

[DISA brochure is available for download here](#)

Mission

DISA is a national collaborative initiative undertaking the building of an online, high quality information resource containing historical material of importance and interest to scholars and students, and making this resource easily and universally accessible. It is a centre of excellence in South Africa, developing knowledge and expertise in digital imaging technology in the library and archival community through research and training.

Our Vision

DISA will make use of digital technologies to promote the efficient and economical delivery of information resources within a selected subject area to students, scholars, researchers and the wider community, locally and internationally. It will play a pivotal role in the development of a digital learning environment, in meeting the needs of an increasingly mature student profile, in the growing needs of distance education, and for lifelong learning.

DISA developed in two phases, now available as one seamless digital resource.

DISA 1

DISA 1, an initiative encouraged by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation through a workshop held at the University of the Witwatersrand in September 1997, and funded by the Foundation in 1998, was the first library/archive project in South Africa to be undertaken on a national rather than a local or institutional level. It makes accessible online to scholars and researchers worldwide, South African material of high socio-political interest which would otherwise be difficult to locate and use.

Entitled *South Africa's Struggle for Democracy: Anti-Apartheid Periodicals, 1960-1994*, it covered the three key decades in the growth of opposition to apartheid rule. The Sharpeville massacre in March 1960 was the start of a crucial period of South African history, and the 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of the Black Consciousness movement, the independent trade unions, and the revival of the

[African National Congress](#)

after the Soweto uprising of June 1976. Resistance increased, most notable in the township revolts which occurred between 1984 and 1986, and the first steps towards negotiation with the apartheid government began in the mid-1980s. A decisive turning point in the history of the Struggle occurred with the unbanning of the liberation movements in 1990, culminating in the first democratic elections of 1994.

Forty five journals provide not only a wide spectrum of political views, but also a diversity of subjects such as trade unions, health, culture and gender (e.g. FOSATU Worker News, Sash, Isizwe, Clarion Call, Grassroots, African Communist). Some of these publications were short-lived and, of necessity, of limited distribution, and are thus not well represented in research collections. Others are scattered in collections around the country. These important resources are now brought together in an easily accessible way.

DISA 2

Also funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, DISA 2 expanded and developed DISA 1 with the addition of archival resources in multimedia formats. Entitled *Southern African Freedom Struggles, c.1950-1994*, it includes documents, interviews, articles, posters, commissions, trials, and legislation under the umbrella theme of freedom struggles, with carefully selected content in areas such as human rights, leadership, political parties, urban struggles, land issues, trade unions and student unions. Content selection is undertaken by scholars who are specialists in various subject areas. It is a challenging task given the abundance of suitable material available and the difficulty of prioritizing it for inclusion. Content decisions are also affected by ownership and intellectual property rights issues, with care and effort expended in obtaining permission to use material for the DISA archive.

Current Development

The combined DISA library is a rapidly developing and accessible resource of materials of all kinds related to the freedom struggle in southern Africa. It provides a fascinating picture of the political and social turbulence of the apartheid period, and the struggle for democracy and justice. Institutions, scholars, librarians and archivists around the country are contributing to its development on an ongoing basis through the selection, provision and processing of items that will add to the intellectual content of the DISA archive.

In addition to building an archive of South African Struggle literature, DISA also plays a leading national role in ensuring that internationally acceptable standards are used for systems, architecture, metadata, indexing and retrieval, and in developing expertise in digital technology through the ongoing training of librarians and archivists. DISA's involvement with partner institutions enables this transfer of digital imaging skills to several remote capture sites in South Africa. The DISA staff have also made available a comprehensive set of Guidelines and standards that assist in the process of building an online resource, and which also serve as a complementary medium of instruction. These are updated on an ongoing basis. A small office staffed by dedicated people and guided by a representative Governing Committee has become a respected and expert centre for digital technology in this country and in the southern African region.

DISA is working towards a measure of sustainability by providing technological expertise, training and hosting of content for several projects in South Africa and the wider region.