him in charge of another fund-financed project in Tanzania. For years, Mr. Young and Mr. Masters, while directors of the fund, were also partners in a lobbying firm based in Washington called GoodWorks International that represented some African countries including Tanzania, a nation in which the fund did business.

EXERCISE 2

Get information about NGOs working in your country

1. Identify the NGOs in your country. Make a list of who they are and what they do.
2. Get their financial disclosure documents. For most US-based NGOs this will be the form 990. Ask them for it and write down how many of them provide it. For those that don't try putting the name in a Google search: For example "World Vision +990"
3. Using what you learned, list the highest paid individuals for the NGOs. Are any of them from your country?
4. List the top vendor the NGO pays for services. Are any of them located in your country?

International corporations have similar report requirements to those of the NGOs. The forms vary across countries. For example, in the United States the forms African Investigative reporters would want are the form 10-K or the 20-F, along with what is called a proxy statement. The forms can be found for free at www.sec.gov on a online database called EDGAR.

The Securities and Exchange Commission is the agency responsible for collecting the documents and the online database contains not just info on U.S. companies, but any company that sells shares on the American stock market. The forms can be a goldmine for African investigative reporters. The first document, the 10-K, is the annual report U.S. companies are required to file with regulators. Taking a look at a filing for oil giant Exxon-Mobil, a report can find several pieces of information about the operation of the company in African countries.

The first screen capture here shows what a 10-K looks like:

<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSITION REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR 15(d) OF THE SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934	
For the transition period from _____ to _____	
Commission File Number 1-2256	
EXXON MOBIL CORPORATION	
(Exact name of registrant as specified in its charter)	
NEW JERSEY	13-5409005
(State or other jurisdiction of incorporation or organization)	(I.R.S. Employer Identification Number)
5959 LAS COLINAS BOULEVARD, IRVING, TEXAS 75039-2298	
(Address of principal executive offices) (Zip Code)	
(972) 444-1000	
(Registrant's telephone number, including area code)	
_____ Securities registered pursuant to Section 12(b) of the Act:	

The next slide shows information about the operations of the company in several African countries.

AFRICA

Angola

ExxonMobil's year-end 2010 acreage holdings totaled 0.6 million net offshore acres, and 2.2 net exploration and development wells were completed during the year. The Angola Gas Gathering Project started up on-block gas handling in 2010, and project work continued on Kizomba Satellites Phase 1. On the non-operated Block 17, the Cravo-Lirio-Orquidea-Violeta project was funded in 2010, while project execution continued at Pazflor. On the non-operated Block 31, project work continued on the Pluto-Saturno-Venus-Marte project.

Chad

ExxonMobil's net year-end 2010 acreage holdings consisted of 63 thousand onshore acres with 46.0 net exploration and development wells completed during the year.

Equatorial Guinea

ExxonMobil's acreage totaled 0.1 million net offshore acres at year-end 2010, with 5.3 net development wells completed during the year.

Nigeria

ExxonMobil's net acreage totaled 1.0 million offshore acres at year-end 2010, with 9.4 net exploration and development wells completed during the year. Work continued on the deepwater Usan project in 2010. A 3-D seismic acquisition program was completed on the Nigerian Shelf venture acreage.

The 10-K contains other information that can be useful to African investigative reports, including lawsuits and other legal issues. This can be very useful for finding out what a company did in other countries where it operates. Did it get in trouble for bribery? Did it pollute the environment? Where their other issues?

All of these questions can be answered using the 10-K. Foreign companies that operate in the United States file a form called the 20-F that contains information similar to the 10-K.

The 10-K is hardly the only documents that provides information about companies operating in African countries.

The Proxy statement, also called a Schedule 14A, can also provide valuable information. The main purpose of the proxy is to provide information about pay and compensation for executives of a company. But it also provides information about lobbying activities and contributions given to members of the U.S. Congress. Why would this be important to an African journalists? Because the lobbying and contributions affects U.S. policy, particular trade policy.

The proxy statement for Exxon below shows salary and other compensation for the top executives at the company.

EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION TABLES				
Summary Compensation Table for 2012				
Name and Principal Position	Year	Salary (\$)	Bonus (\$)	
R.W. Tillerson <i>Chairman and CEO</i>	2012	2,567,000	4,587,000	
	2011	2,387,000	4,368,000	
	2010	2,207,000	3,360,000	
D.D. Humphreys <i>PFO; Senior Vice President (through 12/31/2012)</i>	2012	1,255,000	3,144,000	
	2011	1,170,000	2,994,000	
	2010	1,085,000	2,144,000	
M.W. Albers <i>Senior Vice President</i>	2012	1,020,000	2,345,000	
	2011	942,500	2,070,000	
M.J. Dolan <i>Senior Vice President</i>	2012	1,077,500	2,527,000	
	2011	991,250	2,232,000	
	2010	920,000	1,592,000	
A.P. Swiger <i>Senior Vice President; PFO (effective 1/1/2013)</i>	2012	962,500	2,174,000	

As this section shows, just knowing who a government, an NGO or company has to report to is an important first step in getting the documents or databases you need for your investigation. Although the two documents mentioned above were US examples, other countries have similar reporting requirements. A good place to start when learning who these institutions report to is simply asking them. Ask the local representative from World Vision for example, who they report to for their work they are doing in HIV Prevention. It could be multiple sources.

For example, the would file the 990 because its a tax form that's required by the government, but they might also have to report to a development agency such as the US Agency for International Development or its British counterpart the Department for International Development. Maybe they also get money from the World Bank. Doing a basic interview to understand how the money flows will not only help a reporter understand the process, but provide a roadmap to following the paper trail to the document and data you need.

Step 2

Finding out how often the institutions you are investigating are required to file reports on their work and how is the information collected

This is an important step that is often missed when reporters go looking for documents or data. They get a document or databases and notice that the information is a few years old and discard the information because its old. Sometimes the latest report is several years old and could mean that no one has looked into the issue you are investigating for some time. Or it could mean that the report is the latest information available. Its always worth checking.

Sometimes a reporter will get a report and do a story on the numbers or information without checking out how that information was obtained or over what period of time. Just like people who you interview can provide good and bad information, documents and data are no different. What is left out of a document or database is often as revealing as what is left in it.

For example, a few years ago, Irish rock star Bono of the band U2, started a campaign to raise money to fight aids in Africa called RED. A portion of the money spent by American and European customers on by a red coloured Ipod, computer or tee shirt, is given to the Global Fund, an international financing agency.

The campaign has gotten lots of publicity for its efforts to fight aids in Africa. Documents about the funding can be downloaded from the Global Fund's website. But interviews with officials at the RED campaign and documents at the Global Fund showed that despite claim that money is going to fight aids in Africa, the campaign only operates in a few countries and not necessarily those with the highest level of HIV infection. Furthermore, data showed that RED has spent much more on advertising than it had on actual programs aimed at HIV/Aids prevention. Remember, documents and databases tell only half the story. Always ask how was this information collected and how often is it updated.

Step 3

Is the information public?

Knowing where a NGO, government or company reports or how often they report is useful for investigative journalists, but only if that information is public.

Although data and documents can be obtained freely in most developed countries, often times reporters, both in those countries and foreign reporters are told that the information is not public for various reasons. One of the most common reasons reporters are told that information is not available publicly is that its release would violate privacy. Another reason is that it would violate national security or reveal information about an ongoing investigation. While that's true sometimes, most of the time, its a smokescreen because the individuals who posses the documents don't want to give them out or they have a poor understanding of the law. So how does a reporter know if data or documents are public or not?

It requires a little pre-reporting. The first thing is to examine an institution's website and look for its policies on release of information. The World Bank's website, <http://data.worldbank.org/node/8>, shows it policy on transparency and release of information. International institutions like the Global Fund also make tons of information freely available, even if sometimes the recipients of those funds in African countries will sometimes tell reporters that the information is private.

In the United States, each government agency has a freedom of information website that gives an overview of the FOIA laws and documents available. The sites will also let you file electronically.

This one is from the US Agency for International Development, <http://www.usaid.gov/foia-requests>.

Case Study 3 Rhinos in South Africa

When South African investigative reporter Julian Rademeyer was working on his book, "Killing for Profit," about the global trafficking in South Africa Rhino horns, he turned to an unlikely source: the United State Freedom of Information Act.

Using the US FOIA act, Rademeyer was able to get investigative documents from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, which showed several undercover stings that caught South Africans trafficking in rhino horns in the United States, part of a global network of dealers, whose actions along with poachers, have lead to the near distinction of the South African white rhino. But the documents showed additional information beyond US involvement in trying to stop the illegal rhino horn trade. The documents also showed US Fish and Wildlife officials correspondence with other international agencies from South Africa to China. The documents offered a rare peek into countries that often don't publically reveal what they are doing to fight illegal smuggling.

Step 4

Determine if the document or data you have are primary or secondary

When the organization AidData released a report about Chinese aid to African countries it was widely picked up by both international media companies as well as local newspapers, radio and TV stations. The report found that China had committed \$75 billion on aid and other development projects to African countries over the past 10 years. The thrust of most of the reporting was that China was attempting to use its aid as a form of “soft diplomacy” in order to curry favor with political and business leaders on the continent in order to secure much needed natural resources. Using data from AidData international media organisations noted that China spent millions on social and cultural activities at the expense of true development projects such as power plants and roads.

But almost immediately, the AidData report and subsequent media reporting citing it was criticized for misinterpreting Chinese development assistance to Africa.

On her blog, Deborah Brautigam, Professor and Director of the International Development Program at Johns Hopkins University and one of the foremost international scholars on China-Africa relations, said the information contained in the AidData report was misleading.

The main problem with the AidData figures, Brautigam said, was that they relied largely on media reports of Chinese project financing, and not actual documents from the Chinese government. In one case, a large Chinese-built theme park was supposed to be located near Johannesburg was listed in the AidData database. But there is no park and local officials say the media reports about the park was simply an announcement between the local government and Chinese officials about plans to build a park at some point in the future.

“The main problem is that the teams that have been collecting the data and their supervisors simply don’t know enough about China in Africa, or how to check media reports, track down the realities of a project, and dig into the story to find out what really happened. You can start with media reports, but it is highly problematic to stop there,” Brautigam said in her blog.

The example above points to the need to both understand how information is collected by NGOs and governments. But it also point to the need to understand the difference between primary and secondary sources of information. If the data on Chinese investments and aid had come from documents from that government, the data would have been considered a primary source of information, meaning that it was created by people with firsthand knowledge about the information.

But in the case of AidData, the information comes second hand making it a secondary source of information. While secondary sources of information can prove useful, its more useful for reporters to try and find the original source of the information for themselves. Many reports and databases will have a methodology section that will tell how the information was collected.

So what are primary documents and secondary documents?

The following is a brief overview. A primary document consist of: correspondence, emails, diaries, government institutional records (minutes, memoranda, press releases, and contemporary publications), and database.

Secondary documents consist of: essays, dissertations, documentaries, newspaper articles, and films.

A good rule of thumbs to remember about primary documents and secondary documents is to consider how far removed the materials are from the original event and if the materials draw on multiple primary sources to inform their content. The further the information collected in documents or databases are from the original event, the more likely they are to be secondary documents. You can use them, just do so with caution.

Getting the information you need.

Now that you have an understanding of how to locate documents and data, its time to look at websites that are useful for African investigative reporters trying to using global information for local stories. The list is by no means exhaustive, but it is a good starting point and these sites can point you to other sources of information.

This will not just be simply a list of links with description. For each link, reporters should locate information for their country and think about ways they might use it.

When you look at these websites and database, again don't think these are American or European databases, think what does this mean to me as a journalist locally. These documents don't replace trying to located information at home, but provide a supplement and often provide access when channels are cut off locally.

WHERE TO FIND IT

The US Department of Justice's Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) database

Since 1938, anyone acting as an agent for a foreign entity in a political capacity has to disclose payments made to them in support of their activities. The site can be searched by country, by institution that hired the US lobbyist or even by an individual if they hired the lobbyist. Numerous reporters around the world have used this database to see how much governments and institutions in their country spending on lobbying in the US. As the examples at the beginning of this chapter shows, the information can be useful in helping to untangle information about your government's spending and other activities.

<http://www.fara.gov>

SEC's EDGAR database of filings

10-K and 20-F filings with the US Securities and Exchange Commission: These annual report is required of US-based companies and foreign private issuers of securities. The documents contain a great deal of detail including activities in other countries, including lawsuits and legal troubles. They also contain financial information that they companies might not be willing to share in a country like Angola, for example, but that have to be given to the US government.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has committed \$19.3 billion in 144 countries to fight the three diseases that kills millions of people each year. Data can be downloaded from the website as well as up-to-date reports on the recipients of funds from the Fund. Reporters can find out who in their country got money from the Fund and what are they doing with it.

<http://portfolio.theglobalfund.org/en/Home/Index>

USAspending: government Spending Internationally By the US government

Poring over U.S. federal grants and contracts can almost always point to an international story that's been overlooked. federal contracts database includes information on companies that do business with the United States and NGOs who get government grants to carry out work on behalf of the the US. The database is a treasure trove of global data showing the reach of the US government across the world and the activities of companies and NGO it funds. The database contains information about the location of company or NGO headquarters, the nature of the work they are performing on behalf of the US government, what country that work is being carried out, and how much money involved. The database goes back several decades, so spending and activities can be traced over time. Kenyan journalist used the database to see who much money the US government was providing to counties in East Africa for the Global War on Terror.

<http://www.usaspending.gov>

European Union's database of tenders

Like [USAspending.gov](http://www.usaspending.gov) this database gives the recipients, amounts and locations of contracts by development agencies within the European Union. As with its US counterpart, African journalists can use this database to see what activities are being funded in African countries by development agencies such as the United Kingdom's Department for International Development. For example, when the UK said it would cut off development funding to South Africa

because the country has grown wealthier and no longer needed aid, reporters could have used this database to see what kinds of development projects would be affected.

http://europa.eu/policies-activities/tenders-contracts/index_en.htm

Lobbying Disclosure Act reports

This database compliments the US foreign agents database mentioned above. Unlike that database, this one covers lobbying by foreign companies, not individuals or governments. If the South African government lobbied the US government for aid or the lifting of a trader barrier, it would have to file reports with the US justice Department. If De Beers, the South African global diamond giant, lobbied the government on legislation about conflict diamonds, it would have to file reports with the the U.S. Congress must report how much they spent and what they're lobbying for.

http://www.senate.gov/legislative/Public_Disclosure/LDA_reports.htm

European Commission's Register of Interest Representatives

This is a voluntary registry of lobbyists seeking to influence the European Union's commission.

Since its voluntary, the information contained in it is not quite as useful as those of the mandatory lobbying databases in the US. Still its a good idea to search this dataset when looking for information on companies that are working in African countries, that might also be lobbying the EU.

<http://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/info/homePage.do>

African Development Bank Group

The African Development Bank Group has annual procurement reports that state who received contracts from the bank and provides data and documents about the various projects it funds, such as roads, agriculture or hydro dams to provide electricity. Bank projects can be search by county or by topic such as civil society projects or media.

<http://www.afdb.org/en/projects-operations/procurement/tools-reports/procurement-reports/>

AidData

AidData aspires to catalog the known universe of development finance data, according to its website. This site is a good starting point for information about development funding by country, but as a mentioned earlier in the chapter, some of the information is based on secondary media reports, so reporters will have to locate the primary documents before publishing articles based on the information contained in this database. Still it is a good place to begin a search for information on foreign aid flows.

<http://blog.aiddata.org/2013/07/geography-of-us-food-aid-steep-road.html>

United Nations Procurement Division

The United Nations Procurement Division awards contracts for the United Nations. This link provides access to databases and documents from the United Nations and the various projects they fund around the world.

<http://www.un.org/depts/ptd/>

Office of Foreign Asset Control

The Office of Foreign Asset Control enforces economic sanctions against countries such as Zimbabwe or individuals such as TK. It licenses companies to trade in those countries under some circumstances and issues civil penalties against those who violate the law.

<http://www.treasury.gov/about/organizational-structure/offices/Pages/Office-of-Foreign-Assets-Control.aspx>

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

The Institute, according to its website "is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament.". It specializes in researching and compiling information on arm sales. The site has a large number of database on arm sales that are of use to African investigative journalists. Two of the most useful are the arms expenditures database which provides information on the military spending of 172 countries since 1988, and the arms transfers database, which shows all international transfers in seven categories of major conventional arms since 1950, the most comprehensive publicly available source of information on international arms transfers.

http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/transfers/measuring/financial_values

US State Department Arms Sales reports

The US State Department maintains this page of documents and databases which shows arms sales authorized by the US government to countries around the world. The reports and data show the total amount of the weapons sold, what type of weapon was sold and how many. A look at the 2011 reports, the most recent year available, shows that US arms companies were authorized to sell more than \$11 million in weapons to the Kenyan government. The companies were authorized to sell Nigeria more than \$22 million in weapons.

http://www.pmdrtc.state.gov/reports/655_intro.html

Database of Tax Reports for US NGOs

Getting information about US based NGOs often requires calling or simply emailing them for copies of their tax form called a form 990. Alternatively, a reporter can just Google the group and 990. The database listed below is a paid site, but it does provide fee summary information.

<http://www.guidestar.org/>

US Food Aid data

The US provides over half of the world food aid. Yet the aid is tied to US farming and shipping industries and has been criticized for not being as effective as it should be because of politics. One of the main issues is monetisation, where food is given to NGOs to sell locally to finance their programs. In many cases this depresses local markets, hurting farmers.

<http://www.fas.usda.gov/excredits/FoodAid/Reports/reports.html>

World Food Programme Food Aid Flows

This website by the international NGO the World Food Program tracks food aid from countries around the world. A great resource for tracking the flow of food aid from countries around the world.

<http://www.wfp.org/fais/>

US Fish and Wildlife Service International Grants to fight trafficking

The US Fish and Wildlife Service is involved in enforcing a number of US illegal animal smuggling laws and works with international agencies around the world to fight trafficking. The agency below also provides funding to a number of countries to fight smuggling. A search through the database listed below can yield a number of stories about agencies in African countries who have received funding and how effective they have been in fighting smuggling. The agency also provides a number of reports and investigations that can be obtained by filing a freedom of information request.

<http://www.fws.gov/international/grants-and-reporting/>

EU Aid grants and contracts

This is the one stop shop for all European Union grants and contracts made to governments, individuals and NGOs around the world, including countries in Africa.

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/work/funding/beneficiaries_en.htm

World Bank Data

Despite funding many development projects around the world, the World Bank database has not been fully utilized by journalists looking for information about these projects. This link provides access to both databases on spending and documents that audits projects funded by the bank.

<http://data.worldbank.org/>

Civil society watchdog groups and policy think tanks also monitor the World Bank and other global financing institutions. Global Policy www.globalpolicy.org monitors policy at the United Nations, while the Washington-based Bank Information Center www.bicusa.org and www.freedominfo.org are great places to start for researching the World Bank, regional development banks and the International Monetary Fund.

The National Security Archives

One of the best known sites for declassified US documents is the National Security Archives, a civil society group with no connection to the US government which has used the U.S. Freedom of Information Act to build a library of more than 20,000 records on international affairs. The civil society group, founded in 1985, also offers a subscriber-based digital archive with nearly 40,000 documents linked to U.S. foreign and military policy since 1945. In all, the

group holds more than two million pages of material.

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/>

US and EU lawsuits

Don't overlook lawsuits. Sahara Reports, a website run by Nigerian journalists constantly use lawsuits filed in the US to uncover information about African officials. Lawsuits can also uncover information about international companies operating in African countries. The link below is a paid site for access to US lawsuits, but a friendly US journalists might be willing for run a search for you.

<http://www.pacer.gov/>

Freedom of Information resources

EU FOIA Blog

<http://www.freedominfo.org/about-us/foia-blog-roll/>

Reporters Committee for the Freedom of the Press--USA FOIA

This website is run by a civil society group called the Reporters Committee for the Freedom of the Press. It provides information about US freedom of information laws and access to public records. The best feature about the site is an automatic freedom of information letter generator. You fill out a couple of forms and it will create a letter for you. In many cases you can file the letter electronically from the site.

<http://www.rcfp.org/>

Civil Society Group's EU FOIA help site

An EU site for information about Freedom of Information Request.

<http://www.asktheeu.org/>

Centre for Law and Democracy

Global Guide to Information by the Centre for Law and Democracy which rates access to information in different countries. The site also provides a copy of the freedom of information laws by country.

<http://rti-rating.org/>

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

You have all the documents or databases you've been searching for. Now what? Reporter Ron Campbell, an American investigative journalist has the following advice:

It emphasizes three mental habits that are vital to effectively using documents in reporting. But these are all habits that can be learned and, with time, become instinctive.

Organize

Let's get this straight. Going through documents can be boring and its easy to get lost especially as you get more and more information. So here are a few things to remember.

Keep physical documents in proper files. "Proper" means that you can find any important piece of paper in a few minutes. If a manila folder contains more than 50 pages it probably is too big. Managing files is one of the most important (and boring) aspects of reporting an investigative story.

Keep electronic documents in proper files. If you get more electronic documents than you can easily remember, build an index in a spreadsheet with hyperlinks to the original documents plus summaries and subject headings.

Make your editor or producer an ally so that you get the necessary time. If he or she has no investigative experience, explain why you need time to read the documents. My mantra: No document ever accused me of misquoting it; no document ever changed its story; no document ever claimed after the fact that what it said was off the record. Documents can and do lie, but for my money they are far more reliable than human sources.

An ability to see patterns

Reading everything will do you absolutely no good if you don't systematically explore the documents for hidden relationships.

Start by creating a people file (a detailed list of every individual and business, including information about relations and business deals) and a chronology.

Do this for every investigation that is likely to take more than, say, a week. Be sure to list sources for each and every item in the people and chronology files. This will help you see relationships between individuals you are investigating.

Keep your people and chronology files open as you read documents. Update them constantly.

Consider summarizing your material in a something like Google Doc, so you can share your files with other reporters and instantly link from one name or company to another.

Set aside time to read and re-read the people and chronology files. You may be surprised at the patterns that leap out at you on the third reading.

Re-read key documents occasionally. Don't be surprised if you see new details that you never bothered to put in your electronic people and chronology files.

Look for what's missing. The people who inspire investigations often are pretty good at hiding things. Remember that wealthy people usually buy real estate and that businesses invariably do deals with other businesses. Just because you can't find land or deals in the targets' names doesn't mean they don't exist.

Use checklists. Whether you have five or a dozen or 30 people on your list, make sure you do the same basic check on each and every one of them. (You may, of course, do more detailed checks on a handful of characters.) Spreadsheets are a great tool for this. Create a grid with names running down the first column. Across the top list the documents you need to check. Mark each document as it is checked. If you are working with another reporter, share the load by initialing each item as it is done.

Openness to new ideas

Almost by definition, documents lead us in dozens of different directions. The act of writing, by contrast, forces us to choose a couple of themes and stick relentlessly to those themes; this relentless focus is absolutely necessary for our readers or viewers – to say nothing of our editors or news directors. But in following a paper trail, be mindful that a sidetrack may prove more productive than the main road.

Don't be afraid to get off-trail. Go where the documents lead. If one record includes a name you are not familiar with, pull records on the new name. If you come across a new address, pull records on the new address. Don't let yourself think that you know where the trail is going until you have spent some time exploring it.

When we ask one set of questions, we tend to look for answers in a particular set of documents. Ask a different set of questions, and we look for an entirely different set of documents. Don't be afraid to pose some what-if questions halfway through an investigation, even if they require looking at documents that initially seem unpromising.

Test your limits. Most investigative reporting revolves around just a few types of documents. But land records, court records and tax forms are not the only fonts of knowledge. You can master them and still know only fragments of the paper trail. There are many thousands of types of documents that few reporters have ever looked at. Reporters have to constantly be on the lookout for other documents. Again, the thing to remember is to always ask yourself is: How does the activity I'm investigating get recorded and who is it reporter to?

FURTHER READING

Organizations to help with accessing and locating global documents

Investigative Reporters and Editors	http://www.ire.org
International Consortium of Investigative Reporters	http://www.icij.org/
100Reporters	http://100r.org/
Bureau of Investigative Reporting	http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/
Global Investigative Journalist Network	http://gijn.org/
World Press Institute	http://www.worldpressinstitute.org/
Great Lakes Media Centre	http://www.greatlakesmedia.org/
Pulitzer Center	http://pulitzercenter.org/

Stories using global Documents

Shadow Diplomacy: African Nation's Bypass Embassies, Tap Lobbyist

<http://100r.org/2013/07/shadow-diplomacy-african-nations-bypass-embassies-tap-lobbyists/>

US Warns Kenya against shoot to kill orders

<http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-57117/us-warned-ali-against-shoot-kill-order-says-wikileaks>

CNN denies lobbyist for Nigerian President paid for interview

<http://premiumtimesng.com/news/122797-interview-cnn-disowns-us-lobbying-firm-raising-questions-about-jonathans-40000-payment.html>

Former Ambassador Andrew Young Lobbies for Nigerian President to build library

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/18/business/worldbusiness/18goodworks.html?pagewanted=all>

US role in global rhino horn trade

<http://100r.org/2013/05/u-s-grows-as-hub-in-global-rhino-horn-smuggling/>

Books Using global documents for investigations about activities in African countries

Killing for Profit, Julian Rademeyer, Zebra Press, 2012

Operation Blackwash, Ron Nixon, Mampoeer Shorts, 2013

South Africa and the United States, National Security Archive, New Press, 1994

Apartheid Contras, William Minter, Booksurge Publishing, 2008

Ron Nixon



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