

Beyond regress: museum records management in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Although museums are information centres, it has been observed that they do not have records management procedures, systems and programmes in place. The situation owes its existence to the absence of records managers in museums and a negative attitude towards records management issues by museum practitioners. In Zimbabwe's five National Museums, records are created and kept at departmental levels with no records management guidelines in place. Such behaviour compromises the museum's operational needs,

1. Introduction

Museums are inherently information centres; however their information is often created at local, departmental or project levels with specific targets and outputs in mind (London Museums Hub 2010). Whilst this approach may meet the immediate information goals of a museum, it does not always take into account the overall business needs of the entire organisation, its potential future requirements and the needs of the public and researchers who look up to the museum for documentary heritage. This situation can result in uncoordinated systems, information duplication, poor

collections management and threatens the role of museums as information centres. Through observations, interviews done with Regional Directors and questionnaires distributed to head of departments at all the five national museums that are found in Zimbabwe; the study concluded that the absence of professional records management practices leads to uncoordinated systems, poor preservation strategies and restricts the ability of a museum to innovate. This paper sought to demonstrate the need for professional museum records management practices without which the collections found in museums will become a meaningless box of material culture and the security of collections will be threatened, thereby compromising the position of museums as information centres.

Key terms: Documentary heritage, Records management, Museum records, Collections management, Records management policy, Records procedures manual, Records surveys, records appraisal.

preservation strategies, wastage of resources and time in search of material that cannot be easily found as well as inability to consistently locate relevant information sources. It can also result in missed opportunities, compromised public service delivery and limits the ability of a museum to effectively and efficiently serve as an information centre. From that perspective, this paper examines records management practices in Zimbabwe's five National Museums paying particular attention to the perceived basic records management requirements in public institutions. These include the availability of a records procedures manual, records management policy, retention

and disposal schedule. The paper also sought to establish if Zimbabwe's National Museums conducted records surveys and records appraisals.

2. Background to the study

The National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) was established in 1935 and functions under the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe Act of 1972 (Chapter 25:11). The vision for NMMZ as stated in the National Archives of Zimbabwe's mission statement is to guarantee a secure future for Zimbabwe's heritage and to provide excellent heritage management services while promoting an understanding and appreciation of that heritage within the nation and beyond. For that vision to be attainable there is a need to develop a sound records preservation programme of documents generated as a result of museum programmes and activities. It is however sad to note that the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe Act of 1972 is not explicit about museum records management.

Mahachi (2008) lamented the absence of sound documentation in Zimbabwe's museums and highlighted that museum collections in Zimbabwe were prone to theft. The report indicated that Zimbabwe's loss of cultural objects will persist unless museums ensure the physical infrastructural aspects as well as the storage facilities of collections are well secured. In this regard, this study argues that physical protection of objects alone may not be adequate if the supporting documents of museum objects are not well preserved. As

such, the call to provide museum objects with a secure environment must also be made to the records that accompany them. Zimbabwe's National Museums have experienced a number of incidences where objects have been stolen. For instance, the Natural History Museum lost the Guinea Trophy which contained 175 ounces of gold in 1998, King Lobengula's gold bracelet was stolen on an unknown date and seven leopard skins were stolen on the 3rd of July 2003 (Mahachi 2008). At the National Mining Museum in Kwekwe, two gold crucibles were stolen between the 5th and the 9th of October 2000 while four gold crucibles were stolen on the 24th of December 2001 (Mahachi 2008). While these incidences reflect the inadequacies of physical security in Zimbabwe's National Museums, it should also be appreciated that a sound records management programme is needed to offer physical protection to collection that is comprehensive, complete and meaningful. Mahachi (2008) reported that in 2005 NMMZ received information from a source in South Africa that objects stolen from the ethnography department at the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences were on sale in Cape Town. Efforts to get the objects were in vain as there was no documentation to prove that NMMZ were indeed the owners. Following that report, Mahachi (2008) urged NMMZ to ensure objects are documented in terms of the object identity guidelines. While standard documentation is a critical first step in collections management, record keeping should also be made a museum core activity if the entire documentation process is to yield the desired results. The context in which this study was carried out shows that the need for sound records management practices aids the security of museum

collections, improves the museum operations, promotes easy access to museum records and helps in attaining the overall purpose in life of museums.

3. Research problem

As already indicated in the background to the study, the lack of appropriate record keeping systems in museums compromises the security of museum collections and threatens the role of museums as information centres. Planned and systematised management of records improves museums' programmes and activities thereby leading to effective governance and operation of the museum. While it is appreciated that issues to do with managing records are well documented, this paper laments the lack of records management literature specifically produced for the museum environment. That has resulted in museum practitioners treating records management as a distant phenomenon. Such a situation compromises the role of museums as information centres.

What make museums unique and valuable institutions are the cultural objects they keep in trust for members of the public. However, for the museum's objects to be valuable they need to be accompanied by relevant information. Museum records management is essential because it helps museum personnel to quickly locate objects and make them available to users when they are needed. Information recorded about objects is vital for the management of collections, responding to public enquiries, publications, research and exhibitions.

4. Theoretical model and literature review

This study was informed by the records life cycle concept and the continuum principle which states that for efficiency and effectiveness to be attained in the conduct of an organisation's business, records have to be properly managed throughout their life cycle (Buckland 1994:346; Yusof and Chell 2000 and Atherton 1985). The records life cycle model is the corner stone for creating an effective records management programme because it allows for the development of appropriate tools, systems and procedures to appropriately manage each phase of the life of a record (Yusof and Chell 2000). However, in the museum context, object records do not have an 'expiry' date, they are created and remain in constant use for as long as the object remains in the collection which in most cases would be for the life of the museum or until it has been de-accessioned or even after the object has been de-accessioned. This means that object records do not follow the phases of the records life cycle. They are created and remain active for their entire life. The implication is that object records have an immediate archival status. Their value to future generations is recognised at the time of creation. The records life cycle concept nonetheless remained valid in this study because museums generate various types of records which pass through the three phases of the life cycle identified earlier on. The object related records fall into the final stage of the records life cycle where strategies to manage archives or records of enduring value are provided. Overall, the current study uses the records life cycle concept

to examine how museum practitioners working in Zimbabwe's national museums are managing their records. As such, the research questions for this study mainly covered how Zimbabwe's National Museums created, used, maintained and disposed of their records.

This study acknowledges the existence of several models of museum documentation and their contribution to this research. The models discussed include the International Committee for Documentation (CIDOC) guide for museums, the United Kingdom Documentation Standard (SPECTRUM), the International Council of African Museums (AFRICOM) and the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN). The study also consulted museum documentation initiatives that are offered by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Those models and initiatives identified above are discussed under one section because their areas of interest and points of emphasis on museum documentation are the same.

The CIDOC guide is compatible with the standards provided by ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums in 2006 and it has an international focus on the documentation interests of museums and similar organizations such as libraries and archives. CIDOC has been committed to the development of museum documentation standards for over 40 years (Grant and Petersen 1995: 11) and has provided a platform for the discussion of standards issues and practical initiatives. The

SPECTRUM model represents a common understanding of good practice for museum documentation. It contains procedures for documenting objects and the processes they undergo, as well as identifying and describing the information which needs to be recorded to support the procedures (McKenna and Patsatzi 2005). The resource provides legal procedures, minimum documentation standards, policies and resources in all the documentation phases of a collection, from pre-entry records to disposal (McKenna and Patsatzi 2005). The SPECTRUM is a collection of the experience and insight of hundreds of people from the European continent working in the museum community. For that reason, the SPECTRUM is recognised in the United Kingdom as the museum industry standard for documentation practices. As a way of acknowledging the valuable contribution of the SPECTRUM, the British Museum Accreditation Scheme includes eight of the twenty one SPECTRUM procedures as a requirement (McKenna and Patsatzi 2005:186). Through the use of the SPECTRUM as a standard guide, most museums in the United Kingdom have managed to shape their organisations' records management systems.

Closely related to the SPECTRUM is the AFRICOM handbook of standards which provides advice on how to begin the digitisation of inventories and the documentation of collections using a standardised and rigorous organisation of information. Similar efforts are recognised from ICOM which produced a handbook in 2006 that provides basic definitions relating to collections management and general information on numbering and marking of objects (Boylan 2006:31). The SPEC-

TRUM, CIDOC and AFRICOM acknowledge that museum documentation is more than simply a means of managing an object in a collection but a way of turning objects into working artefacts (McKenna and Patsatzi 2005: 185). That means appropriate documentation enlivens museum activities. The SPECTRUM, CIDOC and AFRICOM regard museum documentation as a vital part of the creative process which transforms recognition into inspiration for museum users. CIDOC, SPECTRUM (McKenna and Patsatzi 2005) and ICOM (Boylan 2006) indicate that with effective documentation, a museum should be able to facilitate collection policies, collection care and accountability, collection access, interpretation and use as well as collection research. The guidelines for museum documentation provided by CIDOC and SPECTRUM mentioned the need for museum practitioners to consider the preservation needs of museum records. CIDOC indicated that the museum must implement a documentation system which 'maintains the information' about the objects and supports practical collections management procedures, such as accessioning, loans management, object location and movement control (Avaro & Godonou 2008). Similarly, the SPECTRUM highlights that the accessions register should be made of archival quality paper and be bound in permanent form (Brunskill and Demb 2012:4). In a meeting held in 2007, UNESCO and ICCROM agreed that all the museum artefacts be numbered, marked and registered in a hard backed, bound accession register, and that an appropriate location system be in place. These sections in the CIDOC, SPECTRUM as well as UNESCO-ICCROM initiative suggest the need for museum practitioners to ensure that

the preservation needs for museum records are met.

Using documentation specialists, CIDOC, SPECTRUM and AFRICOM has managed to offer the international guidelines for museum object information. The CIDOC guidelines provide a definition of the information categories that should be used when recording details about objects and outline the format rules and conventions governing how information is entered in these categories (Grant and Petersen 1995:19). The guidelines are very useful and can be adopted by an individual museum, national documentation organization, or system developer, as the basis for a working museum documentation system. CIDOC, SPECTRUM and AFRICOM guidelines were designed to ensure accountability for objects, aid the security of objects and to provide an historic archive about objects as well as to support the physical and intellectual access to objects (Grant and Petersen 1995:20). The need to protect cultural property against damage, loss, theft, and crimes against humanity has acted as an incentive to the development of standardised documentation practices. As a result, the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property recommends that national inventories be established to identify cultural property. The implication was that inventorying objects in a standardised way could help prevent loss and aid the recovery of lost items. The availability of good documentation also ensures that knowledge about objects extends beyond the objects themselves. It provides a foundation for the use of a collection by curators, researchers

and the public. Overall, CIDOC, SPECTRUM and AFRICOM guidelines are elaborate resources that clearly explain the importance of inventorying (documenting) museum objects.

The museum documentation initiatives offered by UNESCO and ICCROM are slightly different in that they are focused on providing smaller museums from developing countries with the necessary skills and tools to analyse their current documentation systems and to guide them through a user-friendly method for computerised documentation systems for their collections (Avaro & Godonou 2008:5). The UNESCO-ICCROM resource (2008) urged small museums in developing countries to develop and adopt inexpensive, powerful, easy-to-use and efficient software. In 2007, UNESCO and ICCROM conducted a survey of the various initiatives and documentation systems for museum collections which have taken place during the past twenty years in the smaller museums in Africa. The survey was done in order to better orientate further activities. A total of 14 museums were surveyed and half of those museums did not have an accessions register while 90% of museums who had attempted computerisation had failed (Avaro & Godonou 2008). In as much as the SPECTRUM, CIDOC, AFRICOM, ICOM, ICCROM and UNESCO initiatives provide a common understanding of good practice for museum documentation, the current study found them unfulfilling because their focus is solely on documentation and other information associated with objects. The fundamentals of museum records management such as records surveys, records appraisals, records procedures manual, records

management policy and retention and disposal scheduling within the museum context are barely mentioned. The resources do not provide much on how the generated records should be looked after. The aspect of records preservation within the museum environment seem to have not only been overlooked by museum documentation scholarship but has also been 'ignored and looked down upon' by museum practitioners.

Samuel (1988:142) indicated that since the 1970s, documentation of museum objects has emerged as a major concern for museum professionals. For instance, the American Association of Museums (1984:53) notes that the lack of information about the number, location, and condition of objects, artefacts and specimens in the nation's museums is a handicap to adequate care and maintenance of these collections and to scholarly progress in general. However, as long as previous research and existing literature do not address the need for appropriate records management practices within the museum environment, then the mission of museum documentation may not be fulfilled.

Demb (2012:27) observed that the importance of records management might not be obvious to everyone yet its impact on the ability of the museum to function effectively is indisputable. The State of Florida (2009:14) asserts that it is only through the operation of a well-run records management program that a museum retains control of its corporate memory, which allows an organisation to conduct its business. The State of Florida (2009:14) further indicates that a sound records management system is characterised by its ability to

manage and control records from their creation to ultimate disposition.

5. Methodology

This research project employed the survey research design because it allowed the study to gather large amount of data from a sizeable population in a highly economical way (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2007). Questionnaires, interviews, observations and *facebook* as well as *whats-App* were used as data collection instruments. Facebook and Whats-App were used to collect information from head of departments who had not completed questionnaires which were sent and handed to them three times. Informal investigations made as follow ups to the questionnaires was done revealed that head of departments in two of the five surveyed museums perceived records management issues as absolutely divorced from museum operations. To this effect, the head of departments were not keen to participate in the research project. Consequently, the study had to make use of the social media platforms to solicit data from the targeted respondents. Data for the research project was collected from 21 heads of departments and 5 Regional Directors for NMMZ. No sampling was done; the study consulted all the five regional national museums in Zimbabwe. The research questions in questionnaires and interviews were complimenting each other as they were all meant to establish how museums in Zimbabwe created, used, maintained and disposed of their records. Key issues addressed in the research instruments had to do with records management policy, records procedures manual, records appraisal, records

surveys as well as retention and disposal scheduling. The observation technique was mainly used to examine the condition of the museums' records storage areas.

6. Findings and discussion: the types of museum records

The interviews that were conducted with Zimbabwe National Museum's Regional Directors and the questionnaires distributed to head of departments revealed the types of records that are generated in Zimbabwe's National Museums. These included accessions register, card catalogues, visitor comment books, monuments inspection reports, loans in and out registers as well as annual reports (*these are produced by the Executive Director through a compilation of outstanding activities carried out in all the five regional museums*). The interviews held with Regional Directors revealed that the accessions register is a very important document as it serves as evidence that the object belongs to the museum. The Heritage Council of Australia (2004) states that the accessions register provide the basis for developing the museum's entire documentation system. Avaro, Cardelli and Godonou (1996) consider the accessions register as the museum's memory. Other crucial documents which were reported to be in existence throughout the five surveyed regional museums were monuments inspection reports. These help heritage managers to make informed decisions regarding the conservation and or preservation of cultural heritage sites. Through the consultation of previous monuments inspection reports, practitioners are given the opportunity to repeat successes while mistakes are learned from

and avoided. Additionally, if museum records such as the loans in and out register happens to be lost or destroyed, a museum risks losing its objects on loan and those that could have been to other locations for various reasons.

The lack of sound records management programme that initiates acceptable records preservation strategies places the future of museums as information centres in danger. It must always be remembered that a museum collection without supporting information is lifeless, meaningless and may not contribute to scholarship.

6.1 Records management policy

The successful preservation of the above identified museum records largely depends on a well crafted records management policy. A records management policy is a document that governs the way records are created, used, maintained and disposed of. The information yielded through both questionnaires and interviews showed that museum practitioners are mainly concerned with documenting museum collections at the expense of records preservation needs. All informants from the five surveyed regional museums indicated that their museums did not have a records management policy. Such results imply that museums in Zimbabwe do not have a systematic approach, corporate standards and requirements for the management of their records. In essence, the absence of a records management policy reflects that Zimbabwe's National Museums do not have a framework for the creation, maintenance, use and storage

of records. Such a situation negatively affects the preservation of museum records. If museum records are to be lost or deteriorate beyond use, it would mean that the museum's operations and activities are heavily compromised. For instance, for a museum to make informed decisions regarding the conservation or general management of a site there has to be proper documentation regarding the conservation history of the site. For a museum exhibition to be successful there has to be recorded information about the objects to be used so that the development of a story line becomes meaningful. The creation and keeping of records regarding museum operations creates a sound decision making feedback tool and permits successes to be repeated while mistakes can be learned from and avoided.

Kew (2010:3) notes that a records management policy is a cornerstone for effective management of records in an organisation and it demonstrates to employees and stakeholders that managing records is important to the organisation. In this regard, the non availability of a records management policy in Zimbabwe's National Museums suggests that record keeping is not considered a crucial practice. The absence of a records management policy also suggests that museums are not receiving the necessary support from senior management who are responsible for ensuring that their museums have all the necessary policies required for improved operations. Two of the interviewed Regional Directors clearly informed the study that records management issues are a farfetched practice within the museum environment and records management is passively done by 'Curators' as they manage museum objects. From these sentiments, the

study found that even if someone within the museum is to take the initiative of introducing appropriate records management practices, the efforts may not receive the financial backing it requires to help it materialise. It is usually the case that for projects and initiatives to be successful in any given organisation, it has to have the support from the top management.

The lack of a records management policy in Zimbabwe's National Museums presents a cause for concern regarding the future of museums as information centres. A research conducted by the International Solutions Group (ISG) in the United Kingdom (2000:21) revealed that it is crucial for a records management policy to be available in museums as the document serves to set the platform for acceptable records management practices. Parry (2010:12) notes that the existence of a records management policy goes a long way in fostering sound records preservation strategies within the museum environment. In light of those view points, the study established that central to the successful preservation of records in an organisation is the availability of a records management policy. A study conducted by Brunskill and Demb (2012:188) indicates that a museum records management policy is a vital component of a records management programme which has to be in place for records preservation efforts to be a success. In a research done by the State of Florida (2009) it was emphasised that developing and adhering to a formal, written records management policy is the best way to ensure that records management requirements are met in a consistent, effective, and efficient manner. Such calls were contrary to what the

current study established as all informants reported that they neither had a records management policy nor a records procedures manual in place. This reflected a bleak future for museums as information centres because records management issues were treated as a distant and an almost irrelevant practice.

6.2 Museum records management training

With the exception of a few employees who are products of Midlands State University (MSU) where records management comes as a package within the programme of Archaeology, Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies, the study found that that no one was specifically trained to care for records generated as a result of museum businesses. Interviewed Regional Directors informed the study that even the benefits of records management from those who are the products of MSU have not yet been realised. Such a situation largely owes its existence to the reality that national museums in Zimbabwe focus more on the collection and less on the documentation that supports the museum collection. Ironically, the discussions held with Regional Directors revealed that documentation of museum objects is amongst the critical functions of museum operations, yet the preservation and management of the produced documentation was not given priority. The absence of museum practitioners who are specifically assigned and trained to manage museum records implies that records that are generated within the national museums in Zimbabwe are not properly managed.

6.3 Museum records storage facilities

The current study found that the Natural History Museum in Bulawayo neither had a designated nor a centralised storage facility for keeping their records. The same was established for the Zimbabwe Military Museum in Gweru, Great Zimbabwe Museum in Masvingo and the Museum of Transport and Antiquities in Mutare. The study gathered that respective departments in Zimbabwe's National Museums were responsible for creating and keeping their own records. That implied Zimbabwe's National Museums did not have records management units where their semi active records were kept. It also meant that there was no uniformity on how the museums records were created, used, maintained and disposed. The use of departmental offices as records storage areas in Zimbabwe's National Museums implied that museum records are not being kept in appropriate records storage environments and that threatens the survival of those records into the future. It was observed that museum records in Zimbabwe's National Museums are kept in various office spaces that do not have control and monitoring mechanisms for possible agents of deterioration such as excessive high or low temperatures and relative humidity, exposure to direct light and water damage as well as biological agents such as moulds, insects and rodents. In some departments, cartons of sugar and pesticides were observed in proximity with records.

However, at ZMHS there is an Archaeological Survey Unit where archaeology research relat-

ed documentation from all the regional museums in Zimbabwe is kept. The most positive attribute observed about the repository at ZMHS is that the place is tightly secure and access to the repository is highly controlled. This paper appreciates that controlling of temperature and humidity may be a challenge in Zimbabwe's museums considering that the mechanisms usually employed are scientific and would require financial backing which happens to be a thorny issue as reported by the informants of the study. However, the study established that the lack of appropriate records management practices in Zimbabwe's National Museums may not be absolutely attributed to financial challenges but may also be attributed to the lack of awareness and appreciation of the discipline. That was evidenced in the failure by museums to implement some preservation strategies like ensuring that records are strategically placed in their offices so that they are protected from direct sunlight. In some offices, there were no curtains, blinds, shutters or anything to prevent the ultraviolet rays from reaching the documents. In offices where blinds or curtains were available, the study established that these were mainly in place for the convenience of the personnel occupying the office and not to protect the records. As a result the curtains were not strategically positioned to shield the museum records from the effects of ultra violet rays induced by direct sunlight. The failure by museums in Zimbabwe to protect their records from agents of deterioration compromises the longevity of records and that places the position of museums as information centres in danger. Figure 1(a) and 1(b) depict museum records which were turning

yellow as a result of exposure to direct sunlight.



Figure 1a

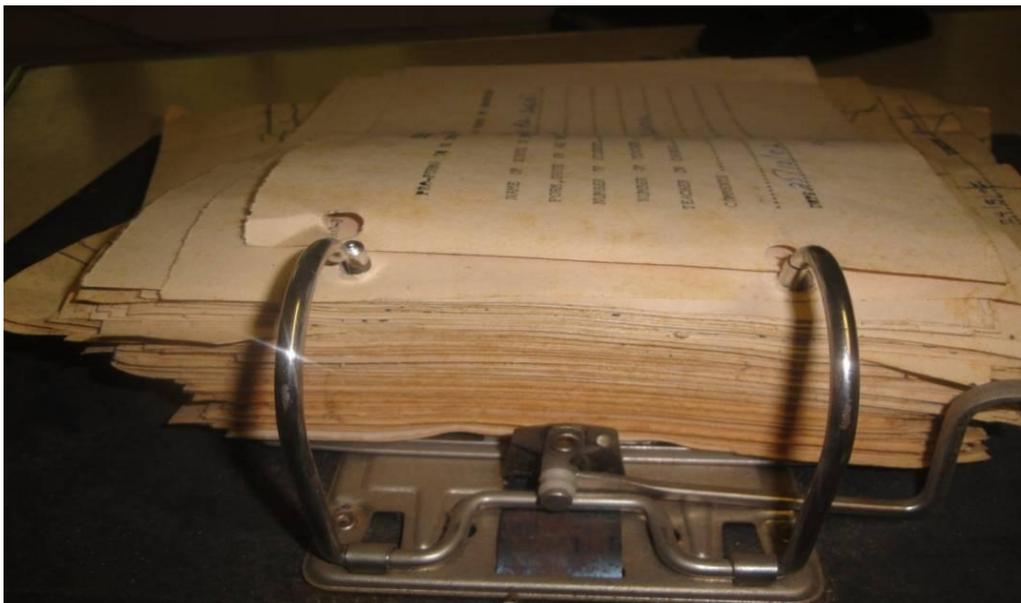


Figure 1(b)

6.4 Disaster preparedness

With regards to disaster preparedness, the study found that Zimbabwe's National Museums were operating without a living document that helps them to protect their records, collections and their entire holdings in the event of a disaster. During the period of the research, the intended disaster management plan was still in circulation for further input awaiting adoption. As a result, the study failed to have access to the draft disaster management plan to see if it had provisions for the protection of museum records because the document was said to be not yet available for public consumption. Based on such findings, the study recommends future studies in museum records management to examine if the disaster management plan for NMMZ has the provisions of protecting museum records. In a similar matter, it was established that museums were keeping their original and backup copies in the same location.

6.5 Records surveys and appraisals

Records surveys provide the necessary information needed to manage records created by an institution throughout their life-cycle. Carrying out records audits is therefore amongst the key steps that an institution may employ to introduce acceptable records preservation practices. The current study found that national museums in Zimbabwe were not conducting records audits or surveys in their institutions. That implied national museums in Zimbabwe were not in a position to identify and resolve recordkeeping problems and they

could not draw up an action plan of how best they can preserve the various types of records under their custody.

The lack of records audits in Zimbabwe's National Museums further implies that national museums in Zimbabwe do not have both physical and intellectual control over their records. It meant that museums in Zimbabwe do not have the muscle to develop sustainable records management programmes. Areas of recordkeeping weaknesses that required immediate attention were not identified and the preservation requirements of museum records were also not determined.

6.6 Retention Scheduling and Disposition

The benefits of having a records schedule are that it ensures that important records are organized and maintained in such a way as to be easily retrieved and identifiable as evidence of the programs activities. This will help conserve office space and equipment by using filing cabinets to house only active records. It also helps preserve those records that are valuable for historical and research purposes and it stabilizes the growth of records in offices through systematic disposition of unneeded records. The study was informed that there are no retention and disposal schedules in Zimbabwe's National Museums. The absence of a retention and disposal schedule implied that national museums in Zimbabwe are keeping some of their records longer than necessary and this creates storage and access challenges. At the Museum of Transport and An-

tiquities and the Natural History Museum, the study observed steel filing cabinets with maps and boxes with records placed in a corridor.

In this study, it is well understood and appreciated that museums create and keep records of enduring value, records that may not be destroyed because of their scientific and research values. For instance, it was observed and revealed by the informants of the study that records that are found in the archaeological survey unit at ZMHS date back to as early as 1902 and these are never to be destroyed. However, the study found that museums also produce records of ephemeral value such as receipts and financial statements amongst others. Such types of records are certainly important but are not worth preserving for posterity. They need to be destroyed at some point in time but the disposition does not have to be on an ad-hock basis. In light of the variations of museum records and the value they carry, the study deemed it crucial to establish if museum practitioners in Zimbabwe had standing instructions as to when and which record(s) must be destroyed and how. The absence of retention and disposal schedules in Zimbabwe's National Museums implied that museums risk destroying critical records that are not supposed to be disposed of while unnecessarily retaining records of ephemeral value for longer periods than required.

6.7 The working relationship between the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) and NMMZ

The common interest that unites NAZ and NMMZ is the guardianship of the nation's cultural heritage. Their main distinction is that NAZ focuses on documentary heritage while NMMZ focuses on museum objects and heritage sites. Despite their closer relationship, the results indicated that NAZ had never offered professional records management advice to NMMZ and NMMZ never took the initiative to seek for such advice. Lack of advice from NAZ which has the expertise to oversee the creation, use, maintenance and disposition of public records explains the absence of basic records management requirements in Zimbabwe's National Museums. Such a situation has a negative bearing on how museum records are generally managed because the personnel responsible for record keeping lack the professional skills and guidance needed to look after an institution's records.

7. Recommendations

NMMZ is urged to capitalise on its good relations with NAZ and seek advice on how to develop a sound records management programme. In relation to museum records management training, the ideal starting point for Zimbabwe's National Museums may be to organise a series of workshops, seminars and conferences on museum records management. These should be attended by every museum employee as all staff is involved with museum records in one way or another. For the man-

agement and preservation of museum collections to be complete, meaningful and successful, the same care given to objects must be extended to the museum administrative records and the records that carry the information about the object(s). That way, museum documentation becomes an accomplished task and a complete process.

Every department in a museum may not function properly if there are no records to support their work. In that light, the current study recommends museums to adopt a collective approach towards the preservation of museum records. Ritzenhaler (1993:51) recommends museum departments to provide clean air with good circulation, controlling light levels, stopping biological infestations, maintaining good housekeeping measures, employing security measures and protecting records from disasters.

Managing and preserving museum records is a practice which is only beginning to emerge in Zimbabwe. While it is common knowledge that museums create, use and rely on records, it has taken a long time to make provision for the proper management of the records. The current study established that Zimbabwe's National Museums did not have personnel designated for managing the museum records. Such a scenario places the future of museums in danger as the records that museum create and rely on risk being lost or damaged because of lack of attention and improper management. The absence of personnel specifically designated for records management implied that the profile of the records management function is low and the practice is accorded

low priority even in the allocation of resources (Mazikana 1998). This study recommends museums to have established records management systems and to house museum records in secure locations.

As opposed to what the current study established where museums were keeping their original and backup copies in the same location. This study recommends that a copy should be made and be stored outside the museum as a security precaution. This study established that with the exception of the Archaeological Survey Unit, Zimbabwe's National Museums did not have a designated records store. The study appreciates that Zimbabwe's National Museums are operating under shoe string budgets. The study therefore recommends that if it is not feasible for Zimbabwe's National Museums to establish a designated records store, it is advisable to determine which staff will be responsible for managing each record series throughout the life cycle stages. Brunskill and Demb (2012:164) indicated that in most instances, complex systems are not required to manage the intellectual custody of records. Creating the retention schedules, records management policy and records procedure's manual is adequate for a good start towards establishing a basic records management practices.

8. Perceived challenges to be faced in trying to introduce records management practices in Zimbabwe's National Museums

The challenges and criticisms faced in the study when trying to gather records management information from museums led to the realisation that introducing the phenomenon may not be an easy task. In that light, the study deemed it necessary to highlight possible challenges that may be encountered in trying to introduce established records management practices within the museum environment. Based on what the author experienced, the likely arguments to be encountered are as follows;

- Our museums have been managing perfectly well without records management. Why now?
- There is no space to introduce records management, the personnel is over-stretched and the budgets are tight.
- How will records management save the organisation's money?
- It is just paper or data: why does it matter?

With regards to the likely obstacles that may be faced in trying to introduce records management in Zimbabwe's museums, this study recommends that there be further studies that try to establish the reasons for a negative attitude towards records management issues within Zimbabwe's museums when the practice seem to have been embraced very well in other public institutions in Zimbabwe as well as other museums in Africa. The starting point for introducing museum records man-

agement in Zimbabwe's national museums is through creating a positive environment through making museum practitioners appreciate the need for the practice otherwise efforts to introduce records management will be in vain. The appreciation of professional records management in other countries is evidenced by the presence of the Museum Records Manager or Museum Archivist posts. The current study appeals for records management awareness campaign programmes to be launched specifically for museum practitioners.

9. Conclusions

Overall, the study realised that the nature of museum documentation available to museum practitioners mainly concentrate on how and why museum collections should be documented. Very little has been put forward regarding museum records preservation issues. This study challenges the museum documentation scholarship to broaden the horizon and go beyond providing collections documentation guidelines and look into how data formats produced as a result of museum activities may be better preserved. Museum staff should perceive the records they create in the course of their duties as a corporate information asset; else their future as information centres would be impossible.

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