

The need for specialized audiovisual archives in the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA)

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Introduction

This paper gives a picture of the way AV materials are kept in the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA). The discussion is based on findings based on the author's study on the management and preservation of AV materials in the region. The study was conducted during the period of 2004-2007. The findings revealed that AV materials in the region were depreciating due to inadequate storage conditions, lack of qualified staff, lack of policies that specifically address AV materials and most importantly, the absence of specialised AV archives (with the exception of South Africa). While some national archives such as the National Archives of Zimbabwe, the Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS), the Kenya National Archives and Documentation Services and the National Archives of Namibia had AV units housed under the same building, the National Archives and Records Services of South Africa, has a specialised AV archives. Others such as the National Archives of Tanzania and Swaziland National Archives, relegated the management of AV archives to media organisations. This paper, therefore, argues that the management of AV archives should be the sole responsibility of national archives. This is best done through specialised AV archives (under the aegis of the national archive) or specialised AV units which meet recommended storage conditions for AV materials. They must therefore be kept under ideal conditions to preserve them.

The need for specialized audiovisual (AV) archives in any country is justified by the fact that AV materials are unique, fragile and fugitive. AV materials differ from textual records in format and characteristics. The chemical nature of audiovisual carriers makes them susceptible to damage, destruction and loss. For instance, tapes can easily get entangled in machines; needles or styluses easily scratch discs and cylinders. Artefacts are susceptible to scratches, dust and surface noise. Sound recordings are dependent on complex technology, which deteriorates at a rapid rate. It is therefore important that AV materials are kept in storage rooms which meet the recommended storage conditions, to prolong their life span. It is equally important that AV materials are stored in specialised national archives or specialised AV units.

The state of AV archiving in most countries in the region is beset with political and socio-economic factors which have a bearing on the placement of National Archives. This invariably impacts on the priority accorded to AV materials. While some countries such as the Republic of South Africa (RSA) can afford a specialized national archive for AV materials, some countries in the region do not have facilities to keep AV materials. There is a general tendency for national archives in the region to relegate the management of AV materials to media organizations. This is an opportunity that needs to be encouraged, since most of the national archives in the region do not have the facilities to store AV materials. Such an arrangement would curtail the ongoing dissipation of AV materials. This paper discusses the development of AV archives in ESARBICA and the administration of AV materials. The paper ends with a section on the best approach to managing AV materials in the region.

Background to the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA)

The Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) is a regional body comprising of the following countries: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, Swaziland, South Africa, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Zanzibar. Established in 1969, ESARBICA represents the Eastern and Southern Africa charter of the International Council on Archives (ICA). Its mission is to advance the archives through regional co-operation. It organizes annual conferences and workshops for its member states and publishes a bi-annual journal on archives and records management. These interactions strengthen relations between archivists in the region and professional institutions.

Background to the development of AV archives in ESARBICA

The concept of preservation of AV archives arose from the need to re-use audiovisual documents for educational, commercial and historical purposes. This seems to have been the trend in developed and developing countries, as evidenced by various authors (Connors 2000; Edmondson 2004; Forgas 1997; Matangira 2003; Mwangwera 2003; Ombiti 1990). While Edmondson (2004) saw the need for officially designated and recognised national audiovisual archival institutions, he noted that the physical location of the AV archives varied from country to country and from institution to institution. Edmondson felt that the administration of audiovisual archives depended on whether or not the service was offered by government, semi-private or private firms. Chavula's (1988) study of the National Archives Act of East Africa revealed that only the Lesotho and Sudan national archival Acts indicated the ministries to which the archival services belonged. The above author concluded that the administrative structure of a national archive depends on the emphasis that the government places on the national archives.

AV archival services developed at a slow pace in the ESARBICA region. Mazikana (1997/98) pointed out that a large part of the continent could not afford to operate an AV unit. Matangira stated that most of the archival institutions in the region were "still struggling to develop their audiovisual collections" (2003:45). She further stated that although the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) were established in 1935, the audiovisual unit (AVU) was only established in 1988. Prior to that, "materials were dumped in a room with no temperature and humidity control required of films and other audiovisuals objects, and were catalogued second class to traditional library material" (ibid.). However, this situation improved with the establishment of an AV unit. Although NAZ has an AV unit, it is unable to acquire or preserve AV materials due to the current political and economic situation (Zinyengere, 2008). In Lesotho, archives materials including AVs are kept in the National University of Lesotho Library, the Thomas Mofolo Library (Qobo 2004).

Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Zambia had the oldest collection of films. The film unit known as the Central African Unit (CAFU) was a regional film unit sponsored by the three governments and it operated during the period of 1948-1963 (Mukotekwa, 2002). In addition to CAFU, films were produced by the Zimbabwe Information Service, International Television News, British Broadcasting Corporation Television, British Gaumont, and Pathè (Mukotekwa, 2002). The collections consisted of political broadcasts, travel films, instructional films, propaganda films, news reels, and documentaries. CAFU produced the bulk of films in the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) but it was very expensive for NAZ to purchase the films in reel form due to budgetary constraints (Mukotekwa, 2002). Zinyengere (2008) reported that prior to the development of the AV unit at NAZ, AV materials were kept in the library (Zinyengere, 2008:37). The National Archives of Zambia was founded in 1947 as a depot of NAZ (Mutiti, 1999). In 1950, all the records were transferred to Zimbabwe. This prompted the opening of a new national archive in Lusaka in 1950. Zambia's National Archives had about 200 films, 2,500 microfilms, 200 microfiche, 25 videos and 200 audiotapes (Matangira 2003).

In the case of Swaziland, Mamba reported that "earlier surveys of Swazi traditions indicate that they probably contain the richest data on the pre-colonial past yet extant in Southern Africa" (1986:251). Mamba revealed that the National Archives of Swaziland had instituted an oral history project, which preserved oral testimonies of Swaziland history (including pre-colonial history). The materials included a photography section with a collection of photographs of national events dating from the pre-independence era (Swaziland Government, Ministry of Tourism 2005). Nonetheless, the National Archives of Swaziland also has a very small collection of AV materials (Matangira 2003). Abankwah (2007) lamented the plight of AV materials in Swaziland when she observed that some of the AV materials at the Swaziland Broadcasting Information Services (SBIS) were in danger of destruction from sunlight. The AV materials were kept in a caravan. This temporary 'shelter' does not meet standard conditions for preserving AV materials. This could be attributed to the fact that the National Archives of Swaziland does not have facilities to keep AVs.

In the case of Tanzania, the responsibility of preserving AV materials was relegated to the Audiovisual Institute of Tanzania, known as Tanzania Television (TVT) (Matangira 2003). In Zanzibar, the National Archives collaborated with the Department of Broadcasting and Television to open a Sound Archives unit in the Main Library of Radio Zanzibar in 1989 (Matangira, 2003). The project covered all institutions that produce audiovisual materials in the country. It was later given a legal mandate for caring for and preserving all Zanzibar records in 1988 (The United Republic of Tanzania 2007). This Sound Archives Unit could have been developed as a specialised national sound and audiovisual unit similar to the National Film, Video and Sound Archives (NFVSA) of South Africa.

Botswana's audiovisual materials are kept under the same environmental conditions as traditional archives (Abankwah, 2007; Kukubo, 1986; Matangira, 2003). The Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS) obtain some of the AV materials from Radio Botswana. Piet (2004) reported that BNARS has an arrangement with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, where Radio Botswana and Botswana Television Services ensure that programme producers deposit copies in the BNARS (Piet 2004). Matangira (2003) reported that Kenya National Documentation Services has a separate AV unit, which mainly houses AV materials from government institutions. The archival Acts for the Tanzania and Zanzibar National Archives (The United Republic of Tanzania, Act, 2002), National Archives of Zimbabwe (Department of National Archives 2006), Swaziland National Archives (Swaziland Government, Ministry of Tourism 2006) and National Archives of Namibia (Government Gazette of the Republic of Namibia 1992) are all silent on the preservation of audiovisual materials. This shows a weakness in some of the archival Acts, which may have a negative impact on the administration of AV archives in the region. It leads to a depreciation of AV materials as they are not kept under ideal storage conditions.

It appears that RSA is ahead of the other ESARBICA member states in terms of audiovisual preservation. In 1964, NFVSA was formed (National Archives and Resource Service of South Africa 2004). NFVSA is a specialized repository for audiovisual materials, with a mandate to collect and preserve AV materials that are produced in South Africa (ibid.). It preserves different formats of AV records and related materials such as films, videos, CDs, DVDs, scripts, posters, slides, music, sculpture, paintings and other artefacts. NFVSA's oral section promotes indigenous music, art and South African history (ibid.). NFVSA is a model to other countries in the region.

Placement of AV national archives World-wide

Harvey and Moosberger noted that the location of archival materials is an important aspect of public service.

The determination of which archives have what materials...can affect a researcher's decision about whether or not to visit an archives, especially if sought out materials are small or split fonds are held by several different repositories in various locations (Harvey and Moosberger, 2007:41).

An AV Archive may be a unit of a centralised national archive, a subject-centred national archive, or a private, specialised media archive (Schuursma 1997). The administrative structure of a national archive depends on the emphasis that governments place on national archives (Chavula 1988). This arrangement invariably impacts on the placement of AV units. Schuursma (1997:81) suggested three approaches to managing AV materials:

- A medium-centered approach, which gives priority to the preservation of specialised sound recordings;
- A content-centered approach, which focuses on the content of the recordings for research and educational purposes; and
- A multi-media approach that is a combination of all media. It aims at giving maximum service to the user.

According to Bantin (2002), the centralised custodial approach has the following advantages over the distributed collection approach:

- i. Mission and competencies – The creating agencies' (or media archives') mission is not to safeguard the authenticity of non-current records (including AV archives). Moreover, their staffs do not have the necessary skills to preserve non-current records.
- ii. Ability to monitor compliance – It is difficult to have enough trained archivists to monitor or audit records.
- iii. Cost to monitor compliance – It is likely to be more costly to monitor recordkeeping practices in a distributed environment.
- iv. Changes in work environment – Changes in staffing and departmental priorities are likely to place records (particularly AV archives) which are in the hands of creating departments or media organisations, at risk.
- v. Vested interests – It is important that AV materials are taken from those who are bound to neglect or corrupt them. It should be noted that media organisations are commercial entities. They do not hesitate to erase tapes/recordings, thereby destroying the cultural heritage!!

The proponents of the distributed custody approach argue that it is more practical and less costly to preserve electronic records within the creating offices, provided policies and procedures are in place to ensure that records can be managed from anywhere. While Schuursma (1997) insisted that there was a need to make a distinction between the two approaches, he acknowledged that, in some instances, a multi-media approach was common. Such an approach aimed at giving maximum service to the user. The multimedia approach requires "a larger part of the budget to be directed towards the acquisition and preservation of audiovisual media" (Schuursma 1997:82). The author had reservations about the multimedia approach, since it was difficult to give this required priority to AV materials due to financial constraints (Schuursma 1997). This was the case in most countries in the region (Abankwah, 2007; Dlamini, 1999; Matangira, 2003; Zinyengere 2008). Schuursma (1997) explained that, in reality, most archives were medium-centred, or content-centred, or a combination of both. Abankwah (2007) observed that most national archives in the region attempt to follow the multimedia approach, albeit unsuccessfully.

Kofler (1997:45) suggested that AV archives should be legally designated, mandated and appropriately equipped to "...collect, restore and preserve audiovisual materials of national or international importance..." The author saw a need for countries to formulate a legal framework, in order to make a clear distinction between AV archival institutions, which are officially appointed and are recognised, and other types of AV organisations. He emphasised that a statement of the purposes, objectives and responsibilities of all archival institutions in a country should back up such a framework.

Harrison (1997) stated that a combination of AV materials in one setting was a common practice in Australia. Similarly, Germany Sound Archives are kept under one administration. The practice is different in the United Kingdom (UK) where "...the BBC has archives of separate materials under different heads of department and scattered all over London and beyond..." (Harrison, 1997:3). Cook (1986) reported that the BBC was responsible for providing technical services for written archives, sound recordings and visual recordings in the U.K. In Canada, AV materials were decentralised to heads of departments which manage specialised AV materials. Similarly, the Library of Congress and the National Archives in Washington DC operate under a decentralised set up. Harrison (1997:4) reported that most of the archives were "... developing into function-based archives rather than material or media-based archives." Saintville (1986) said there was a similar approach in the case of France. In Spain, the AV materials were the responsibility of film archives and organisations which were responsible for producing radio and television programmes. The Spanish Film Archives fell under the Film Department of the Ministry of Culture (Labrada 1986). The section that follows examines the placement of various national archives in ESARBICA.

Placement of AV national archives in the ESARBICA region

The administration of AV archives in ESARBICA does not differ much from the developed world, albeit with resource constraints. A few cases of separate media archives are reported in ESARBICA. These include Botswana, Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zanzibar, and Zimbabwe (Abankwah 2007; National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act No. 43 of 1996; Matangira 2003; Mwangwera 2003). According to Mnjama (2005:459), "experience gained in other commonwealth countries such as Ghana and Gambia indicates that where the national archives are placed in a ministry without wide ministerial powers their operations are bound to suffer". This invariably impacts on the operation of the AV unit/ independent national AV archives.

The 1985 RAMP report states that a national archive should be placed in a way that can best serve its objectives. This means that "archives should be aligned with the highest level of inter-ministerial or supra ministerial authority" (Parer 2000:10). While the RAMP report realized the need to place archives within a bureaucracy, it stated that the placement of archives within government depends on whether emphasis is based on heritage or record keeping. In this regard, the levels of autonomy given depend on whether the archive is:

- i. A section within a department;
- ii. A separate department in its own right reporting direct to a minister;
- iii. A statutory authority, an executive agency, or even a government corporation (Parer, 2000).

While each of the above choices has advantages and disadvantages, each country decides what suits their needs. "Legislation does not normally nominate the placement of the archives within a bureaucracy or specify the responsible minister" (Parer, 2000:11). Nonetheless, the 1985 RAMP report clearly states that an archive should be placed in such a way that:

prevents the submission of competing interests..., eliminates blurring of functions with other professional agencies and disciplines; protects against interference within agency programme responsibilities under the color of coordination authority; and eliminates the hampering supervision and control by having little or no professional knowledge of its program responsibilities and operations (Parer, 2000:11).

It appears that different member states have different ways of administering AV materials. For instance, in Botswana, all public records are the responsibility of the BNARS, which aims at providing efficient and effective economic management of all public records throughout their life-cycle, as well as their preservation (Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs, Government of Botswana 2005). The BNARS was later restructured and placed under the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture. The majority of the national archives in the region fell under the Ministries of Education, Sports, Art and Culture, as well as the Civil Service Department (Mazikana, 1997/98; Mnjama, 2005). However, there were extreme cases, such as the National Archives of Swaziland, which fell under the Ministry of Tourism, Communication and Environment. Dlamini (1999) explained that the aims of the above ministries differed from those of the national archives. Such a structural arrangement poses problems for the National Archives of Swaziland. These included shortage of funds, shortage of personnel and lack of machinery and equipment. This author observed that it was difficult to convince administrators to release funds because they "lacked knowledge, understanding and importance of the information kept in archives" (Dlamini 1999:27). The National Archives of Swaziland was moved recently to the Ministry Information, Communication and Technology. In Lesotho, "the national archives are a small component of the Department of Culture, which fall under the Ministry of Tourism, Sports and Culture" (Mnjama 2005:459).

Mazikana (1997/98) pointed out that a few countries in the region had appointed boards/committees to assist the national archives. "In South Africa, the management of audiovisual collections is directly under the national archives..." (Mnjama 2005:466). It appears that

the structural placement of National Archives has a direct bearing on the way AV materials are managed. National Archives which are administratively well placed tend to accord more financial resources to the management of AV materials. This explains why countries such as South Africa have a fully fledged National Film and Sound Archives while others such as Tanzania and Swaziland do not even have an AV unit due to lack of facilities to keep AV materials. On the other hand, countries such as Zimbabwe which had a well equipped AV unit have failed to maintain it due to political and economic factors.

UNESCO emphasizes adherence to archival legislation in the management of AV materials. This means that by relegating the management of AV materials to media organizations, most of the national archives in the region fail to enforce the required archival legislation. This paper challenges ESARBICA countries to put their act together before they seek funding from international organizations. International organizations such as International Association of Sound and Audio Visual Archives (IASA), International Federation of Television Archives (IFTA), International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF), International Federation of Films and Archives (FIAT), South East Asian and Pacific Audio Visual Archives Association (SEAPAVAA), and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) continue to offer training scholarships and expertise to developing countries. This has been acknowledged by AV archivists such as Zinyengere (2008). Nonetheless, the onus is on archivists to play a more proactive advisory role in their respective countries. They should not merely settle for the traditional custodial role.

What is happening at the moment is that whatever funds are granted to national archives are allocated to services other than the preservation of AV materials. Biblically, it is documented that the servant who could not manage little had it taken away and given to the one who could manage it better, hence the saying, the 'haves will have more'. International organizations should reward those national archives which are managing their AV materials well. Countries which do not make any attempt to develop AV units should not benefit from any assistance. Ultimately, all countries in the region should be encouraged to have an AV national archive. This should be a requirement set by the International Council on Archives (ICA). That is, *NO AV ARCHIVE, NO NATIONAL ARCHIVE*.

Advantages of specialised national audiovisual archives

Keeping AV materials in a central location has various advantages. It is cost effective and users can easily access the collections from one place. This arrangement also makes maximum use of available resources which include skilled AV personnel, equipment and space.

Conclusion

This paper maintains that AV archives should either be managed through a centralised custody approach, or a semi-custody approach (which is a combination of centralised custody and distributed custody). This will grant national archives, which do not have the facilities to preserve AV materials, to keep them in various other institutions while at the same time having control in terms of policies and specialised archivists. The major observation is that currently, AV materials remain a neglected resource in the region, and where efforts are being made to manage these materials, these efforts are rudimentary (except for South Africa). Unlike the developed world, there has been little effort to have specialised national archives for AV materials in the region. The paper therefore makes the recommendations:

Recommendations

- i. National archives should be placed under an influential ministry, which will grant national archives more funds.
- ii. National archives in the region should take a cue from the developed world. While a combination of AV materials may suit some countries, other countries could opt for a decentralised set up. The latter should ultimately prevail.
- iii. Directors of National Archives should be granted more autonomy in decision

- iv. Assistance should be rendered by way of expertise. Experts could be attached to various archival institutions in the region. Such experts should train AV archivists and play an advisory role in the running of specialised AV units/archives.
- v. National Archives in the region should follow a medium-centred approach. Media organisations should be permitted to manage AV archives under professional guidance of archivists. (A good example is Botswana, which has various storage places such as the Department of Information and Broadcasting, Radio Botswana, Botswana Television and the Department of Surveying and Mapping).
- vi. All national archives in the region should appoint boards/committees to assist with the operations of the national archives. There should be a representative from one of the media organizations on these boards/committees.
- vii. There is an urgent need to form a regional committee which should see to the training of AV archivists and the formation of specialized AV archives in the various countries (regionally).

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