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# TRACING COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL RECORDKEEPING IN ZIMBABWE

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## Abstract

*The article traces archival development in Zimbabwe from the colonial to the postcolonial periods. Like in many African colonies, the foundations for formal recordkeeping in Zimbabwe were laid during colonial administration and this article argues that there is a direct relationship between what is happening today and the past whether good or bad. It covers the historical background of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwean government from the colonial to the postcolonial periods. A historical understanding of the country provides a picture of the archival scene for the period under discussion. In addition, it also gives an overview of records management in Zimbabwe from the colonial to postcolonial periods, as well as the role of the National Archives of Zimbabwe. The article analyses the positive and negative aspects of both the colonial and postcolonial recordkeeping periods and brings out the relationship between the two. The article was guided by the stages of the records life-cycle concept and information was gathered through literature review which included annual reports, legislation, archival documents, published and other academic articles and books on Zimbabwe. It is part of a works in progress and methodology for this article is desk research.*

## Key words

Archives administration, archival development, National Archives of Zimbabwe, records keeping, records management

## Introduction

In order to understand current recordkeeping trends in Zimbabwe, it is important to trace the stages by which recordkeeping has developed over the years in Zimbabwe. The article identifies key features which characterised each stage of archival development in the country in both the colonial and postcolonial periods.

### *Country profile*

Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) came under British protection in 1888. Banton (2008: 272-273) summarises the country's colonial foundations and notes that formal administration in the country commenced with the granting of a Royal Charter by the Queen of England in 1889 to the British South Africa Company (BSAC) to develop and administer the territory, marking the beginning of colonial administration as a British Protectorate. In 1891 an administrator, nominated by the company, was appointed, and in 1896, a resident commissioner was appointed by the British government. In 1896, Southern Rhodesia was placed under the supervision of the high commissioner for South Africa, although retaining the position of resident commissioner. In 1923 the territory was annexed to the Crown and BSAC rule came to an end on 1 October 1923 when the country became a self-governing British colony under Responsible Government. On 1 August 1953 the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland came into being. The Central African Federation operated for the next decade until it came to an end on 31 December 1963. This saw Northern Rhodesia becoming Zambia; and Southern Rhodesia became Rhodesia while

Nyasaland became Malawi. Two years after the dissolution of the Federation, the Rhodesian Prime Minister, Ian Smith, declared Rhodesia independent from Britain through the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) on 11 November 1965. Britain declared this action illegal and banned trade with Rhodesia. At this time also, African nationalism grew stronger culminating in a war of liberation where the Rhodesian Africans were fighting for independence. The war ended with independence on 18 April 1980 and the country became known as Zimbabwe.

The capital city is Harare (formerly known as Salisbury before independence). The country is divided into ten provinces, which are the Harare Province (where the capital city Harare is situated), Mashonaland East Province, Mashonaland Central Province, Mashonaland West Province, Manicaland Province, Masvingo Province, Midlands Province, Bulawayo Province, Matabeleland North Province and Matabeleland South Province.

### **Background to archival work in Zimbabwe**

Formal and modern recordkeeping in Zimbabwe is traced to the colonial administration of the British South Africa Company. Tough (2009), observed that the conventional practice of recordkeeping in most of sub-Saharan Africa began with colonial administration in the form of bureaucratic paper and card systems. Previously, recordkeeping in most African nations was largely oral (Lihoma 2012; Tough and Lihoma 2012).

The case of Southern Rhodesia was peculiar, having started off colonialism under company rule without it being a full-time British colony. Perhaps this explains why its early recordkeeping was not as organised in comparison to that of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland at that time; an observation made by the Government Archivist (Central African Archives 1947); and an argument which eventually paved way for the establishment of a records management programme at the National Archives in 1954. Mandated to administer the Southern Rhodesia colony on behalf of the Queen of England, BSAC's administrative departments situated in Southern Rhodesia were only part of the company's larger administrative machinery whose headquarters was in London. As a result, all important matters were referred to the board of directors in London, and this line of understanding was also reflected in the recordkeeping work. A certain category of records was sent to London, while the remainder was filed in local registries, destroyed or left uncared for - at no stage was it recognized by BSAC that the administrative records in its custody were anything but its private property (Central African Archives 1947: 29), "as it was thought that they were the property pure and simple of the Company" (National Archives of Zimbabwe 1925). In the end, the vast majority of BSAC records never left London; notably the minutes and agenda of board meetings, correspondence with Salisbury, Cape Town, the Colonial Office, the High Commissioner for South Africa and others (Central African Archives 1947: 29).

In 1922 when Company rule was coming to an end and preparations were underway for the coming of Responsible Government, there were increased concerns on what to do with BSAC records (Manungo 2012; Ngulube 2012, Central African Archives 1947). In the wake of a new system of administration as a full-time colony of Britain, a position on the Company records was needed as it was realised that the records of the colony were clearly regarded by BSAC as private property not national assets. Concerned citizens pushed for the records to remain inside the country as they strongly felt that those already sent to Britain should not have gone there in

the first place. In particular, Colonel H. Marshall Hole, the Colonial Secretary in Southern Rhodesia also remarked that:

Strictly speaking the records they sent to London may have legally been the property of the Company, it is to be regretted that they were allowed to leave the country as many of them were of great ... historical interest in the years to come (National Archives of Zimbabwe 1925).

It was during such discussions that the push for the establishment of an archival service began to surface prominently, with the need to preserve historical records in the country clearly being the main driving force. Increased pressure for the establishment of archival services was felt after the 1933 historical exhibition to mark the fortieth anniversary of the conquest of Matabeleland. The exhibition comprised of books, private manuscripts and public records and it roused considerable interest in archival work. Following on this, a provisional committee to bring before the public the importance and necessity of forming a permanent national historical collection and national archives was formed. The committee received official status in 1934 and became known as the National Historical Committee. Its work and efforts resulted in the promulgation of the Archives Act on 12 April 1935 paving way for the formation of the National Archives on 1 September 1935 (Central African Archives 1947: 11).

Notable in those early stages of establishing an archival service for the country is that the concern and focus was not so much about managing records in the current or semi-current state but on preserving records already past active use, i.e. the non-current records (Manungo 2012; Ngulube 2012; Njovana 1989; Tough and Lihoma 2012). Ngulube (2012) noted that the primary orientation of archival work during the first era of archival management in Zimbabwe was to accession, arrange, describe and preserve the archives of BSAC. The Chief Archivist had also reported earlier on that “the motive behind the establishment of the Government Archives of Southern Rhodesia was an interest in national history” (Central African Archives 1947: 6). This direction continued for many years to follow and this is the area to which the National Archives seemed to have earned its reputation on. Dritsas and Haig (2014) maintain that the establishment of archival services in Zimbabwe was driven by the desire to preserve colonial settler identity; to glorify and justify its existence.

### **The National Archives of Zimbabwe**

The National Archives of Zimbabwe came into being on 1 September 1935 as a government institution, then known as the National Archives of Southern Rhodesia, under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Thus, technically, from 1935, the institution began collecting documents created earlier on especially those by BSAC administration which had remained inside the country. The newly established archives also collected early records of missionaries, explorers and hunters who had worked in the country before colonial administration.

The demands and necessities of the Second World War as well as the need for closer economic co-ordination brought about a vigorous political campaign for closer association of the three Central African countries (Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland). This resulted in the formation of the Central African Council in 1945. The new body attempted to unify various technical services, of which archives was one, and in 1946 the Southern Rhodesian government Archives was asked to assume responsibility in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. In the following year depots were opened at Livingstone and Zomba, and the archives, while still a department of the Southern Rhodesia Government, became known as the Central African Archives (Central African Archives 1947: 2). Apparently, this move was made in anticipation of the coming of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, which eventually came into existence

on 1 August 1953. Thereafter, on 1 July 1954 the Central African Archives became a Federal body, and was renamed the National Archives of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

At the dissolution of the Federation in 1963, the National Archives of Rhodesia and Nyasaland ceased to exist and the national archival institution in Rhodesia became known as the National Archives of Rhodesia (with similar but separate institutions opened in Zambia and Malawi). In 1980, when the country attained independence, the institution became known as the National Archives of Zimbabwe. It is today located in the capital city, Harare, in the upmarket suburb of Gunhill, the same premise that it occupied since 1961.

### **The colonial period: 1890 - 1980**

As administrators of the colony, BSAC created and maintained formal records of activities and transactions, a certain category of which were sent to the Company's London Office for preservation. The same records became the subject of concern when Company rule was coming to an end. The other category of records was of those that remained in the country. There seems, however, to have been no direct Company interest on this category of records, with some of it handed over to the Parliament Librarian for safe-keeping when BSAC rule came to an end (National Archives of Zimbabwe n.d.). Indeed, the Government Archivist raised concern in 1947 when he reported that:

No attention has been paid to public records; they had been quietly accumulating for forty years in offices of every type, many of them with the most primitive storage facilities; and for many years, no one had taken much care of any but the current records" (Central African Archives 1947: 30).

When the BSAC rule was eventually terminated in 1923, most departmental records remained in the offices which had created them, with records of the former Administrator distributed to those departments that had taken over the functions of the Administrator. Records of no local administrative value were sent to BSAC's London Office, while those deemed of no importance at all were destroyed (Central African Archives 1947: 29). Most of BSAC divisions as well as the filing and classification systems were haphazardly carried over to the Responsible Government, something noted as a concern by the Archivist sorting the records at the National Archives (National Archives of Zimbabwe, Pre-1923 Inventory, n.d.). Interestingly, in a 1924 letter responding to calls for the establishment of an archival institution, the Colonial Secretary expressed satisfaction at the system of capturing and maintaining records in place within government structures and suggested that it was too early then to invest in an archives for the country (National Archives of Zimbabwe 1925). This insinuated the existence of satisfactory recordkeeping systems in the country then (at least on their part) a position however, dismissed by the Government Archivist who thought that recordkeeping during that period was not at all very pleasing (Central African Archives 1947: 30). This position taken by the Colonial Secretary echoed the general position of the Colonial Office in most British colonial as explained by Musembi (1988: 116) who, writing on East Africa concluded that "[t]he Colonial Office had, throughout the colonial period in East Africa, shown very limited interest in the management of official records". In the case of Southern Rhodesia, pressure for the establishment of the archives came from a group of concerned settlers, and clearly not from the colonial administrators. This made a huge difference to the way archival services were to be handled in Southern Rhodesia and the rest of the British Commonwealth in Africa.

Today, BSAC's administrative records exist in many places including the National Archives of UK; the Colonial Office Library in London; among the records of the South Africa High Commission; the Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House,

Oxford; and the Derbyshire Record Office holding the papers of P.L. Gell, a director of the company (Banton 2008: 191; Central African Archives 1947: 29). Others are at the National Archives of Zambia and Zimbabwe and these were part of BSAC records that were left in the country when others were sent to Britain. Efforts to negotiate for the return of SAC records were without success (Dritsas and Haig 2014). The archivists were also searching the globe for the books and manuscripts that would make up their historical collection (Dritsas and Haig 2014).

Such sentiments and concerns as expressed above regarding the need to safeguard the national history were to be reflected in the first National Archives Act of 1935 which saw “documents and other historical materials [as those] ...transferred or acquired by the archives office” (Archives Act 1935). The legislation has been blamed for failing to address directly the management of current and semi-current records. Instead, it focused more on the archival preservation of those records of enduring value, a distinct weakness noted by many authors (Dube 2011; Kamba 1987; Ngulube 2012; Murambiwa *et. al*, 2012). Unfortunately, this state of affairs in the legislation remained so throughout most of the colonial period. Subsequent repeals to the Act (*Archives Amendment Act*, 1947 and the *National Archives Act*, 1958) were largely meant mostly to address added territorial responsibilities and political changes in government (not necessarily recordkeeping issues). It became necessary to re-define, through legal instruments, the physical constituencies brought in by the changes from National Archives of Southern Rhodesia to Central African Archives and, also from Southern Rhodesia to the Federation, and then to Rhodesia – ostensibly this being the main pre-occupation then.

However, despite the fact that the legislation and main focus at the time was on archival services, some recordkeeping work was undertaken from the onset of colonial administration. The administrative structure under the British colonial system in many of its colonies began at the level of the Governor who had the highest executive office in the country. His office had centralised records in the office of the Chief Secretary (Manyambula 2009; Tough and Lihoma 2012). Shared integrated recordkeeping systems were also created for various departments, though there were also separate registries in several other locations. The creation of confidential registries during that time was driven by the need to maintain security, and ensure that communications and information reached the metropolitan centre in London (Tough and Lihoma 2012). For these reasons, the Governor was instructed to “report to the Secretary of State in all matters of interest; ...and furnish accounts at regular interval, of receipts and expenditure” (Tough and Lihoma 2012: 193). The new colonial government had to be accountable to the colonial master, and thus, from the onset, reporting structures were explicit – they were required to create records of transactions and to forward them to Britain. Tough and Lihoma (2012: 203) noted that imperial control over recordkeeping systems made stipulations about recordkeeping and confidentiality, and further observed that the colonial government “demanded that written documents were generated and maintained, which explains the adoption of efficient recordkeeping systems right from the beginning of colonial administration”. Comparatively, BSAC also operated a similar system of administration where records of transactions were expected to be created and forwarded to London with a system of registries or central registries operating within its various administrative structures. The major difference with BSAC system was that this was Company rule (as opposed to full colonial rule), and as a result the administration in Salisbury was considered only as a branch of the Company’s main office in London whose records had two main divisions: those of interest to London, and those of local interest.

Accounts of recordkeeping in most British colonial establishments mention the use of the card system, and that filing was initially based on “one letter, one subject, one reference” but this later

shifted to “one file, one subject, one reference” system – a notable shift from handling individual papers as discrete units towards the aggregation of papers through files (Tough and Lihoma 2012: 191). Such record series as ‘original correspondence’, ‘registers of correspondence’, ‘entry books’, registers of out-letters’, ‘acts’, ‘sessional papers’, ‘government gazettes’, and ‘miscellanea’ were a common feature in most British Colonial records (Banton 2008). It appears this was a system that was carried over from overseas but however, in Zimbabwe, it lacked the backing of legislation thereby creating loop-holes for individual perspective. Such loop-holes probably explain the chaotic records that had accumulated in the government departments as noted by the Government Archivist in 1947 (mentioned earlier on in this article). Similar record series were observed by this author from BSAC records preserved and housed at the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) which include in-letter; out-letters, correspondence, circulars, legislation, reports, registers, rebellion papers, private secretary’s papers.

### *Legal and regulatory framework*

The Archives Act of 1935 became the first legislative instrument to be enacted for the purpose of managing public records and archives during the early colonial era. According to Njovana (1993: 33), “the passing of the Act was indeed a pioneering gesture in that very few countries on the continent had started to provide for the preservation of their documentary heritage”. The act drew huge influence from South Africa, whose archivists were heavily consulted at the time of drafting the legislation (National Archives of Zimbabwe 1924-1945).

The act adopted what Murambiwa *et al.*, (2012), term the ‘custodial approach’ which appeared more feasible to the settler government at that time in the face of possible loss of important records through destruction, theft, purchase or relocation to Britain. In a way, this ‘custodial approach’ was in line with the very reason for the establishment of archival services in the first place. The agenda of the advocates was to establish a local repository for the records of the colony. As a result, the Act gave power to the Government Archivist to control the disposal of government records. It took care to ensure that the archival record was looked after but it remained silent on the management of current and semi-current records. Following a survey through a questionnaire by the Government Archivist in November 1935 which revealed poor management of records, an instruction (*Circular No. 2 of 1936*) was issued which forbade the destruction of government records before inspection by the Government Archivist. In particular, the survey noted a worrisome accumulation of records without any disposal plan, and in this regard, *Government Notice No. 356* of 15 July 1938 was issued. It regulated the destruction and transfer of public records. The regulation also provided for the preparation of schedules of records to be destroyed, and also for the consideration of the schedules by the Records Destruction Committee, a committee which consisted of the Government Archivist, the Auditor General (and later also the Government Statistician), and a representative of the department concerned (Central African Archives 1947: 32).

Anticipating the coming of the Federation, the Central African Archives assumed the management of records of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland after the passing of the *Archives Amendment Act* in 1946. It enabled the Government Archivist in Salisbury to perform duties in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. When the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was eventually formed in 1953, the Central African Archives became a Federal institution.

At the break-up of the Federation in 1964, the National Archives Act was promulgated leading to the formation of the National Archives of Rhodesia. The territories of Zambia and Malawi, formerly Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, respectively, took over custody of their own territorial records. The act continued with the legacy of taking a custodial approach in managing

records and archives in Rhodesia, explicitly proclaiming the role of the National Archives to be that of managing non-current records only (Dube 2011), and this remained unchanged up to the time of independence.

*Resources, facilities and tools*

From the onset, BSAC government and all its administrative structures were expected to create and manage records of all colonial business in a certain way that allowed transmission to the Company's headquarters in London. Registries and sometimes central registries serving a number of offices were created in the country. The central registry system created by BSAC continued with the next government of the Responsible Government as noted by the Archivist sorting the records at the National Archives of Zimbabwe (National Archives of Zimbabwe n.d.). What seemed to be a big challenge then was the disposal of records that were accumulating rapidly in the various departments and the non-availability of a standard filing system – concerns to which the Government Archivist raised at his first appointment in 1935 (Central African Archives 1947). Such concerns pushed forward the main argument for the establishment of the Records Management programme at the National Archives in 1954. A visit to USA by the Chief Archivist and subsequent sending of two senior archivists to train in America brought in such American influence (Baxter 1963) which advocated for life-cycle management of records.

On the management of public archives, from the time that the formation of a national archival institution was agreed to leading to the formation of the National Archives of Southern Rhodesia, the need to provide appropriate facilities for archival preservation was stressed. Thus, in the early years of its establishment, the National Archives moved house many times all in search for better archival facilities. It started off along Central Avenue; moved to Bechuana House, and to Milton Building (Central African Archives 1947: 15). Throughout these movements, the premises were taken as temporary housing for the archives as the need for a purpose-built archival facility had been made clear from the beginning. By the 1940s, serious planning had begun for the construction of an archives premise at the present site which was completed in 1961 (Central African Archives 1947: 26). All these other premises were never adequate and appropriate especially with increased records management activities from the 1950s. Storage facilities for semi-current records remained inadequate even after the new archives building was opened because the building was meant for public archives not as a records center. To ease the problem, a satellite repository was opened in 1954 at Craneborne, a few kilometres from the headquarters, an event described by Mazikana (1988: 143) as “the first such centre on the African continent and only the second in the British Commonwealth”. In 1966, a branch repository for semi-current records was opened in Bulawayo to cater for the western region of the country. That same year, an extra repository was opened at the headquarters in Salisbury, further strengthening and improving both records and archives management facilities for the country (Mazikana 1988).

The opening in 1966 of the purpose-built facility at Gunhill headquarters in particular, earned the National Archives the reputation of being one of the best archival institutions in Africa (Barata, Cain and Serumaga 2000; Mnjama 2005; Tough 2009). Resources and facilities for archival preservation were put in place and archival practice was based on international standards, mostly of British influence, but increasingly North American from the 1960s (Ngulube 2012; Central African Archives 1947).

However, in terms of records management, even though departments were expected to create and manage records for transmission to London in a certain way, it appears there were challenges with issues of filing, classification and disposal, especially during BSAC colonial



administration. This was evidenced in an unprecedented accumulation of records which was reported in the 1935 National Archives questionnaire to all government departments prompting the Government Archivist to take action by establishing a records management programme in 1954 (Central African Archives 1947). The same chaos was also noted when the records eventually came to the National Archives as evidenced by the notes written by the Archivist sorting them at the National Archives. The archivist also noted the differing classifications on the records and commended that they lacked standardisation which pointed to departments using different filing systems (National Archives of Zimbabwe n.d.).

### *Skills, training and awareness*

Any effective records and archives management system depends largely on the existence of a skilled, knowledgeable and a capable work-force. Policies, guidelines, regulations and instructions require staff to implement. Being a British colony, the system of administration assumed by BSAC first, and the various colonial administrations that followed after were modelled along British recordkeeping systems (Tough 2012). However, with time, especially from the mid-1950s, North American trends whose approach favoured more with the life-cycle approach were emulated (Dritsas and Haig 2014; Ngulube 2012).

From the time that it was opened, the National Archives witnessed significant growth in terms of personnel beginning with three staff members in 1935, rising to 24 in 1954 and 47 in 1962. The earliest professional training recorded was that of two staff members who received American fellowships in 1955 and 1956 to study archival sciences in the US (National Archives of Zimbabwe 1962: 10).

At the departments, as Tough (2012) noted for many colonial British administrative set-ups, it was common to see most appointees to administrative posts in the Southern Rhodesia government seconded to the registry upon arrival in Southern Rhodesia from where they would advance upwards to other administrative positions. This ensured that all administrative staff had knowledge of filing and general recordkeeping. In later years of colonial administration, local clerks were employed to carry out recordkeeping processes.

### **The postcolonial period: 1980 – 2013**

On 18 April 1980, the country became an independent state, marking the end of colonial rule. With this development, the National Archives of Rhodesia became known as the National Archives of Zimbabwe, a department under the Ministry of Home Affairs. The new government made a deliberate effort to ensure that the government continued to run without major changes and disruptions. The Director of the National Archives noted: “much thought has been given during this period to ensure that the National Archives identified itself with the new nation” (National Archives of Zimbabwe 1981: 3). In order to demonstrate this new identity, various visits by the government’s high level officials, distinguished persons and members of the diplomatic corps etc. were arranged. However, during this transitional period many white civil servants voluntarily left government service or the country for reasons ranging from fear, mistrust, uncertainty or failure to accept change (Njovana 1993: 36). Others chose to stay. The Director’s reports for the years soon after independence did not report any major disruptions to activities at the National Archives of Zimbabwe. However, the first early change was the appointment of the first African Director, Angeline Kamba, who was a trained and experienced information practitioner. An accelerated intake of African staff was also witnessed as the government deliberately wanted to “bring the archives to the people” (National Archives of Zimbabwe 1988: 6). This was after the National Archives had previously been regarded as a

privilege of the white people. According to Njovana (1993: 36), such actions, carried out through radio, television and print media, were largely public relations exercises aimed at publicising the existence as well as the functions of the National Archives.

Another significant development with the new government was the serious planning for the construction of a new Records Centre at Gun Hill - a direct response to the long-term problem of inadequate accommodation emanating from the pre-independence era. To alleviate the space shortage, accommodation was expanded at the Southerton repository with the erection of 22 bays in 1981 (National Archives of Zimbabwe 1982: 3). Despite this, while carrying out its functions, the National Archives found itself faced by the challenge of growing responsibilities and inadequate resources. However, an upsurge of external funding from international donors during the early period after independence alleviated the situation. The National Archives received quite a number of grants that enabled projects to be undertaken which could not have otherwise have begun. These were projects such as the microfilming of the Federal archives through an International Development Research Centre (IDRC) grant, and the oral history programme funded by a Ford Foundation grant (National Archives of Zimbabwe 1984: 3). Generally, the National Archives responded positively to the expansion of government. The promulgation of the National Archives Act in 1986 further strengthened the government's deliberate expansion drive. It appears the direction taken by the new government regarding the management of records and archives was a positive one, and according to Njovana (1993: 36), "the professionalism of the National Archives [was] strengthened considerably during the postcolonial period".

A further positive development during the first decade of independence was the establishment of the Audio Visual Unit to house the growing audiovisual collections of the National Archives. The unit was equipped with environment controlled vaults of international standard. In addition, the oral history programme was intensified by expanding oral testimonies in the two main languages of *chiShona* and *isiNdebele*. This was in response to new user needs and to fill the gap in the archives created by lack of any materials on Africans. The African oral history programme was a deliberate attempt to fill gaps or in some instances correct wrong impressions of the past (Njovana 1993: 37).

*The National Archives Act: Chapter 309, 1986*

The 1935 legislation had been generally seen as weak in the area of records management, particularly the relationship between the National Archives and the rest of the public service. According to the Director of the NAZ:

While the National Archives had been providing a records management service to government departments and to local authorities and statutory bodies since the mid-1950s, it had of late become very clear that the existing legislation made it difficult to pursue a dynamic policy in the management of these records (National Archives of Zimbabwe 1987: 3).

The 1935 legislation had assigned to the National Archives a passive role so that the initiative lay with the ministry or department and quite often, "by the time the National Archives was called in, irreparable damage had already been inflicted on the records" (National Archives of Zimbabwe 1987: 3). It was therefore necessary that the National Archives improved from its passive role to directly involving itself in the whole life-cycle of a record; from the time that the record is created until it is disposed of by way of destruction or preserved as a public archive. In comparison with the previous legislation, the new act gave the National Archives more influence in the decision-making process as well as the enforcement of recordkeeping activities at the

departments. It gave more impetus to the new government's drive to expand and reach out to the whole country in terms of recordkeeping.

The main provisions of the National Archives Act of 1986 related to records management, whereby the National Archives was put in position to pursue an active role in the management of records of central government, local authorities and parastatals. The Act empowered the National Archives to inspect and examine any records held by any ministry and to give advice or instruction concerning the filing, maintenance and preservation of records. This was a significant improvement from the 1935 legislation which limited the role of the National Archives to mere advisory with no power to enforce. The National Archives could now give instructions, not just advice, for records to be transferred to the National Archives. Other provisions concerned the access policy where the period of closure of public records was reduced from 30 to 25 years. The Act also saw the enlargement of the composition of the Records Committee to achieve wider consultation in the appraisal of records for retention or destruction. It also introduced measures to identify and make provision for the preservation of nationally valuable records held in private hands (National Archives of Zimbabwe 1987).

With all these new provisions, the National Archives Act was to bring far reaching consequences for archival development in the country. The new legislation gave the National Archives more influence in decision-making at the departments. According to Njovana (1993: 34), the Act "has put the Archives on a sounder footing with regard to its responsibility for semi-current records, particularly those which are still in ministries and departments". It appears though that these initiatives which culminated in the 1986 Act were emanating from the National Archives itself as Murambiwa *et al.*, (2012: 5) noted: "it would have been difficult for the National Archives of Zimbabwe to deal with public records, let alone stand its ground as an archival authority in the country". The playing ground had been laid in so far as legislation was concerned. The passing of the act was a positive development as this laid the first step towards marrying the stages of the lifecycle of records, something which was weak in the previous dispensation. Before, the focus was more on the end of the life-cycle, and indeed the National Archives earned a good reputation in the area of archives management. Clearly, the new legislation strengthened recordkeeping work because it now became mandatory for recordkeeping activities to be carried out rather than it being an optional and flexible activity where individual decision could be made on how to manage records. However, with the growth of information technology, recordkeeping faces new challenges which are not directly addressed in this legislation. The overall capacity of the National Archives to oversee the growing area of responsibilities has also not been fully addressed by this National Archives Act.

#### *Resources, facilities and tools*

At independence, the new drive to expand records management services supported by a legal instrument also saw increased government support for the National Archives. The construction of a huge Records Centre in 1988 was to cater for the extended responsibilities. The new Records Centre building was considered the biggest in sub-Saharan Africa at that time – with a maximum capacity of 78 180 square meters within 28 repository units; each unit having a capacity of 8712 cubic feet of records (National Archives of Zimbabwe 1989: 3). With the extended mandate to cover the whole country, the National Archives, over the next few years from 1980, restructured and decentralised its services from Harare to set up four new sub-centres in Mutare (1986), Gweru (1988), Masvingo (1988) and Chinhoyi (1999), in addition to the already existing ones in Bulawayo and Harare. Under this arrangement, the Harare Records Centre is responsible for the Harare, Mashonaland East, and Mashonaland Central Provinces; the Chinhoyi Records Centre for the Mashonaland West Province; the Bulawayo Records Centre

responsible for the Bulawayo, Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South Provinces; the Mutare Records Centre for the Manicaland Province; the Masvingo Records Centre for the Masvingo Province; and the Gweru Records Centre for the Midlands Province. This covers the entire regions of the country. The year 2000 also saw the opening of the new purpose-built archives building in Bulawayo which caters not just for records management but also archives management, similar to the Harare headquarters. Construction of the Masvingo Records Centre had also started before the crisis of the 2000s. Land was also identified for similar construction in Mutare, Gweru, and Chinhoyi (Murambiwa *et al.*, 2012: 10). In this way, recordkeeping was not just centred in the capital city, but spread throughout the country. The impact of this was that many other parts of the country could now be catered for in terms of recordkeeping activities than before. Records management work could now be conducted in various parts of the country. In Harare, facilities for audiovisual archiving were also put up with the establishment of the Audio Visual Unit in 1988 housed within the new Records Centre building.

### *Skills, training and awareness*

The transition period at independence witnessed a lot of changes in most government departments in Zimbabwe. However, the situation was generally stable at the National Archives as noted by the Director of the Archives in her annual reports from 1981 to 1986. Njovana (1993: 37) also alluded to this by saying that the National Archives had not been negatively affected by the political and constitutional changes that took place in the country at independence. According to him, the character of the institution had in fact not changed but broadened. The new independent nation became a favourite spot for donor support including scholarships for overseas training. However, to avoid reliance on expensive overseas training and donor funding, efforts were made to establish local training facilities for recordkeeping personnel. Today, the country has several records and archives training institutions established at various places in the country and at different levels of training from certificate, diploma and degree including post-graduate level. The National University of Science and Technology (NUST) is the main training institution offering undergraduate and post-graduate degrees in records and archives management as well as the related field of library and information sciences. Several polytechnic colleges established in four different towns in the country also offer certificate and diploma training in records management.

The other government affiliated institutions include the Zimbabwe Institute for Public Administration and Finance (ZIPAM) in Darwendale, the Management Training Bureau (MTB) in Harare, and the two Public Service Training Centres - the Highlands Training Center in Harare, and the Elangeni Training Center in Bulawayo. All these offer induction, refresher and short courses to government employees, with those at Highlands and Elangeni compulsory for all records personnel in the civil service.

The establishment of all these training facilities in the country can be seen as a positive development in postcolonial Zimbabwe. However, the quality of it has been questioned; for instance, Ngulube's (2000: 169) study on professionalism and ethics in the Zimbabwe Public Service concluded that the training afforded to recordkeeping personnel in the public service was unsatisfactory and "piecemeal". For him, it was 'piecemeal' in the sense that it hardly addressed the life-cycle concept but rather focused more on mere registry procedures, mail management and supervision, and records classification. In a way, these are the practical activities expected of recordkeeping staff, and technically this should be the right direction to take. However, it needs to be supplemented by in-depth formal training in order for one to be fully conversed with the life-cycle concept as Ngulube (2000) suggested. He also observed in the same study that there was no form of continuing education provided for the registry personnel apart from these short

courses. However, it looks like this issue was later addressed by the introduction of records and archives courses at NUST in 2002 at undergraduate level and later at post-graduate level as well as the various Polytechnic colleges offering certificate and diploma training.

Ngulube's (2000) study also noted another flaw in the system whereby 72% of the respondents did not have an ordinary level certificate (and therefore would not qualify for any further and formal training) while only 23% had para-professional certificate in records management. This meant that the level of education for recordkeeping staff was extremely low. However, the restructuring in the civil service in the period 2005-2008 put the minimum educational level at 5 Ordinary Level passes for all entry into the civil service, as well as making a minimum of certificate in records and archives or library and information sciences as the entry level for all records personnel in the Public Service. This should have addressed to a great extent Ngulube's (2000) concern of low level education among recordkeeping personnel.

For the National Archives, the period 1980 to the mid-1990's was fairly stable in terms of staff as is alluded to in the Director's annual reports for the early years of independence. However, by the end of the 1990's, a notable dwindling in funding resulted in continuous staff turnover. King (1998: 408) observed that there were savage cuts in funding which affected staffing levels and morale. Murambiwa *et al.*, (2012) alluded to the same staffing instability and pointed out that while there were excellent staff development opportunities that were being offered, the environment did not have complementary staff retention schemes. Thus, even though there was sound investment towards staff development over a long time, it was difficult to control staff leakage due to poor remuneration. Ultimately, staff retention was generally poor, and the many trained and experienced staff left the institution for 'greener pastures' leaving the institution's pool of trained and experienced staff dry.

#### *The 2000 – 2010 crisis*

At the end of the first two decades of independence (1990's) the unresolved issues of land and other economic inequalities stemming from the colonial era increasingly re-surfaced and heightened with the elections in 2000. These issues soon developed into a major crisis which drew the attention of the international world, and put the country into a political and economic crisis which continued for the next decade. The National Archives was equally affected by this crisis, and this author observed increased negative reports of a struggling institution beginning to appear in the Director's annual reports. This included cuts in government funding to sponsor major activities and critical low staff levels. This negative trend continued as the decade progressed, and a number of authors have alluded to this downward trend (Matangira 2012; Moyo 2012; Murambiwa 2009; 2012). The National Archives found it increasingly difficult to carry out activities particularly records management outreach programmes. This obviously compromised recordkeeping work at the departments which had to operate without the guidance of experts from the National Archives. The momentum that the new government had started off with at independence was beginning to be eroded and so were recordkeeping activities throughout the country. Matangira (2012) described this period as a disaster situation which required some kind of international intervention in the same manner as other disasters such as those caused by war or earthquake are treated by international organisations to protect cultural heritage institutions. According to Murambiwa (2012: 61), the impact of the 2000-2010 crisis was "catastrophic" to archival services as "Government support to culture and heritage sector declined".

## **Overview of recordkeeping during the colonial period**

On one hand, there were positive attributes that came out of the colonial recordkeeping system. Mainly, from the start, records and archives management was an expectation of the colonial administration though in the beginning the main repository for the records when they reached the end of their life-cycle was in Britain. Recordkeeping was part of an administrative culture inherited from Britain and extended to the colonies. The National Archives, a product of those who advocated for it, earned a good reputation in archives management, a reputation it carried with it for many years. A huge investment was put forth for archival skills development, especially at the National Archives, and the issue of lack of skills was never a huge problem during colonial days as the Archives staff were trained and exposed as much as possible to their work where they remained relatively appropriate for that time. One can also safely say that awareness and appreciation of the importance of recordkeeping was high during the colonial period. The records management aspect, though not fully developed, still had systems in place that ensured the capture, use and management of current and semi-current records.

However, on the other hand, the whole matter of archiving started off on a wrong footing in colonial Zimbabwe. Firstly, with Company administration, BSAC records were never regarded as local assets and thus, archiving for local purposes was far from the Company's main agenda. Efforts to correct this only came with later administrations as a full-time British colony. Secondly, archival business was only seriously raised when BSAC administration was coming to an end and people were concerned about losing the history that had been created in the country through BSAC administration. In essence, this provided a rather weak recordkeeping foundation as evidenced by the accumulation of records; a poor or non-existent disposal system; non-availability of standard filing system; and an accumulation of disorganised records which later came to the National Archives as archival records. Furthermore, recordkeeping during most of the colonial period operated with a weak legislation which led the National Archives to play an insignificant role in the management of the records of the country. The 1935 Act failed to provide the requisite backing to the country's recordkeeping processes and the role of the National Archives remained passive throughout most of the colonial period.

The major consequence of this scenario was that, even though available, records management systems remained weak as the regulatory system would not provide a clear-cut and mandatory system of managing the record throughout all its stages. However, this does not suggest that there were no recordkeeping activities during the colonial period, but that the situation could have been better had it been backed by a strong legislation. The legislation would have brought the much-needed archival expertise from the National Archives into the forefront of government recordkeeping. Seen from another angle, the colonial system of administration has also been blamed for imposing itself on local systems, making it impossible or difficult to incorporate. As a result, it seems modern recordkeeping systems brought by colonial administration failed to merge smoothly with local systems which were mostly oral as suggested by Lihoma (2012) and Tough (2012). Probably, this explains the root of some of the postcolonial problems whereby recordkeeping has remained misunderstood and the benefits of it largely unappreciated. Perhaps this could be a separate study on its own which could shade light on some of the recordkeeping problems facing Africa today.

## **Overview of recordkeeping in the postcolonial period**

At independence in 1980, the country inherited fairly well-established recordkeeping and archival systems, with fairly functioning institutions already in place. This included file classification, filing systems, registry systems, instructions, guidelines, and disposal systems, however, with a huge

draw-back of a weak legislation. The absence of strong legislation made implementation of recordkeeping processes less effective and largely unaccounted for. It lacked direct guidance of experts from the National Archives. However, there were sound archival institutions mainly in the form of a well-established National Archives which also was not affected much at the time of change of government at independence. As a result, the transitional period was relatively smooth in terms of general administration. The new government's drive to take the archives to the people with extended and expanded services also saw the opening of provincial records centres throughout the country as well as a lot of marketing of the National Archives.

Having inherited a weak archival legislation, the new legislation after independence in the form of the National Archives Act of 1986 gave more impetus to recordkeeping processes in the country. As a result, the first decade of independence into the second witnessed a boom in records management and archival services. This was driven by a deliberate government focus on expansion and improvement of recordkeeping services. There was also expanded funding from the government and donors, though this was dwindling towards the end of the second decade of independence. A huge investment was put into acquisition of skills through training. It was also during the postcolonial period that the levels of qualifications for recordkeeping staff at the departments were upgraded from clerical staff to certificate or diploma level with a full ordinary level certificate. Efforts were put to professionalise recordkeeping in the entire public service especially in the period after 2000. However, towards the end of the second decade, increasing funding problems began to surface in the country. This was coupled by the political crisis from 2000 which, stretching into the decade following, affected the economy of the whole country. This also affected the National Archives as the problems affected both staffing and funding required for the effective execution of archival work.

## Discussion

Evidently, postcolonial Zimbabwe, in one way or the other, inherited strong archival and recordkeeping systems including infrastructure from the colonial period. This was in contrast to many of the former British colonies who established their archival institutions only after independence. As noted by Ditsas and Haig (2014), the creation of the Southern Rhodesian Archives in 1935 was a first for British tropical Africa because at that time most colonies and protectorates did not have formal archives. In addition, there were no consistent systems for records management as the responsibility was left to individual departments.

However, the country's recordkeeping systems needed to be strengthened especially with regards to legislation as that inherited from the colonial period made recordkeeping activities difficult to carry out. The independent government of Zimbabwe realised this shortfall and took action that resulted in the 1986 legislation. The new legislation backed up the new expansion drive. The first two decades after independence were set in the right direction of strengthening the good infrastructure that had been inherited from the colonial period as well as introducing new facilities such as records centres, the Audio-Visual Unit and strengthening the Oral History Programme. Unfortunately, many of these gains from the past and from post-independence periods were heavily compromised by the economic and political problems that affected the country from about 2000 through to 2010. At the time of writing this article, though the situation had stabilised, significant improvements were still to be seen at the National Archives of Zimbabwe.

## Conclusion

This article traced the history or archival development in Zimbabwe from of colonialism to independence. Through a review of literature, it brought out the recordkeeping strengths and weaknesses of the two epochs. Areas covered include the regulatory and legal framework; resources and facilities; as well as skills, training and level of awareness. In the case of Zimbabwe, some good recordkeeping systems were inherited and carried over from the colonial period and continued to offer strong points to the postcolonial period which also saw a lot of improvements on those areas that were weak from the colonial period. The article concludes that, in fact, emerging from a solid records and archival foundation of the colonial period, archival services expanded significantly in the postcolonial era especially in the first two decades after independence. Some weak areas from the colonial period such as the weak archival legislation were only improved in the postcolonial period.

In essence, the article acknowledges, on the basis of available literature, the existence of a good framework for recordkeeping in postcolonial Zimbabwe together with many of the required basic skills for managing records, especially in the later years with professionalization of the field. What seems to be the biggest challenge and drawback is the crisis of the 2000 – 2010 decade. Furthermore, the capacity and resources to implement proper and modern recordkeeping practices as alluded to also by Barata, Cain and Serumaga (2000) is another critical area. The country is yet to rise up from the slumber that it went through for it to regain its previously held status. In particular too, the country requires thinking about the means to tackle the new demands brought about by new information and communication technologies. However, an empirical and pragmatic study is required to make first-hand assessment of what is currently happening regarding the management of records and archives in present Zimbabwe.

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