

COMMUNITY AWARENESS FOR ARCHIVES IN TANZANIA: A CASE STUDY OF ZANZIBAR NATIONAL ARCHIVES

MAXIMILIAN CHAMI
BRANDENBURG UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
maxchami@yahoo.com

Abstract

The study focuses on the assessment of community awareness and challenges facing Zanzibar National Archives (ZNA). The study utilised convenient sampling to collect data from the members of the public (93 respondents) in Stone Town in Zanzibar. Data were augmented through interviews with the staff of the Zanzibar National Archives (10 respondents) and the general public from Zanzibar (93 respondents). Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and Microsoft excel. The findings indicate that the public has very little awareness about archives and its functions. At the same time the ZNA is facing a lot of challenges, including theft and lack of modern equipment for conservation purposes. The study recommends provision of education programs to the community, allocation of more funds for acquisition of modern conservation facilities, and staff training to ensure better management and conservation of the records in Zanzibar.

Keywords: archives, national archives, Zanzibar, awareness

1. Historical background of Zanzibar National Archives

The Zanzibar National Archives (ZNA) is the one of the oldest and richest archives emerged as an independent institution with full

responsibilities of preserving Zanzibar records. It was established by the British Protectorate in 1954 with the name of Zanzibar Archives. Before that, the Peace Memorial Museum was responsible for the archives of the British Protectorate.

Since its establishment in 1954, Zanzibar Archives have been collecting and providing access to information including documents which are currently in paper form. The first chairman of the ZNA was Sir John Gray who was appointed in 1955 while Mr. H Thompson was the first Archivist and Curator who worked from 1956 to 1961 respectively (Declich 2006). In 1963 a special building was constructed at Kilimani to house archival collections preserved in the Peace Memorial Museum.

Zanzibar National Archive has got very important and valuable documents such as Consular Records, Protectorate Records, German Records, and Arabic correspondences as earlier as 19th century which prove interaction between Zanzibar and other parts of the World, as well as records on the famous East African Slave Trade, Explorers and Missionaries which all of these were acquired in 1965. Due to these richness and variety of collection and records, it led to be nominated for the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2003 (Bang 2011).

However, after Mr. H. Thompson left in the 1961, and through two decades, the material of the ZNA was left ruining because of the absence of funds. Due to this, in 1983 the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar took initiatives and began taking care of the Zanzibar Archives and the documents. In 1984 and 1985 two international missions, headed by John Walford, set up a recovering program to rescue important documents which were deteriorating. Since the Middle 80's the Zanzibar Archives collect books and other material such as magazines, photographs and other important documents. In 1987 the Archives received its official name of Zanzibar National Archives, and in 1988 it officially became a public organization legally preserved under the Records and Archives Management Act, 2002. Lastly, in recent years ZNA has become a centre for study to

scholars and researchers of the countries bordering Indian Ocean and the rest of the World.

2. Problem Statement

Most studies that have been conducted in Tanzania have mainly concentrated on issues related to the management and conservation of cultural heritage and archaeological investigation (Lwoga 2010; Bwinabona 2012; Chami 2009). This has been the same in Zanzibar whereby there has been much concentration on early urbanism whereby archaeological surveys, excavations, interpretation of the sites and tourism satisfaction have been conducted throughout (e.g. Juma 2004; Chami and Lyaya 2015). Unfortunately, many of the studies in Tanzania and Zanzibar have totally ignored the aspects of archives. As such, before this study, there was no clear information on whether or not community are aware of archives in Tanzania and Zanzibar particularly. It was important to find out and determine whether or not the community are aware on Archival institution and challenges facing Archives in Zanzibar, which is vital to ensure proper management and development of Archives in Tanzania. It is for this reason that the present study investigates the awareness and challenges facing Zanzibar National Archives in Tanzania.

3. Purpose and objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess community awareness about archives and challenges facing Zanzibar National Archives. The specific objectives were:

1. To determine the community awareness of archival institution in Zanzibar.
2. To investigate on the reason for which archives were mostly visited in Zanzibar.
3. To determine the challenges facing archives in Zanzibar.

4. Literature review

According to American Archives (2007), archives can be defined as a place where people go to find information. It includes people who do research in archives often gather first-hand facts, data, and evidence from letters, reports, notes, memos, photographs, audio, video, recordings, and other primary sources. Therefore, the term archives generally can be referring to the actual records housed in the archival repository or institution (Roper and Millar 1999:1). With a number of studies conducted on archives in Africa and elsewhere, Onuoha (2013) examined on the awareness and use of National Archives in Nigeria and found out that majority of Nigerians were not aware of the national archives and their visit to archives was mainly for the purpose of school excursion. This has been the same to Uduigwome (1989) who observed the similar results that public archives were used by scholars and particularly by students of tertiary institutions Nigerian National Archives.

Meanwhile in Ghana, Otu and Asante (2015) revealed the lack of awareness of the Volta and Eastern Regional Archives by the inhabitants within that geographical area. Likewise, Kemoni (2002) did not go far away from Uduigwome (1989) by discovering that researchers from University of Nairobi utilized maps, atlases, gazettes, thesis and dissertations, newspapers, statistical records, video films, political record books, journals and conference papers from National Archives of Kenya. Additionally, some scholars such as Blais (1995:20) argued that most citizens never become active users of archives and their curiosity is limited to learning about the activities of archival institutions. Hence, different programme should be offered that promote knowledge of the function and mission of archives, and some basic familiarity with the material they hold (*ibid.*). His arguments also where supported by Grabowski (1992) who revealed that in any communities where there is little awareness on Archival Institution, Archivists need to build an awareness of archival value among the general public and they need to work together with the community of public and academic historians in creating this awareness.

Lastly, Alegbeleye (1998) exposed different challenges such as inadequacy of modern conservation facilities; inadequate publicity of the importance of the National Archives to national development; limited training opportunities for the staff of the National Archives and absence of a comprehensive and integrated records management programme in Nigeria. This has been similar to Yusuf (2013) who claimed that a major challenge facing archival management in Africa is the lack of funds, which is needed not only to store records, but also for the efficient training of staff, streamlining technology in archival institutions, and creating efficient systems for access, among other records information management needs.

5. Research methodology

Data for this study was obtained through interviews and questionnaires. A total of ten (10) staff members were selected purposively and interviewed. Only staff members who were considered by the researcher knowledgeable enough about the management, preservation and history of Zanzibar National Archives so as to generate reliable data were selected. Moreover, the study used questionnaires which were designed and distributed to 140 respondents in Zanzibar Stone Town area, although only 93 filled in questionnaires were returned. The data from interviews were analyzed by using thematic analysis while data from questionnaires were analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

6. Results of the Study

The findings and discussions of this study were presented as per the objectives. These objectives were to assess community awareness, reasons for visiting and challenges facing Archives in Zanzibar. In summary of gender respondents, 77(83%) of respondents were males while 16 (17%) of the respondents were female.

6.1 Community Awareness

On the question of the understanding of the meaning of archives, about 66 respondents equal to 71% did not know the meaning of archives. Other 27 (29%) respondents knew the meaning of archives. Findings indicate that majority of the respondents 66 (71%) did not know the meaning of archives.

Moving to the question on what are the functions of Archives, 20 (22%) respondents stated that archives are used for tourism purposes while 57 (61.4%) of the respondents said that an archive was a place for keeping unwanted documents. Thirteen (14%) respondents answered that an archive was a place for keeping documents, while three (3) of them (3.2%) said they did not know any function of Archives in Zanzibar. Therefore, the findings indicate that majority of the respondents 57 (61.4%) revealed as a place of keeping unwanted documents.

Lastly, on the question of whether or not respondents were aware and understood documentary heritage, 87 of the respondents equal to 94% stated that, they do not know what documentary heritage is. The other 6 respondents (6%) said that they know the documentary heritage. Findings indicate that majority of the respondents 87 (94%) revealed, they do not know what documentary heritage is.

On the reasons for visiting the Archives, 10 Archives staffs were interviewed in this question. The respondents revealed that within a month only 2 to 3 (24 to 36 per year) local people would visit the Archives and only for very serious problems concerning title deeds of land and house ownerships not withstanding that about more than 250 university students who are coming believing that is a place for data collection and excursion each year running. But in contrast, a large number of foreigners who are coming all the way from Asia, Europe or the USA are the ones coming more often for research purpose ranging more than 300 people per year.

6.3 Challenges facing Zanzibar National Archives

The question on challenges facing the institution was asked to the 10 staff members of Zanzibar National Archives (ZNA). Respondents revealed that many documents and records were too old and fragile; some of them date back to 1892 up to 1930. Many of these collections had been damaged due to the tropical weather which is too hot for proper the conservation and management. Moreover, the respondents revealed that illicit trafficking and theft of records and documents has been one of the big challenges facing the ZNA. For instance, in 2013 some collections disappeared. Rumours had it that some of the members of the department had colluded with outsiders to have them stolen. These led to some of the members to be suspended from work and were sent to court to answer charges. Up to the time of this research the case was still in process.

Other challenges which were pinpointed by the respondents were lack of funds from the government and other sources, leading to causing the ZNA failing to purchase modern equipment (e.g., for digitalization). This has forced them to use only basic conservation techniques such as tissue repair, lamination and fumigation. Additionally, lack of enough space has led to some documents to be kept in some staff⁷ offices which in turn increases chances for illicit trafficking. Furthermore, many people live inside the Archives compound and use the same gate to come in and go out.

Lack of trained experts in conservation of documents and records is another big challenge facing the ZNA. For example, the entire Institution had only one professional archivist, who, unfortunately died in 2014; leaving the Department without a professional archivist. The other staff members who chanced to work with him are now using the knowledge and skills he transmitted to them. This in a way goes together with the lack of academic institutions which provide high level training on archival conservation and management in Tanzania. One has to go to Kenya or South Africa for archival training, and not many can afford. Another revelation made during the research is that the Government seems not to give priority to Archives as they see it as a store to keep old documents, when

compared to other heritage areas such as museums and archaeological site. Probably because these attract tourists, hence generate financial resources.

7. Discussion of findings

This paper aimed at assessing three specific objectives: assessment of community awareness on Archival Institution, reasons for visit Archives and challenges facing Archives in Zanzibar. One the aspect of community awareness on Archival Institution, the findings show that over 71% of the respondents did not know what is Archives. Also, 61.4% of the respondents revealed that the function of Archives is to keep unwanted documents. Lastly, on the question of documentary heritage, 94% of the respondents did not know exactly what a documentary heritage was. These findings suggest that community at Zanzibar were not aware on Archives. This is consistent with previous studies (Blais 1995; Onuoha 2013; Otu and Asante 2015) in Nigeria and Ghana respectively. However, whatever reason one could provide, lack of awareness among the community in Zanzibar might be due to the low level of education among the people.

One the aspect of reason for people visiting the Archives in Zanzibar, the respondents revealed that the need to look after tittle deeds for houses and research needs are the main reasons led the people to come in Archives. Another reason which was revealed was the presence of students from university who come for data collection and excursion. These findings are perfect accord (Uduigwome 1989; Komeni 2002) who also found similar results in Kenya.

Lastly, on challenges facing archives in Zanzibar, the findings revealed that lack of training for staffs, lack of funds, illicit trafficking and shortage of skilled labour were some of challenges which were presented by the respondents. These results are symmetrical with Alegbeleye (1998) and Yusuf (2013) who found out that there are always challenges facing Archives in Africa. Hence, whatever the reasons one could provide, it is sufficient

enough to understand that the challenges facing archives in Zanzibar are due to the Lack of Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar to support the institution and poor security system in the Archives.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the findings and discussion above, it can conclude that the majority of Zanzibaris are not aware of the National Archives and the few who actually visited Archives was mainly for the purpose of research and school tour. However, interesting discovery was those people who actually visited the Zanzibar National Archives to find title deeds for their lands and houses. Lastly, as it has been revealed in the findings, the Archives face a lot of challenges on his operation such as lack of funds and illicit trafficking. For that reason, whatever reason one could provide, it is enough to understand that the lack of awareness and challenges facing archives in Zanzibar are due to the Lack support from the Government and low level of education among the community in Zanzibar.

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following;

1. Zanzibar National Archives should establish different education programs for the public in Zanzibar through meetings, consultations, mass media and local festivals where they are likely to get more of the locals and educating them of the importance of national heritage.
2. The Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar should build a new and bigger Archive and at same time remove all the people who live inside the Archives compound so as to enforce security of documents and records from illicit trafficking. This also should include the provision of security cameras inside the Archives.
3. Staff members should be given opportunity for training both short courses and full programmes even if it is outside the country. This will help them to get more skills and knowledge on the conservation and management of documents and records in Zanzibar National Archives.
4. Lastly, the government should provide adequate funds to the development of Archives in order to enable it handle

management and conservation appropriately. All these will improve management and conservation of archival heritage in Zanzibar in particular and Tanzania in general and ensure its sustainability for future generations.

References

- Alegbeleye, G. B. O. 1998. Archives administration and records management in Nigeria: up the decades from amalgamation. *ARMA Records Management Quarterly*. Available at: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3691/is_199807/ai_n8799970/ (Accessed on 10 May 2017).
- Bang, A. K. 2011. Textual sources on an Islamic African past: Arabic material in Zanzibar's National Archive. Jeppie and Diagne, meanings of Timbuktu, In Bang, A. K (ed). *Authority and Piety, Writing and Print: A preliminary study of the circulation of Islamic texts in late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century Zanzibar*. 81(1): 89-107.
- Blais, G. 1995. Access to archival records: A review of current issues: A ramp study, *General information programme and UNISIST. -Paris: UNESCO*.
- Bwinabona, E. I. 2012. The State, cultural significance and management of built heritage assests of Lindi and Mtwara Regions, Tanzania. M.A Dissertation, University of Dar es Salaam.
- Chami, F. 2009. Zanzibar and the Swahili coast from c30, 000 years ago. E&D vision publishing, Dar es Salaam.
- Chami, M., & Lyaya, E. 2015. Assessment of tourist satisfaction in cultural heritage tourism destination in Tanzania: The case of Zanzibar Stone Town tourism. *Studies in the African Past* 12: 259-276.
- Declich, L. 2006. The Arabic manuscripts of the Zanzibar National Archives: A checklist, *Nuova Serie, Supplemento* 78(2): 7-10.
- Grabowsk, J. J. 1992. Keepers, users, and funders: building an awareness of archival value, *American Archivist* 55: 464-472.

- Juma, A. 2004. Unguja Ukuu on Zanzibar, archaeological study of early urbanism. Uppsala: University of Uppsala.
- Juma, A., Ali, K., & Khamis, A. 2005. Management of Zanzibar cultural heritage. In Mapunda, B. B. & Msemwa, P (eds). *Salvaging Tanzania's cultural heritage*: Dar es Salaam University Press: Dar es Salaam: 317-323.
- Kemoni, H. 2002. The utilization of archival information by researchers in Kenya: A case study of the University of Nairobi. *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science* 12(1): 69-80.
- Lwoga, N. B. 2010. Built heritage management in Dar es Salaam city central area. M.A dissertation, University of Dar es Salaam.
- Uduigwome, C. 1989. The use of archival resources in the national archives, *The Nigerian Archives* 1(1): 28–32.
- Onuoha, U. D. 2013. Awareness and use of the National Archives in Nigeria, *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education* 3 (4): 64-68.
- Otu, B. O & Asante, E. 2015. Awareness and use of the National Archives: Evidence from the Volta and eastern regional Archives, Ghana. *Brazilian Journal of Information Studies: Research Trends* 9(2): 21-25.
- Roper, M & Millar, L. 1999. Managing public sector records, A study programme. International Records Management Trust, London.
- Yusuf, F. 2013. The role of archives in national development: National Archives of Nigerian perspective. *International Journal of Econom-ic Development Research and Investment* 4 (2): 19–24.