
Infrastructural challenges on archives and recordkeeping at the National Archives of Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Infrastructure plays an invaluable role in the preservation of records and archival material. In Zimbabwe, records management services have been decentralised to provinces but the challenge is that most of the provinces are still characterised by poor infrastructural challenges. In light of the afore-mentioned problems, this paper sought to highlight and discuss the challenges that were bedevilling the National Archives of Zimbabwe regarding records and archival infrastructure. The methodology employed in this study involved the use of questionnaires, observation, document analysis and literature on records and archives infrastructure. The study revealed that records centres in Masvingo, Chinhoyi, Gweru and Mutare did not have adequate records management facilities, such as purposely built structures, shelving equipment and preservation facilities. The afore-mentioned records centres still use rented premises which are not designed for keeping records, the study revealed. In Harare and Bulawayo where there were purposely built structures for records and archives, issues of the shortage of shelving facilities, and storage/filing space still required immediate attention. Given the importance of the national memory in the form of archives or records, the paper recommends that records and archival infrastructural issues be given due attention by both the government and the National Archives of Zimbabwe itself in order to ensure sound records management practices.

Keywords: Records, archives, National Archives of Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

With the field of archiving and recordkeeping dating back to close to a century, the importance of records or archives is well understood. Morley (2012) asserted that:

archives are a vital part of our cultural heritage. They help people, communities and nations make sense of the past. They are evidence of events and of the past. They are evidence of events and decisions, of past lives, ideas and communications, and of people's own identities...

It is therefore by this virtue that archives should be jealously guarded as most of them are rare, special and cannot be sold on the market or purchased from vendors or inside bookshops (Asogwa and Ezema, 2012). Therefore, keeping them in purposely constructed and secure infrastructure is of paramount importance as archival buildings are one of the archival facilities that play a critical role in the management of records and archives. In fact, buildings are recognised as the first line of defence against a severe climate and various disasters (Murambiwa, et al 2012: 11 citing Teygeler et al 2001). Thus, sound records and archives management can be achieved in the presence of adequate infrastructure.

African archival institutions face a plethora of challenges and the lack of purposely built premises is one of them. Bostock (n.d:2) argued that

although there are many impressive public and private archival holdings in Southern Africa, the comment has been made that developing countries are focused on primary survival needs and lack national information policies, finance and human resources to create suitable infrastructures. Without proper store of information it means the national memory is in danger.

Thus, the challenges of infrastructure impact negatively on preservation activities of records and archival institutions. Unfortunately, most African institutions find themselves in this predicament, resulting in poor preservation and conservation activities. As observed by Olatokun (2008:3), most information managers in Africa are facing the problem of effective preservation and conservation of information materials. In most countries, national archival institutions occupy either purpose-built or converted buildings and most of those purpose-built repositories were constructed after 1960 (Mazikana n.d:2). Murambiwa (2012: 11) also cited Mazikana (1997) who stated that “for a long time it was common to find archival collections in Africa being housed in buildings that were inadequate. Such buildings do not provide conducive environments for both the documents as well as the staff working in the archives. Baxter (1954) in Murambiwa et al (2012:11) stated that to begin with, the public archives in Zimbabwe were accommodated in an inadequate semi-basement facility, with proponents for an archives service, since the 1920’s, insisting on the provision of purpose built premises. This saw temporary premises being used whilst waiting the opportunity to construct the building to permanently accommodate the archives.

The challenges faced by NAZ are not only unique to the institution but cut across other cultural repositories in Zimbabwe such as the National Museum and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) and National Art Gallery in Zimbabwe as stated by by Tsiko (2013) who argued that:

museums are not the only cultural institutions that have been affected by theft, disappearance and looting of the cultural heritage that embodies the country’s collective memory. The National Archives of Zimbabwe, the National Art Gallery and public libraries are facing similar problems.

This calls for secure infrastructures with well-equipped security equipment for the archival collections. Asogwa and Ezema (2012) have this to say about structural preservation techniques:

This involves a way of selecting the type and quality of materials to be used in constructing libraries, archives and records after a good site has been identified. This requires that the structures/buildings should be constructed with fire resistance materials; secured with iron windows and doors; equipped with alarm system, portable fire extinguishers and humidifier (air conditioners) and CCTV.

2. The history of archival buildings at NAZ

The National Archives of Zimbabwe started operating in 1935. It then used rented premises until 1961 when a purpose built archives building was opened (Matangira, 2012: 114). Murambiwa et al (2012: 11) stated that the first buildings to accommodate archives were the two rooms at the corner of Central and Fifth Street in Harare. Later the archives moved to Bechuana House in what is now Robert Mugabe Way (Matangira 2012:114). In 1938, the Archives moved to the basement of what is now the Munhumutapa Building. By the 1940’s serious planning had begun for the construction of archives premises at the present site. The Beit Trust and the government contributed to the construction of a custom building which was completed in 1961 (Murambiwa et al, 2012:11).

The National Archives of Zimbabwe, which once operated as the Central African Archive (CAA) in 1947-1963 catering for Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and Nyasaland (now Malawi) is praised by Matangira (2011: 115) for

laying “a strong foundation for archival services, making it a unique establishment which served as a model for good record keeping”. Matangira (2011: 115) then quoted Tough who described CAA as “the outstanding archive repository in sub Saharan Africa”. In 1966 the Bulawayo Records Centre was opened in the second largest city to cater for the Matabeleland region. It started operating from the Tredgold building and moved to other different rented premises in Bulawayo (Tokwe, 2010: 9). In 2001, a purpose-built archival building was opened in Bulawayo, with eight huge repositories. In 1988, a gigantic record centre and recorded to be one of the largest centres in sub-Saharan Africa (Matangira, 2011: 115) was opened next to the archival building in the Head Office in Harare. Matangira further described both of these structures as purpose built buildings with facilities put in place for proper records and archives functions and having secure and appropriate storage with access points.

The National Archives of Zimbabwe operates five (5) records centres within the ten (10) provinces of Zimbabwe, owing to its decentralisation programme which was rolled out in 1986. It was during this year that the then Prime Minister of Zimbabwe quoted verbatim by The Ministry of Information, Posts and Telecommunications (1986:2) declared that my government intends

... to decentralise archival services and extend record centre facilities to reach the larger urban and provincial administrative centres. This year will thus see the opening of an archive in Mutare as the beginning of the decentralisation process.

However, twenty six years from that declaration, records centres in Masvingo, Gweru, Chinhoyi and Mutare are still using rented premises. The Head Office, that is the National Archives of Zimbabwe in Harare and the Bulawayo Archives and Record Centre (BARC) are the only centres which have purpose-built archival structures. Such a situation does not offer a favourable solution for the preservation of the nation’s memory because most of the country’s records are housed in buildings that were not meant for the housing of archives and records.

3. Statement of the problem

The National Archives of Zimbabwe has only two out of six buildings that were purpose-built for archives and records management, which are the Head Office in Harare and BARC. The other record centres which are Mutare, Masvingo, Gweru and Chinhoyi are using buildings that were never meant for archives. This situation is further compromised by obsolete infrastructure and the shortage of important equipment such as shelving material and storage space.

4. Objectives of the study

The aim of the study was to determine the state of archival infrastructure at NAZ and the impact that infrastructural challenges pose to the institution concerning records and archives management. In particular, the objectives of the study were:

1. To determine the state in which the records and archival buildings at NAZ were.
2. To assess the significance of the location of NAZ and its sub-centres in relation to its users.
3. To establish the extent to which the status quo regarding storage and shelving space affected the operations at NAZ.
4. To determine the condition of preservation equipment at NAZ.
5. To identify security equipment that was used at NAZ to protect records and archives.

5. Research Methodology

A case study design was used in this study and it was qualitative in nature. Data gathering instruments involved questionnaires, interviews and document analysis. A total of five (5) standard questionnaires were administered to archivists at all the records centres which are the Bulawayo Archives, Mutare Records Centre, Masvingo Records Centre, Gweru Records Centre and the Chinhoyi Records Centre. Document analysis included an analysis of the Director's annual reports, building plans and letters of correspondence. Telephone interviews were conducted with two (2) archivists at the Head Office in Harare.

6. Summary of Research Findings

The following sections present the findings of the study. As explained earlier on, the study was qualitative in nature and most of the data is presented in textual and tabular forms following the order of the research objectives.

6.1 Buildings

As stated by Mazikana (n.d:145) "architecture plays an essential role in the preservation and conservation of archival heritage". In light of this, the study sought to determine the state of records and archival buildings at NAZ, in which the following results were obtained as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Records and archival buildings at NAZ

National Archives of Zimbabwe and its branches	Archival suitability of the building and ownership
National Archives of Zimbabwe (Head Office)	Purposely built for archives and records management and owned by the department
Bulawayo Archives and Records Centre	Purposely built for archive and owned by the department
Mutare Records Centre	Rented premises and unsuitable for archives and record keeping
Masvingo Records Centre	Rented premises and unsuitable for archive record keeping
Gweru Records Centre	Unsuitable for archives and record keeping. The building is owned by the government public works department
Chinhoyi Records Centre	Owned by the department but not suitable for archives and record keeping

As shown in Table 1 above, only the Head Office in Harare and the Bulawayo Archives had purposely built records and archival facilities. Thus, out of six (6) records/archival facilities around the country, only two (2) were purposely built.

Still on the aspect of buildings, the study further sought to establish the structural qualities of the buildings that were being used by NAZ to store its records and archives. Table 2 shows the structural qualities of the buildings that are found around the country, which were littered with a lot of problems.

Table 2: Some of the structural qualities of National Archives of Zimbabwe's buildings

National Archives of Zimbabwe (Head Office)	Bulawayo Archives and Record Centre	Mutare Record Centre	Masvingo Record Centre	Gweru Record Centre	Chinhoyi Record Centre
32 Fire proof walls for the records section	Divided into 8 repositories, offices, gallery, reading room, library, receiving bays, access doors	Constant movement to different repositories. One of the repositories at Natvest is leaking	Using partly 4 th floor of a storey commercial building. Also using satellite repository at district development fund offices some 5km from the main office	Building used to be a prison	Was once used by Chinese builders who were constructing the Chinhoyi hospital. It is a bedroom that was converted into a records centre and partitioned into offices
Concrete roofing for both the archives and records sections	Concrete roofing for the records section before zinc roofing			Roof leaks	Roof leaking in some of the areas
Two separate walls before archival repositories				Cracks in walls and old cracking floors	
Archival repositories divided by shatters within					
Well working drainage system for the records section and opposite for the archive section	Proper and well working drainage system				

As seen in Table 2, NAZ premises in various parts of the country were faced with serious challenges such as leakages, cracks, poor and ageing drainage systems, difficulties regarding accessibility and distance.

7. Location of NAZ facilities

Because the location of the archives tends to affect the extent of their usage, the study also sought to determine the effect of the location of the NAZ facilities. Since users can only gain access to archives as opposed to records, the focus was on the Harare and the Bulawayo archives since the other facilities are just records centres. The study revealed that the archives in Harare and Bulawayo were located closer to the military barracks. This was said to be negatively

affecting the usage of archives since some users are not comfortable with being closer to military barracks. In Masvingo, the distance between the staff offices and its satellite repository was 5 km, thereby making it difficult for the records personnel to move between the repository and their offices.

8. Shelving and storage facilities

The study further sought to establish if the storage and shelving facilities were adequate at NAZ. The following results were revealed by the study:

8.1 National Archives of Zimbabwe (Head Office)

Records Section: There was a shortage of shelving space but adequate storage space. There was a shortage of space in the archives section. The storage space was available but it had been taken up by the records which were waiting to be processed. This has led the archives section resorting to one of the repositories to store the records waiting processing.

The records section at the Head office has decided to stop the accessioning of new records except for policy and personnel files. The archive section was outsourcing shelving material from the records section. It emerged through the study that archives were being processed and put on the floor.

8.2 Bulawayo Archives and Records Sections

The records section at the Head Office has decided to stop the accessioning of new records except for policy and personnel files. The archive section was outsourcing shelving material from the records section. Now it is just processing and putting the records on the floor.

8.3 Mutare, Gweru and Masvingo Record Centres

These three record centres were all facing the shortage of shelving equipment and storage space.

In Masvingo the new records consignments are put on the floor, awaiting the expiry date of the shelved ones which were then destroyed to create space for those that were placed on the floor. This records centre also had a satellite repository that was 5km away from its main offices which, in most cases is unmanned. The Gweru Records Centre was now restricting the acceptance of new records deposits. In Mutare, the records due for transfer to the public archives were transferred and those due for destruction were destroyed. In this way, space was created thereby solving the challenge of inadequate shelving space. The Chinhoyi Records Centre sometimes supplied the Mutare Records Centre with shelving material since they have excess shelving material.

8.4 Chinhoyi Records Centre

This centre had adequate shelving equipment and storage space. This was a positive situation as compared to that prevailing in other centres.

9. Preservation Equipment

The deterioration of information bearing materials such as records and archives has a very long history, and unless something is done to stop the process, library and archival material will continue to deteriorate (Ogunmodede and Ebijuwa 2013:50). This is a battle that has to be waged against in order to protect the invaluable information contained in archives and libraries (Ogunmodede and Ebijuwa 2013:50). Because preservation is strongly dependent of the availability of adequate infrastructure, one of the objectives of this study was to establish the

preservation equipment that was in use at NAZ and its records centres around the country. Table 3 summarised the findings of the study with regards to this objective.

Table 3: Preservation facilities

Name of Archives/Records Centre	Availability of Cold rooms	Availability of Conservation equipment	Availability of Fire extinguishers	Availability of Overhead sprinklers	Availability of Humidity and temperature equipment	Availability of Dust suckers and air conditioners
National Archives of Zimbabwe (Harare)	yes	yes	yes	yes	Yes for the audio visual section	Yes but the air conditioner is not working
Bulawayo Archives and Records Centre	no	no	yes	yes	no	Yes, the dust sucker is there but the air conditioner
Mutare Records Centre	no	no	no	no	no	no
Masvingo Records Centre	no	no	no	no	no	no
Gweru Records Centre	no	no	no	no	no	no
Chinhoyi Records Centre	no	no	no	no	no	no

As shown in table 3 above, archival institutions lacked the proper archival equipment, with four (4) out of six (6) recording a no for all the necessary preservation equipment.

10. Security Equipment

Security of both records and records/archives is important. As stated by Brow and Patkus (n.d) “if collections are to be protected against loss, libraries and archives must consider security as a management issue deserving a serious investment of resources” Given the importance of security in archives, this study also aimed at identifying the security equipment that was in use at NAZ. The study showed the following results as tabulated in Table 4.

Table 4: Security Issues

Name	Guards	Alarm	CCTV	Biometric	Lock and key	Authorised access
National Archives of Zimbabwe (Harare)	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bulawayo Archives and Records Centre	Yes	Yes but not functional	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Mutare Records centre	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Masvingo Records Centre	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Gweru Records Centre	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Chinhoyi Records Centre	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes

As shown in table 4, security issues were also a cause for concern as results indicated that security systems were still unavailable in some institutions, especially the records centres.

11. Data interpretation and discussion

The focus of the following sections is data interpretation and discussion. Data interpretation and discussion enables the findings the present study to be juxtaposed with literature on similar subject matter, thereby further placing the study in context.

11.1 Buildings

Understanding the importance of buildings in the preservation of records and archives is hardly new (Rene 2001). For example, as early as the nineteenth century India, the authorities started to create a network of builders which were based on specific standards for the storage of district records. However, despite this, it is worrying to note that most records and archival buildings are not suitable for the storage of records and archives. As observed by the International Council on Archives (ICA) (2005: 12), in most of the countries, archives buildings are often neither suitable nor adequate because they are not considered a priority in the public service. This is a case in Zimbabwe because since the launch of decentralisation of records centre programme in 1986, only one archival building has been built. Bhebe (2011: 121) observed that “it had taken too long to complete the archival building in Masvingo because of lack of funds...” However, the building is now at roofing level. This is impacting negatively on the preservation of records since most of record centres have leaking roofs, cracked floors and walls leading to the deterioration of their records.

The data collected revealed that all record centres (Mutare, Gweru, Masvingo and Chinhoyi) were using unsuitable buildings for their recordkeeping. This is what Rene (2001)

meant by stating that “in some countries, even now, the condition of archives and library buildings is alarming”. The present study revealed that some of the buildings that are being used as records rooms used to be prisons. A good example is the Gweru Record Centre, whilst the Chinhoyi record centre used to be a bedroom for the Chinese builders who constructed the Chinhoyi hospital. Murambiwa, et al (2012: 8) concurred with this desperate situation, stating that:

out of these sub-centres only Bulawayo has an archival repository for the storage of public archives. The other branches are restricted by their repository infrastructure to be records centres or offices that only cater for public records within the province. The Bulawayo Records Centre of the National Archives of Zimbabwe officially began its operations from a new repository in the suburb of Kumalo in 2000, after leaving the Tredgold Building Complex. Of concern is the fact that the other provincial records centres are situated in non-customised buildings that lack the requisite repository facilities of space, equipment and controlled environmental records centre has begun in Masvingo whilst land for similar centres has been identified in Mutare, Gweru and Chinhoyi.

It is commendable that stands to build proper archives for these record centres have been secured long back but it remains to be seen when the government of Zimbabwe will start to prioritise and build the archives in these centres. The predicament that NAZ finds itself in is similar to what other archival institutions in Africa. Surveys of African archives and libraries indicated that the majority of these institutions, especially archival ones, adapted premises to house their collections (Rene, 2001). This was usually done as a way of saving costs (Rene 2001). The revelations by the present study where it emerged that with the exception of the Harare and Bulawayo archives, all the other records centres of NAZ were adopted buildings that were unsuitable for records and archives confirms an observation by Khayundi (1995, Laar (1985) and Mbaye (1995) cited in Rene (2001) that adapted buildings are normally old and sometimes dilapidated structures. As shown in Table 2, a number of these structures that were adapted by NAZ as records centres are characterised by a lot of structural shortcomings and signs of dilapidation such as cracks on the walls and floors as well as leaking roofs.

11.2 The significance of the physical locations of NAZ’s archival buildings

The location of archival buildings is always the bone of contention, with the ICA (2005: 12) stating that:

a building intended for an historical archive, as opposed to that intended for a library or any other public building, does not need to be in the city centre, since the majority of users are not members of the general public, but specialist researchers. On the other hand, administrative archives, which are more frequently consulted, do need to be in the administrative centre of a city.

It can be said that most of archival material at BARC is administrative in nature and a bit historical whilst for the NAZ Head Office it is both. BARC is located opposite the huge ‘Brigade one’ military barrack and within a stone’s away from the busy Bulawayo-Harare highway road. NAZ’s Head Office in Harare is also located next to KG6 military barracks and separated only by the fence. The state house is also within the ten minutes’ walk from NAZ. Whether these locations are by design or what, still remains unclear. However, some colleagues at NAZ have postulated and came with theories to this issue and suggested that it was done intentionally for security reasons. For example, they state that in case of wars and military invasions, soldiers will easily defend these archival institutions and protect the national heritage. Nowadays, there is no need for military invasions involving soldiers on foot in order to fight your enemies. Drones are used and controlled from afar and the fact that archives are located nearer military barracks will not help when there is war. Military barracks are also war targets, so by virtue of archival centres

being nearer to them, they become collateral damage during war. In fact, this tends to have unintended results of researchers somehow shunning archival centres because they cannot stand being nearer to military barracks.

The location of BARC has impacted negatively on a number of researchers who visit the centre. For example, the cost of transporting the requested records by government departments has been passed to those government departments which then further passes the costs to the clients or researchers. Bhebhe (2011: 99) quoted the then Director of NAZ lamenting the site location of BARC:

after a number of approaches to the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development, the Department of Physical Planning in Bulawayo wrote to us in July 1987 and offered us a site located some way off Bulawayo-Harare Road near the Observatory and asked for our opinion as to its suitability. The site in question is in an undeveloped area ...some distance from the City Centre and from other related institutions and amenities, an area which did not appear to be within easy reach. We pointed these shortcomings to the same authorities and inquired as to the possibility of finding a more centrally located site-somewhere near the Museum or National Library and other public amenities. Having failed to get any response, we then appealed directly to the Municipal authorities through the Bulawayo Town Clerk. The outcome of that correspondence was our being informed that the more centrally located site near the museum enhanced the beauty of the city and could not be used for building developments and the Town Clerk went on as far as pointing that after all the National Archives in Harare was not in the city centre and that a national archives was just a place where old records were stored and hence did not have to be centrally located! He thus totally ignored the fact that an archival institution also exists to give service to the public and therefore must be accessible to the public and also that National Archives in Harare is in a developed area.

Therefore, the location of NAZ in Harare and BARC violates one of the cardinal archival principles which states that it is desirable for archives to be located “near major user community” (Schwirllich and Belluiken, 1987: 39). The ICA (2005: 12) suggested that

usually thought that archive buildings should be situated in the urban centre, the seat of the central administration or the government, as this would offer them a greater level of protection. All these considerations notwithstanding, an archive building, whether historical or administrative, needs to be situated on a site with easy access and above all, in a cultural or administrative centre.

These are the issues that may have been seriously taken into consideration when it came to the construction of BARC. The site of an archives institution should not be at risk because of its nearness to military targets, and should be convenient in terms of accessibility by the public. (My Infor Blaze 2010). Other archives in African countries, including Botswana, South Africa and Nigeria. In South Africa, national archival institutions are spread around the country’s provinces that are not located close to military bases. This, the situation in Zimbabwe regarding the two national archives which are located next to military barracks may be a cause for concern, although this is debatable.

11.3 Shelving and storage facilities

The importance of adequate shelving and storage infrastructure can be traced back to as early 2000 BC Mesopotamian archivists who stacked clay tablets on shelves off the floor and away from the walls to protect the vulnerable clay from damp (Banks 1999 in Rene 2001). In explaining the importance of having adequate and well-structured shelving and storage equipment, Rene (2001: 95) quoting Read emphasised that:

when the heart of a cultural institution is its collection and the main part of its collection is in storage, then institutions should put taking good care of its heart, its collection in storage as the highest priority.

Whilst this is so, the National Archives of Zimbabwe has a serious shortage of shelving equipment and storage space. The only exception is the Chinhoyi Record Centre. The reason, as offered in the Director's annual report (2009: 3), was that the Chinhoyi Records Centre had shelving space because it was relatively new. However, for the other centres, the situation was dire, with the Director (2010: 4) lamenting that "our record centres have been hit hard by space and shelving shortages".

The impact of this is that it has affected public access to archives as most records/archives remain unprocessed for public research. The Director (2009: 4) concurred with this by observing that in public archives section

lack of shelving contributed to the section failing to absorb matured records from records centres. This compounds the processing backlog. Currently we have over 17 000cuft of records awaiting processing. At current processing rates it will take us 48 years to clear this backlog alone!"

The storage challenge at NAZ has led to unorthodox archival methods being practised. Sometimes records are being processed and then put on the floor. Even the top cover on the shelves is being used to store records and archives. The Canadian Council of Archives (2003: 33) noted that the top cover of the shelves comes handy in reducing the amount of dust settling on records and reduces water damage from roof leak, burst pipes or an activated sprinkler system. At the Bulawayo Archives and Records Centre some part of roof was once blown away by the wind in 2010. The roof was repaired but water was now able to ingress through it and this affected the records which were on top of the shelve covers.

The Canadian Council of Archives (2003: 33) strongly advised that there should have no archival materials stored on the floor as they are at greater risk from water damage and if a large collection is delivered and it has to be set on the floor a temporary platform should be created for them. Rene (2001: 102) echoed the same sentiments by stating that "in case of insufficient shelving when records must be stored on the floor, some type of blocks or pallets should be used so that records are not directly in contact with the floor". At BARC in December 2010 the importance of this was learnt in a hard way when during the weekend some of the records which were left on the floor at the receiving bay were affected by water which was coming from an unclosed tap. This was a serious challenge that characterised NAZ despite Rene (2001) explaining that "perhaps the second most common threat to archives is water damage", a warning that NAZ should act on the problem of shelving space immediately.

The shortage of shelves at NAZ in Harare and Bulawayo has led archivists to shelve ½ cubic feet boxes using their sides' not normal bases so that more of them are shelved. This may seem as a creative method of addressing storage challenges but it has unintended negatives. One of them is that when retrieving some files it becomes difficult to remove the box from shelve and sometimes tearing it in the process.

NAZ administers the National Archives Act of 1986 and the Printed Publications Act of 1979. The Head Office in Harare was the one in which publications were deposited whereas in Bulawayo, the Bulawayo Public Library (BPL) was the one which was administering the Printed Publications Act (PPA). However, when it was proposed that since the BARC has now infrastructure to accommodate this PPA material, it was then transferred from BPL to BARC. This marked the beginning of records, archives and library shelving storage chaos at BARC. Walker (2003: 2) advised that shelving should be of inert material, and appropriate to the size of its contents.

What is happening at BARC is that the shelving material in the repositories was meant for records and archives not the library material. This has led to the wastage of shelving space because the library material is now housed on the shelves that were designed for records and archives. Safely, it can be said that the shortage of shelving space at BARC is due to goal displacement. That is, what BARC was initially designed for is being changed. This can also be cemented by the observation made by Bhebhe (2011: 98) that the architectural plan of BARC revealed that the “microfilm and audio visual rooms at the institution were catered for. However, these rooms have never been used for their intended purposes, instead, the microfilm room is now used as a library. The audio visual room is now an office”. This represents goal displacement which seems to be continuing and thereby causing records and archives repositories to be inundated with library material.

11.4 Preservation

Infrastructure for the preservation of records and archival material includes temperature and humidity regulators as well as lighting equipment. Thus, “environmental conditions such as temperature, humidity, light... can affect documents of any kind” (Alabada 2001 in Rene 2001). These are discussed below.

11.4.1 Temperature and Humidity equipment

Archival material is well preserved if properly built archival infrastructure is used. Walker (2003:1) mentioned that “preventive measures can considerably extend the useful life of collections, and are usually much more cost-effective than intervention measures taken to remedy damage after deterioration”. Uncontrolled temperature and humidity can be destructive to archives especially the audio visual section. Roper and Millar (1999: 20) advised that in repositories where paper-based archives are stored, the ideal is to ensure that the following conditions are maintained with no rapid changes or significant variations:

Temperature: within the range 16-20 degrees celsius

Relative humidity: within the range 55-65 percent.

This is important because temperature and relative humidity outside these ranges, and fluctuations in particular, lead to deterioration of the materials. In repositories where microfilm, microfiche, photographs, sound tapes and film are stored, it is particularly important to avoid fluctuations of temperature and humidity because these types of archive are even more vulnerable than paper. In these instances, the temperature should be the same as for paper but ideally the relative humidity should be lower, silver halide (acetate) film: within the range 15-20 percent:

Silver halide (polyester) film: within the range 30-40 percent and

Diazo film: within the range 15-30 percent.

However, at NAZ, only the audio visual section has that infrastructure to measure temperature and humidity. The air conditioning system which used to service the archive section has been long not working. There were not even dust suckers in the the archives section in Harare. In the Director’s Annual Report (2010) it is mentioned that this has led to high levels of dust which is both affecting records and the members of staff. The dust suckers were available at the records section in Harare and at BARC. For the record centres, all of them did not have even have the basic infrastructure for disaster management except the guards who mann their record centres. This is a cause of concern as Matangira (2010: 120) stated that the effect of uncontrolled and “inappropriate temperature and humidity levels will surely be seen one day, when some records cannot be read or accessed”.

Matangira (2012: 120) bemoaned the equipment failure at NAZ during the period of 2000 to 2010 by noting that:

film cold-rooms, in the Audio Visual Unit, (AVU), also suffered from constant power-cuts during this period. There were frequent breakdowns of the refrigerating units and the dehumidifiers and eventually, with no maintenance or servicing, the film cold rooms became dysfunctional. Thus, the huge audio visual collections became victim to what every archivist fears most: fluctuations in temperature and humidity (mainly due to power-cuts); and total loss of controlled temperature and humidity when the equipment broke down completely. However, the AVU storage vaults were repaired in early 2010 through grant from the Zimbabwe Culture Fund, which is a great development indeed! It is important though, for the National Archives to carry out preservation and condition surveys of the audiovisual (AV) collections in order to assess the damage that was done during this period of upheaval and make plans to save any damaged collections.

The situation that was prevailing at NAZ with regards to preservation equipment was worrisome. It cut across the whole department with record centres not even having fire extinguishers for their repositories. The overhead water sprinkler at NAZ archives section in Harare has not been working for the past twenty years as the interviewed archivist stated whilst respondents were not sure whether the one in the records section was functional or not. This was also the same with the one at BARC. In a study that was conducted by Ngulube (2005) on “Environmental monitoring and control at national archives and libraries in Eastern and Southern Africa”, it emerged that the challenge of poor temperature and humidity controlling equipment was typical of these institutions. Ngulube’s (2005:161) study revealed that;

- Only three (27.3%) archival institutions had a heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system whilst only two (22.2%) national libraries had these facilities;
- The HVAC systems had broken down some few years back;

If an air-conditioned system is installed, it is important to ensure that the system runs continuously, even in the silent hours (Rene 2001). This was not the case in most national archives and libraries in Eastern and Southern Africa as shown by Ngulube’s study. This was also a challenge for NAZ whose air-conditioners were down. Ngulube (2005:162) concluded that “the energy resources to keep an air-conditioning system running are prohibitive for most countries in sub-Saharan Africa”. This can be said to be true for NAZ as witnessed by the present study which showed that with exception of the Harare Archives, all the records/archival buildings around the country did not have cold rooms or temperature regulating equipment. It was also worrying to note that even at the Harare and Bulawayo Archives where air-conditioners were available, these were not functioning. See Table 3 for more details on this. For example, Ngulube in his 2005 study reported that one institution reported that the environmental control and monitoring units were last calibrated two years ago, and the other institution was not aware as to when the units were last calibrated. A similar trend was revealed by the present study at NAZ where, for example, it emerged that overhead sprinklers in the archives section had not been working for the past twenty years. Thus, preservation infrastructure is a cause for serious concern at NAZ, and the problem is typical of other archival institutions in Eastern and Southern Africa as revealed by Ngulube’s (2005) study.

11.4.2 Lighting

Ngulube (2005:162) reminded archivists and librarians that “over and above controlling temperature and RH, archivists and librarians have to be concerned with light sources and their

levels in the repositories”. Light speeds up the oxidation of paper, causing materials to deteriorate faster (Roper and Millar, 1999:18; Ngulube 2005:162). Various lighting systems are available, including, natural, fluorescent and incandescent. Ideally, incandescent lights which generate lower levels of radiation, should be used in place of fluorescent ones (Roper and Millar 1999:19). At NAZ, fluorescent lights were used in the repositories and this is not advised. This implies that archival materials were at risk of deteriorating faster than it would if incandescent lights were used. A study that was conducted by Ngulube on “Environmental monitoring and control at national archives and libraries in Eastern and Southern Africa) in 2005 indicated that the major sources of artificial light that the respondents cited was fluorescent lamps, which emit high levels of ultraviolet light (UV) that causes fast deterioration of materials, with only five (45%) archives and two (22%) libraries using natural light from windows in their storage areas. This implies that the problem of using improper lighting systems was not only typical of NAZ, but the majority of national archives and libraries in Eastern and Southern Africa.

However, Roper and Millar (1999:19) advised that both types of lights do produce heat, implying that it is generally advisable to keep lights off whenever it is possible. NAZ was adhering to this advice as it used to switch off the lights in its repositories every time there was no one there and upon knocking off.

11.4.3 Dust suckers and sprinklers

Dust is also also detrimental to records/archival material. A study that was conducted by Olatokun (2005) on preservation and conservation practices and techniques in Nigerian university libraries revealed that the major cause of deterioration, ranking higher than other factors such as bad shelving excessive light, which were found to be the least causes. Thus, despite an archival institution having adequate air-conditioning facilities, other equipment including dust suckers is important. As shown in Table 3, the situation concerning the availability of dust suckers and sprinklers was not pleasing as only the Harare and Bulawayo Archives had these facilities, with the rest of the records centres around the country operating without this equipment. It is also worth noting that although the Harare and Bulawayo Archives reportedly had dust suckers, the air conditions were all down. This also implies that the collection at all the NAZ records centres and archives were at risk, owing to poor preservation infrastructure. This is what led to Olatokun (2005:10) citing inadequate infrastructure as one of the key constraints against effective preservation of library and archival materials.

11.5 Security Equipment

One of the important factors in protecting records and archives is the provision of adequate security measures to protect the people working in these repositories (Roper and Millar 1999:133). Stealing from archives (2007: 5) further elucidated that:

archives contain theft-prone objects of many different kinds. Some have a commercial value by virtue of their age or historical importance, while others may be of value to individual persons because of the information they contain regarding present-day properties or deceased relatives.

Then means that archival institutions need to acquire security equipment for the protection of the archives. The National Archives of Zimbabwe at the Head Office is moving in the right direction concerning this issue by introducing biometric security measures. These measures allow a strict authorised access to the repositories. However, a lot still needs to be done as these structures do not have circular circuit televisions (CCTV).

At BARC and all the other records centres, biometric methods had not been introduced. At BARC, there is the use of CCTVs for monitoring only because they do not record what is

taking place. So the BARC and other records centres are relying on basic security infrastructure such as lock and key system.

12. Conclusion and recommendations

NAZ needs to secure funding for its building projects. Since it is not getting much from the government they can consider partnering with private sector in order to secure the so much needed funds for purpose-built archival centres. Partnering can be extended to local government departments, for example the Masvingo Municipality can be approached for any assistance that they can offer towards the completion of the Masvingo Archives and Records Centre. Friendly countries can also be approached for donations. NAZ can also consider prioritising their building and shelving projects over everything.

A functional national library for Zimbabwe needs to be created and take over that function of administering the Printed Publications Act, given the incapacitation of NAZ at present. By so doing, NAZ will then concentrate its energies only on archives and records management and this is likely to improve the issues of storage and shelving both in Harare and Bulawayo.

NAZ is also encouraged to improve the entire records and archives infrastructure around the country by building more purpose-built structures which are fully equipped with the necessary preservation equipment. Preservation equipment such as air-conditioners and humidity regulators should be given priority so as to ensure the readability of the materials over time. Archives are unique, implying that once they are rendered unreadable by improper preservation measures, the nation would have lost its invaluable and irreplaceable memory and cultural heritage.

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