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RECORDKEEPING IN ZIMBABWE IN COLONIAL AND POST-INDEPENDENCE CONTEXTS

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Abstract

The study was based on the general assumption that good recordkeeping systems existed in the colonial period, while general crisis situations have been reported in many postcolonial African nations, including Zimbabwe. With a view to determining whether there was continuity or not in the management of public sector records in Zimbabwe between the two periods, the study employed an interpretive paradigm and made use of qualitative methods including interviews, observations and documents search. Contrary to the general notion of collapsing recordkeeping systems in many postcolonial African scenarios, the study revealed that the recordkeeping systems established in the colonial era in Zimbabwe did not actually collapse but, in fact, the continued use of archaic manual systems, and absence of information and communication technologies (ICTs) became the main source of recordkeeping problems. This article presents the findings and recommendations of the study.

Keywords: Archival development, colonial recordkeeping, National Archives of Zimbabwe, postcolonial recordkeeping, Zimbabwe

Introduction

The guiding principle of records and archives management is to ensure that information is available when and where it is needed; in an organised, efficient, and well maintained environment. This study acknowledges that records need to be systematically managed throughout their life-cycle; that is from creation to disposal in a continuous and integrated way. Generally, if this does not happen, there are bound to be problems. Such problems have been identified in many postcolonial African situations and this study, on the backdrop of failing recordkeeping systems in many postcolonial African countries, sought to establish the status of records and archives management in postcolonial Zimbabwe's Public Service; and particularly establishing the colonial-postcolonial dichotomy within the Zimbabwean context.

The problem of poor recordkeeping systems in postcolonial Africa, including Zimbabwe, has been a subject covered by many authors for many years in the past two to three decades. Earlier studies include Mazikana (1996), Mnjama (1996), Musembi (1986, 1988), Mwiyeriwa (1985), Njovana (1989), and Thurston and Smith (1986), who all confirmed the presence of serious problems in the management of records and archives in the period after independence. The World Bank and the International Records Management Trust (IRMT) (2000) in particular, concluded that records management in Africa has remained a neglected area of public sector reform. Numerous other studies (Barata, Kutzner and Wamukoya 2001; IRMT 2011a; Mazikana 2009; Mnjama 2005; Ngulube and Tafor 2006) also alluded to this general failure, collapse or decline in recordkeeping operations in most postcolonial African nations. However, within the same African context, good recordkeeping systems are reported to have existed during the colonial period. For instance, some regional and general African studies, including specific African country studies such as those by Barata, Cain and Serumaga (2000), Kemoni and

Ngulube (2008), Mazikana (1996), Musembi (2000), Nengomasha (2009), Ngoepe (2008) and Tough (2009), maintained that there were good records and archival systems in many African countries during the colonial period.

In colonial Zimbabwe, strong recordkeeping systems are reported to have existed (Mazikana 1988; Mnjama 2005; Thurston and Smith 1986; Tough 2009). Thurston and Smith (1986: 1) particularly noted that Zimbabwe had “long established and highly developed [recordkeeping] institutions”. Similarly, Tough (2009: 189) also noted that the Central African Archives (CAA), which was born out of the archive in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), was “the outstanding archive repository in sub-Saharan Africa”.

As for postcolonial Zimbabwe, Barata, Cain and Serumaga (2000) observed that the country was a source of good practice, especially in the area of evaluating and monitoring of recordkeeping systems, but lacked resources to fully operate and meet demand across the whole country. This observation by Barata et al. (2000) is interesting as it came in the midst of reports of ultimate failure to manage records and archives in most of postcolonial Africa, Zimbabwe included. However, Ngulube (2000), while focusing on professionalism and ethics among postcolonial Zimbabwe Public Service’s recordkeeping staff, noted a general lack of professionalism, which he attributed to lack of training among the records management personnel.

All in all, critical key issues on this colonial-postcolonial dichotomy emerged from the literature and are summarised as follows:

- 1) The presence, in the colonial period, of recordkeeping systems that were functional and effective to serve the purposes of colonial administration.
- 2) The collapse of recordkeeping systems in the postcolonial period.
- 3) Colonial archival systems were not so fully developed to enable their continued sustenance in later years when colonialism ended.
- 4) Colonial legacy culminating from colonial circumstances of oppression and rapid transition to independence leading to poor foundations.

All these views provided a platform in this study to investigate the status of recordkeeping in postcolonial Zimbabwe.

Objectives of the study

Even though the orientation of this study was drawn from a general African perspective, the objectives of the study were to:

- 1) Establish the status of records and archives management in Zimbabwe’s postcolonial Public Service.
- 2) Find out if the situation regarding recordkeeping systems as observed in other countries is applicable to Zimbabwe and determine the reasons for this situation.
- 3) Formulate a model programme of records management strategies, policies, procedures and guidelines for Zimbabwe’s Public Service.
- 4) Make recommendations that will strengthen records and archives management systems in Zimbabwe’s Public Service.

Methodology

Based on an interpretivist paradigm and a case study design, the study was carried out in Zimbabwe through the use of qualitative data collection methods of interviews, observations and documents search. This was in order to gain in-depth insights into the state of records and

archives management in the Public Service of Zimbabwe; which constituted the population of the study. The sample of the study was all the 24 government Ministries of the Government of Zimbabwe. Interviews were done with selected recordkeeping staff from the Ministries; made up of three persons from each of the 24 Ministries comprising the Permanent Secretary, the Records Supervisor, and one Action Officer; three from the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) comprising the Director, Head of Records Management section and Head of Public Archives section; and one key Information Technology (IT) person from the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, Postal and Courier Services (MICTPCS Ministry) responsible for ICT issues in the Public Service of Zimbabwe. Initially, the researcher hoped to interview one key IT person at every ministry, but it turned out that there were no such positions in the ministries except for IT technicians responsible for the procurement and maintenance of computers and computer accessories.

Other than interviews, observations were also made on recordkeeping facilities at the registries within the Ministries. In addition, through documents search, an assessment of related recordkeeping documents was also carried out. In the end, permission to research was allowed in 14 (58%) ministries while the researcher failed to get access to 10 ministries out of the 24 targeted ones. Respondents from the 14 ministries where access was granted are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Interview Respondents List

Ministry/ Institution Identifier	Permanent Secretary Identifier	Records Supervisor Identifier	Action Officer Identifier	Other
1	PS1	RS1	AO1	
2	PS2	RS2	AO2	
3	PS3	RS3	AO3	
4	PS4	RS4	AO4	
5	PS5	RS5	AO5	
6	PS6	RS6	AO6	
7	PS7	*RS7a;RS7b; RS7c	AO7	
8	PS8	RS8	AO8	
9	PS9	RS9	AO9	
10	PS10	RS10	AO10	
11	PS11	RS11	AO11	
12	PS12	RS12	AO12	
13	PS13	RS13	AO13	
14	PS14	RS14	AO14	
NAZ				NAZ1; NAZ2; NAZ3
ICT Ministry				KIT
Total	14	16	14	4
Grand Total	48			

* This ministry had 3 Registries due to merger of Ministries in 2013

KEY:

PS: Permanent Secretary
 RS: Records Supervisor
 AO: Action Officer
 KIT: Key IT Person
 NAZ: National Archives of Zimbabwe

Findings and discussions

In line with the objectives to establish the status of records and archives in postcolonial Zimbabwe's Public Service; and to find out if the situation reported in other African countries is applicable to Zimbabwe, this section discusses and presents the findings as well as the conclusions regarding these objectives.

Registries and the operation of the manual system

It emerged from this study that recordkeeping systems in Zimbabwe did not actually collapse or deteriorate in the same manner as was witnessed in other postcolonial African countries as reported in other studies (Magaya and Lowry 2012; Mutiti 2001; Mutsagondo and Chaterera 2014; Nengomasha 2012; Ngulube and Tafor 2006; Ngoepe and Keakopa 2011; Wamukoya and Mutula 2005). The study concluded that the situation in Zimbabwe's Public Service is a result of archaic systems rather than collapsing systems. This is because the same manual systems from the colonial times were found actively operating in all the registries of the Public Service of Zimbabwe; in particular, the capture, classification and filing of physical records.

However, this did not imply that all was well in Zimbabwe; the continued use of the traditional manual recordkeeping systems turned out to be the main source of problems. There had not been any attempts to modernise records management in the registries and the systems were found running on archaic platforms, which completely excluded records in electronic format. The symptoms found were those of an overwhelmed and archaic manual system, which manifested as complications with file-tracking, delays in finding files, missing or misplaced files, the opening of temporary files etcetera. Clearly, the absence of ICTs was the biggest challenge to the country's records and archives management framework rather than that of collapsing systems as virtually the whole records management system in Zimbabwe had barely been modernised to incorporate the use of ICTs.

Records management personnel and the professionalisation of the records management field

The professionalisation of the records management field was successfully implemented throughout the Public Service of Zimbabwe particularly in the period after 2005 when the government put the entry level for all records personnel to a minimum of a certificate in records management. All registries are now operated by qualified records staff.

Table 2 illustrates the number of records staff in each of the Ministries covered in the study including those who were unqualified; tabulated from field data. Table 2 shows that out of a total of 180 records staff from the 14 Ministries, 159 (88%) had the required educational qualifications while only 21 (12%) did not (mainly those who joined the Public Service before professionalisation). Therefore, the issue of the absence of trained records personnel can no longer be cited as a problem in postcolonial Zimbabwe's Public Service even though in the first two decades after independence, its registries were operated by unqualified clerks whose main source of training was the Public Service induction programme and an active mentorship programme.

Table 2: Schedule of records staff at the ministries

Ministry	Number of Records Supervisors	Number of Records Assistants	Unqualified staff
1	1	8	0
2	1	2	0
3	2	19	1
4	2	17	2
5	1	8	2
6	1	3	1
7	Registry a	14	0
	Registry b	13	4
	Registry c	4	0
8	1	6	0
9	1	11	2
10	1	3	0
11	1	4	0
12	1	9	5
13	1	5	0
14	1	10	0
Total	18	141	21

Source: Field Data (2015)

However, what turned out to be inadequate was the number of records management positions on the National Archives structure itself as shown on Table 3 below extracted from the NAZ organogram.

Table 3: NAZ Records Centre Staff

Records Centre	Staff	Total
Harare RC	1 x Chief Archivist 1 x Archivist 4 x Records Assistant	6
Bulawayo RC	1 x Chief Archivist 2 x Archivist 2 x Records Assistant	5
Gweru RC	1 x Archivist 1 x Records Assistant	2
Mutare RC	1 x Archivist 1 x Records Assistant	2
Masvingo RC	1 x Archivist 1 x Records Assistant	2
Chinhoyi RC	1 x Archivist 1 x Records Assistant	2
TOTAL		19

According to Table 3, only 19 records management positions were on the NAZ structure to oversee the records management for the whole country. The study found these figures grossly inadequate to cover the records management work for the entire Public Service covering ministries, departments, and regional branches as well as parastatals, local authorities and statutory bodies as stipulated in the National Archives Act, 1986.

Archival skills and job opportunities

For many years postcolonial Zimbabwe operated with qualified archivists; whose training was backed by an active scholarship programme for overseas training. However, in recent years, the absence of scholarships derailed the training programme, while the loss of qualified and

experienced archivists drained the pool of investment of the first two decades after independence. The situation was exacerbated by slow recruitment due to a general government freeze on vacant posts. In addition, the benefit and impact of local training through the establishment of records and archives management training at university level at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST); the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU); and a few others have not been felt due to the freeze on posts.

However, the study noted that even if the posts were to be opened, NAZ could only take a few of the graduates due to its limited structure. Therefore, the government's move to localise training as a solution to the skills deficit is half-backed because the actual benefit of it had not been fully realised. The need for more archivists at NAZ is clearly pertinent, but while the facilities for training are now available in the country, the current NAZ structure does not allow the institution to recruit many of the graduates to satisfy the growing needs at hand.

IT Skills

For more than two decades after independence, registries in the Public Service of Zimbabwe were operated by unqualified clerks who had no formal training in records management, but whose main source of training was the vibrant induction and mentorship programmes. These rendered the clerks capable of running the manual and paper-based system. However, even though the records staff in Zimbabwe are now trained and qualified, they remain overly skilled in the manual system. They lack IT skills to tackle new challenges brought about by the ICT revolution. This makes them largely irrelevant in today's IT-based information set-up. Due to this, the critical areas of managing electronic records and computerisation of the entire records management field remain unaddressed on top of other challenges such as lack of IT resources. However, the study concluded that the lack of IT resources could not just be the burning issue. This is because 11 (79%) of the 14 ministries which had computers in their registries, only 4 (36%) of them used the computers for rudimentary information management while the rest used them for nothing less than type-writers. This further confirms the problem of lack of requisite IT skills.

Similarly, records management staff at NAZ also did not have the necessary IT skills to drive electronic records management operations at the registries. There were no IT specialists at NAZ and as a result the institution lags behind in the use of computerised archives management systems. Such IT experts are necessary to support archivists in the drive to computerise archival management activities including the use of electronic finding aids and online access tools. The effects of the absence of IT skills at NAZ are evidenced by the continued use of manual finding aids and failure to lead the adoption of electronic records management systems at the creating offices.

This situation of lack of IT skills at the registries and NAZ further explains why issues to do with ICTs in the management of records remain largely unexplored in the whole Public Service in Zimbabwe. As it is, NAZ as the 'expert' did not have the expertise to drive IT initiatives.

High staff turnover and limited positions on the NAZ structure

The study further concluded that while NAZ employed qualified archivists and records managers, the institution's current skills base was not only unstable but also porous due to a combination of high staff turnover and poor staff retention. In addition, NAZ's current organisational structure was limited in terms of the number of professional archivists and

records managers who could be employed in comparison with the work-load at its disposal. Thus, the institution operates with a reduced capacity.

Low status

The study also concluded that records and archives management carries a very low status within the Public Service of Zimbabwe. The registries, though well-established within the ministries, did not have much authority and influence due to the low status they carry. In addition, NAZ was not fully capacitated to effectively execute its mandate within the Public Service because the government viewed it as a small individual department without considering the universal part it plays within the whole Public Service realm.

Public Service induction programme

The study found the Public Service induction training programme, adopted from the colonial times, to be very good for in-depth orientation to government administrative systems including records management but noted a distinct absence of the direct involvement of NAZ which would bring professional expertise to government recordkeeping work. There was a gap in the tripartite relationship of the registries, the Public Service and NAZ. Even though NAZ is the expert in this relationship, it is tasked only with advisory and supervisory roles to the registries, while the training part is done by the Public Service. NAZ was not involved in this training yet it is expected to advise, supervise and monitor on issues such as appraisals and disposal of records at the registries. This awkward situation does not promote effective records and archives management and the country would benefit more by directly involving NAZ in the training or curricula development. South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, and Nigeria are good examples where the national archives is increasingly getting involved directly in induction training through organising training programmes for government records staff (Abioye 2007; Nengomasha 2013; Ngoepe and Keakopa 2011). The framework to execute such collaboration in Zimbabwe is there but the tripartite bond has not been formally constituted as a strategy to improve recordkeeping.

Legal and regulatory framework

The study also looked at the legal and regulatory framework, which supported the records and archives management in the Public Service of Zimbabwe. Such legislation defines the rights of archival institutions and provides them with the authorisation necessary for them to carry out their records and archives functions (Mazikana 1990). In earlier studies, Wamukoya and Mutula (2005), Ngulube and Tafor (2006) identified the absence of legislation, policies and procedures to guide the management of both paper and electronic records as one of the biggest problems in the East and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) region.

From the data gathered in this study, it was evident that the current National Archives Act, passed six years into independence in 1986, already needed to be revised to incorporate new trends and new technology as well as strengthen the role of NAZ within the Public Service set-up. This would allow its effective interaction with the creating offices; an area found weak in this study. However, it should be noted though that Zimbabwe had archival legislation quite early enough in the colonial period in comparison with other African countries, having had its first Archives Act in 1935, which was then revised and strengthened in the postcolonial period. Thus, Zimbabwe made an effort to improve on its archival legislation in the postcolonial period and this is seen as a positive development. However, even though the National Archives Act of 1986 strengthened records management in Zimbabwe, three decades down the line, the study found it

outdated particularly because it did not directly address records in electronic format. While technically, this might not be a major limitation since the Act recognises records in any format including electronic records, a direct mention and specific incorporation of electronic records management issues would eliminate uncertainties and specify clearly what is to be done at the different stages of the life of the electronic records. More importantly, the current legal framework lacked guidelines to prescribe day-to-day operations for managing electronic records as well as guidelines for carrying out such processes as appraisal and disposal of records. This left registries and ministries operating without adequate backing of formal guidelines. In addition, the Act lacked provisions which would prescribe at the legislative level, the designing of systems for the creation, management and digital preservation of electronic records as outlined in the records continuum theory.

While many authors (Mazikana 1990; Ngulube and Tafor 2006; Wamukoya and Mutula 2005) have emphasised on the lack of legislation to cover e-records, this study argues that in Zimbabwe it is more of operational guidelines that were required than just legislation. Further to this, the study found NAZ with inadequate power to enforce and monitor compliance to recordkeeping activities in the creating departments. Mazikana (1990: 60) contended that at the minimum, archival institutions require “the right and ability to inspect records while they are still held by the creating agencies”. This study concluded that even though NAZ had the mandate to advice and monitor records management processes in the Ministries, an improvement gained from the 1986 National Archives Act, it still did not have enough power to influence recordkeeping processes in the ministries and departments. It also lacked the power to enforce compliance, in particular when creating agencies were not cooperative or had different views. Earlier on Barata, Cain and Serumaga (2000: 3) also concluded that where problems occurred at the creating offices in Zimbabwe, “there is no recognised authority that can enforce compliance with records legislation or pursue disciplinary action”. Mazikana (1990: 60-61) emphasised that this right to enforce is needed in cases where “mismanagement of records and archives is identified; where the records and archives are clearly in danger”. Magaya and Lowry (2012) also reported that none of the three East African countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania had this mandate to enforce compliance in particular with retention schedules. In Kenya, despite there being provision in the law for records disposal, where Ministries were found flouting the rules, the National Archives argued that “it is difficult for one department to prosecute a sister department” (Mnjama 2003: 97-98), further confirming the problem of lack of adequate power by national archival institutions.

Decentralisation of records management

NAZ successfully decentralised records management operations in the period after independence backed by the government’s deliberate expansion drive adopted soon after independence. This saw the opening of four new records centres including the construction of the huge records centre in Harare in 1988, which at that time became the largest records centre in sub-Saharan Africa (Mazikana 1988). This is seen as a positive development in postcolonial Zimbabwe’s records management.

Conservation work

Conservation work at NAZ, carried out through the Conservation Unit, was consolidated in the period after independence. NAZ became renowned in the region for its conservation work and even offered internships to other archivists from the region. In this regard, conservation work was, in many respects actually consolidated in the period after independence rather than collapse.

However, the study acknowledges that the current economic crisis had negatively affected many of the conservation programmes.

Management of audiovisual collections

The opening of the NAZ Audio Visual Unit in 1988, which was equipped with proper infrastructure and equipment to manage audiovisual collections, was a departure from the years before when audiovisual materials were housed and managed in the same facilities as paper records. The audiovisual collections are today stored in purposely built storage vaults with controlled temperature and humidity. Thus, the formal management of audiovisual collections was a positive development in the postcolonial period. However, in recent years, the audiovisual unit faced challenges of equipment breakdown and obsolescence as well as incessant power cuts which were mostly attributed to the economic crisis in the country.

Oral history collections

The NAZ Oral History programme, which was mainly conducted in the English language before independence, was expanded in the period after independence to include two other major indigenous languages of Shona and Ndebele with the aim of capturing the unrecorded histories of the local people whose history had been side-lined in the past. The recording of such histories became active and vibrant after independence in the 1980s and 1990s through a deliberate effort to 'take the archives to the people' including the project 'Capturing a Fading National Memory' – a project set-up in 2003 to document oral testimonies of experiences of the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. Thus, the oral history programme was strengthened in the period after independence. Nevertheless, in recent years, the programme also faced operational problems due to the Zimbabwe economic crisis.

Classification and filing

The study found that a standard classification and filing system was used throughout the Public Service of Zimbabwe though the system originated from a system now considered 'archaic' from the colonial times. However, even though the system still operated fairly well and is still considered a good system on its own, its operation was drawn back by a number of challenges including:

- a) Problems with the use of indexing terms between the records office and non-records staff due to lack of coordination between the two. This caused confusion and delays in finding information.
- b) There was a possibility of fragmentation of records due to operation of temporary files. In addition, poor e-records management created a possibility for fragmented records because the system did not guarantee their capture into formal recordkeeping systems.
- c) Poor file-tracking systems posed a threat to records management in the Public Service of Zimbabwe, as they lead to high incidences of delays in finding information including missing or misplaced files.
- d) Suspected cases of sabotage or deliberate actions to conceal or destroy information posed a threat to records management in the Public Service of Zimbabwe if left unmonitored. In addition, the risk of fire was high due to non-servicing of fire-detection and fire-fighting equipment; a problem attributed to sheer negligence and not due to budget constraints.

Many of the issues mentioned above have also been cited in other studies as the symptoms of 'collapsing' recordkeeping systems in many African countries (Mazikana 1996, 2009; Mnjama 2005; World Bank and IRMT 2000). However, the extent to which they were found in

Zimbabwe cannot be termed ‘collapsing’ because the manual recordkeeping systems were still actively used. Apart from poor file-tracking, which was quite rampant, the other challenges cited above such as problems with indexing terms; the use of temporary files; and suspected cases of sabotage were not reported in alarming numbers even though they remain worrisome. From the evidence gathered, the study argues that the symptoms shown were more of archaic and overwhelmed systems rather than collapsing ones.

Appraisal and disposal of records

Even though facilities were available in the records management system for the systematic movement of records from current to semi-current and non-current stages, poor and inconsistent records appraisal and disposal systems throughout the Public Service of Zimbabwe affected this logical flow. In the long run, it led to congestion of storage spaces at the registries and the records centres by either un-appraised or ephemeral records. This problem has been cited in other studies and has been given as one of the reasons contributing to collapsing systems in Africa (Garaba 2007; IRMT 2011b; Luyombya and Sennabulya 2012; Nengomasha and Nyanga 2012; Ngoepe and Keakopa 2011; Ngulube and Tafor 2006). However, this study contends that even though records centre facilities were not enough, the problems in Zimbabwe were not about the absence or shortage of records centre facilities but more of the misuse of existing records centre facilities and a failure to implement set disposal procedures. The records destruction that should happen at the creating offices or records centres did not regularly take place. This led to congestion of storage spaces and ultimately a breakdown in the records disposal system. Therefore, even though postcolonial Zimbabwe started off with a good framework for the disposal of records, it had also joined other countries with collapsing disposal systems not because of absence of facilities but mainly due to poor implementation. Clearly, poor implementation of appraisal and disposal procedures contributed to the current breakdown in the disposal systems. The breakdown was a cumulative process because the space and facilities were provided for early enough into independence with the opening of four new records centre facilities and at some point retention schedules were available in the ministries. The records centre facilities became congested due to irregular disposal of records, which, in a smooth-flowing system, would clear space at the different stages of the life-cycle.

Acquisition of archives

Archives are the residue of the first three stages of the records life-cycle. In Zimbabwe, poor appraisal and disposal of records in the second and third stages contributed to inconsistencies in the acquisition of archives at NAZ. In addition, shortage of storage space and shelving at NAZ also contributed to poor acquisition of archival materials because some records could not be taken in at the time that they became due for transfer to the archives; further stifling the archives acquisition process. However, even though NAZ continued to receive transfers of matured records, in recent years, the institution increasingly showed a reduced capacity to absorb all records that were due for transfer. Its capacity to take in records did not match the inflow of matured records.

Archives processing

The backlog in archives processing found at NAZ’s headquarters in Harare stood at 35 609 cubic feet in 2015. The study attributed this backlog to inadequate archivist posts within the NAZ structure. In another study, Ngulube, Sibanda and Makoni (2013) also found a 20 000 cubic feet backlog at the Bulawayo Archives even though they noted that the centre sometimes engaged records and archives university students from NUST in Bulawayo to assist with clearing

the backlog as part of their training. The NAZ organogram has 76 professional staff and among these, only seven archivists (six in Harare and one in Bulawayo) were designated to processing of all archival materials in paper format (which constitute the bulk of records at NAZ), including the historical manuscripts collections which NAZ receives through donations. The rest of the archivists are distributed within other sections of NAZ designated as follows (excluding the Chief Archivists): records management for all centres country-wide (17), audiovisual archives (two), oral history (one) and the legal deposit library (four).

While the backlog of unprocessed archives at NAZ in Harare stood at 35 609 cubic feet in 2015, the number of archives processed in the 10 years from 1999 to 2009 totalled a mere 3924.5 cubic feet. Annual statistics of incoming records versus processed archives at NAZ in Harare are given in Table 4, taken from NAZ annual reports (Murambiwa 2012: 64):

Table 4: NAZ statistics for archives acquired and processed (Murambiwa 2012: 64)

Year	Processed Archives (in cubic feet)
1999	297
2000	217
2001	188
2002	232.5
2003	312
2004	762 (Full staff complement)
2005	569
2006	788
2007	161 (Economy grinding to a halt; high staff turnover and rising staff absenteeism)
2008	167
2009	237
Total	3924.5

Table 4 shows that the processing of archives was low between 1999 and 2003; then suddenly shot up between 2004 and 2006. However, this high archive processing rate could not be maintained as it sharply fell even below its initial figures. Overall, the average for archives processing was 259 cubic feet; and in good years such as 2004, 2005, and 2006, the average rate of archives processing went up to 706 cubic feet per year. Using these two extreme cases, the study calculated the number of years it will take to clear the current backlog of 35 609 cubic feet of archives. The results show that using the average for the general years of 259 cubic feet, it will take a total of 138 years to clear the backlog, which is appalling. Using the good years' rate of 706 cubic feet, it will take 50 years to clear. Using the same formula, in order to clear the backlog in 25 years, the average processing per year should be 1424 cubic feet. Thus, the backlog situation can never be contained under this current structure unless the institution's capacity is raised tremendously. This is because even if the institution operates on full capacity with all staff positions filled, the amount of archives that can potentially be processed in a year is just a drop in the ocean.

Such archives processing backlog problems found in Zimbabwe have also been confirmed in other African countries, for instance, in Uganda (Luyombya and Sennabulya 2012) and many of the ESARBICA countries (Mnjama 2005; Ngulube, Sibanda and Makoni 2013). These were also attributed to lack of capacity by the countries' national archival institutions. In the case of Zimbabwe, the study further concluded that the problem with archives processing backlog is not due to collapsing systems at NAZ but mainly attributed to low capacity at the institution. With its current structure, NAZ cannot cope with the growing quantities of all incoming archival materials. The number of staff on the NAZ structure is too low in comparison with the material that needs to be processed.

Finding aids

The majority of NAZ's finding aids were still in manual format. These manual finding aids were inherited from the colonial period but this system is no longer a favourable option in the face of huge quantities of archival materials that are open for access. Electronic and online finding aids are more convenient, faster and user-friendly for both users and reference staff. NAZ lags behind in this area and needs to tackle the issue of finding aids head-on. Similar archaic finding aids have also been reported in other African countries (Lihoma 2012; Luyombya and Sennabulya 2012; Mnjama 2005; Ngulube and Tafor 2006). A special project is required which is dedicated to converting the current manual finding aids to electronic-based systems. At the introduction of computer technology, many information management institutions around the world including libraries and archives invested in projects to convert their manual finding aids to electronic-based systems and this is a giant but necessary step that NAZ still needs to take.

Preservation and conservation of archives

Facilities for the preservation of archives at NAZ were found inadequate; a situation also reported in other African countries (Abioye 2007; Burns, Ferris and Liatsopoulos 2009; Ngulube and Tafor 2006). In particular, due to a breakdown in the air-conditioning system in the 1990s, the critical temperature and humidity controls posed a threat to the long-term preservation of collections. The current economic crisis in the country had grossly derailed conservation work, which had been consolidated in the period after independence but now suffered from procurement and funding challenges. In addition, the absence of preservation and conservation specialists at NAZ compromised the effective preservation and conservation of collections.

NAZ capacity and resources

While a framework for NAZ to operate was available, the institution remained with no adequate resource capacity to cover the whole Public Service including all other state-affiliated institutions. This situation of resources challenges has also been cited in many other African countries, particularly, in Uganda and Nigeria during their crisis years of the 1980s (Abioye 2007; Luyombya and Sennabulya 2012). An analysis of data gathered in the study showed that resources, facilities and tools for the management of records and archives were never sufficient in the postcolonial period, as evidenced by the poor outlook of the registries visited. They exhibited symptoms of neglect over time. The situation was even worse for ICT resources that are essential in today's technology-driven era. In most cases, IT facilities were completely absent and this stood out as the biggest challenge in the country's recordkeeping systems. The current economic crisis presented a bigger challenge to the already strained resources for the management of records and archives.

In addition, the study revealed that NAZ's focus changed after independence from one which mainly concentrated on archives management to incorporating more of records management yet its structural capacity was not significantly increased to enable it to operate within the new focus. Furthermore, NAZ neither had the capacity or infrastructure to manage e-records particularly in their semi-current or non-current stages where its responsibilities mostly lie; nor the capacity to manage electronic records in the manner recommended by the records continuum theory. The futile proposal to restructure the institution in 2008 was in the right direction as it sought to increase the institution's capacity including its e-records management capacity. The postcolonial government of Zimbabwe realised the need to empower NAZ regarding its records management role but only addressed the legal aspect through enacting the 1986 National Archives Act and paid little attention to the resource requirements which would enable it to perform its expanded

duties as well as handle the IT-based records. This situation of inadequate capacity by the national archival institution has also been cited as a big problem in many other African countries (Barata, Cain and Serumaga 2000; Musembi 1988; Luyombya and Sennabulya 2012; Okello-Obura 2012).

The study also concluded that a strong framework existed in the Public Service of Zimbabwe for the management of records and archives but the government’s capacity to fully execute recordkeeping work had been drastically reduced over the years due to failure to recognise the increase in records that the government generates. As a result, the current system faced problems, which include poor file-tracking; poor records disposal; congested storage spaces; archives processing backlogs; inadequate archival preservation; and poor conservation programmes. Notably, these are the same issues that have been cited as symptoms of collapse in other African countries (Mazikana 1996, 2009; Mnjama 2005; World Bank and IRMT 2000) but the magnitude that these were experienced in Zimbabwe was not at the same level as they are depicted in other African countries where systems ultimately collapsed to the point of not functioning at all. Nonetheless, they still had a negative impact on recordkeeping operations in the Public Service of Zimbabwe.

The position of NAZ and the registries within the Public Service set-up

NAZ positioning as well as that of the registries within the Public Service was found not favourable for the effective management of records and archives. Figure 1 illustrates the position of the records function within the Ministries; an interpretation by the author based on information given by respondents.

NAZ and the registries lacked adequate authority and influence within the Public Service structures and their recognition by other stakeholders in the Public Service was generally low. In addition, there was a gap between the records office and top-level management at each ministry, while NAZ, under the Ministry of Home Affairs, was found not strategically placed to enable it to have authority and influence over recordkeeping in the Ministries. This affected the overall effectiveness of NAZ and the registries with the result that recordkeeping activities were never taken seriously by other stakeholders outside the registry. The same issues of poor recognition and placement of national archives as well as its overall influence within the Public Service set-up have been raised in many other African countries such as Botswana and South Africa (Ngoepe and Keakopa 2011).

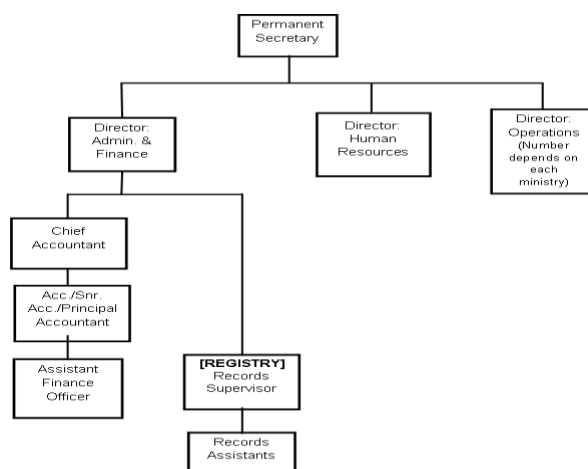


Figure 1: Position of registries in the ministries (Field Data 2015)

Awareness and appreciation of records and archives management

The study found a general low awareness and less appreciation of the role of records and records/archives management within the Public Service of Zimbabwe; a situation also reported in many other African countries, (Abioye 2007; Kemoni and Ngulube 2007; Nengomasha 2009; Nandain 2006; Ngoepe and Keakopa 2011). Even though the government of Zimbabwe professionalised the records management field, the field still carried a very low status and this affected its overall influence within government administrative systems. Career progression opportunities were limited in the registries and this demoralised the staff as evidenced by one staff member who moved from the registry to the administration section after acquiring an archival degree. For this staff member, there were no prospects to advance further in the registry from the Records Supervisor position. In addition, the study found no systems in place to raise the awareness of non-records staff on their recordkeeping responsibilities yet they also perform indirect but critical recordkeeping activities in their role as creators, receivers and users of records. The system did not make non-records staff accountable for the actions they took or failed to take when they handled records, and hence they tended not to take recordkeeping issues seriously.

Overview of life-cycle management of records in the Public Service of Zimbabwe

Shepherd and Yeo (2003: 252) recommended that “where an embryo records management service already exists; it is often helpful to evaluate it by means of a SWOT analysis”. SWOT is an acronym, which refers to the strengths and weaknesses of an organisation’s service and the opportunities and threats which faces it (Shepherd and Yeo 2003). Thus, a SWOT analysis was done by the author on existing records and archives management processes in the Public Service of Zimbabwe, as part of further investigation on the status of records and archives management. The results of the SWOT analysis are represented in Table 5.

Table 5: SWOT analysis of recordkeeping in the public service of Zimbabwe

INTERNAL FACTORS	EXTERNAL FACTORS
Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established and working registries • Good manual system • Educated and skilled staff • Committed records staff • Established systems for controlling access and maintaining confidentiality • Functional manual system as good foundation for computerisation (E-readiness) • Legal framework 	Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government support for training • Staff willingness to study, learn and upgrade skills • High literacy rate • ICT revolution • New Privacy, Freedom of Information and Open Access legislation highlights the importance of effective records management systems • Advocacy for democracy, good governance and human rights
Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archaic manual system • Poor file management and tracking systems suitable for current/modern situation • Lack of resources for records management • IT illiteracy • Lack of IT skills for managing electronic records • Lack of IT resources • Lack of integration between electronic records and paper records 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICT revolution [failure to keep pace; more records generated] • Unstable economic environment • Little regard for records management in many IT solutions (Software and hardware packages are chosen by computing specialists with little regard for records management implications) • Politics

INTERNAL FACTORS	EXTERNAL FACTORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of preservation skills • Lack of funding • Inadequate preservation resources • Lack of operational guidelines • Inadequate legal framework 	

Note. This SWOT analysis was carried out by the author.

Based on the SWOT Analysis above, Figure 2 shows a framework of facilities and activities that were being done and those that were not available in the Public Service of Zimbabwe; further explaining the status of records and archives management from the perspective of the life-cycle concept and the records continuum theory.

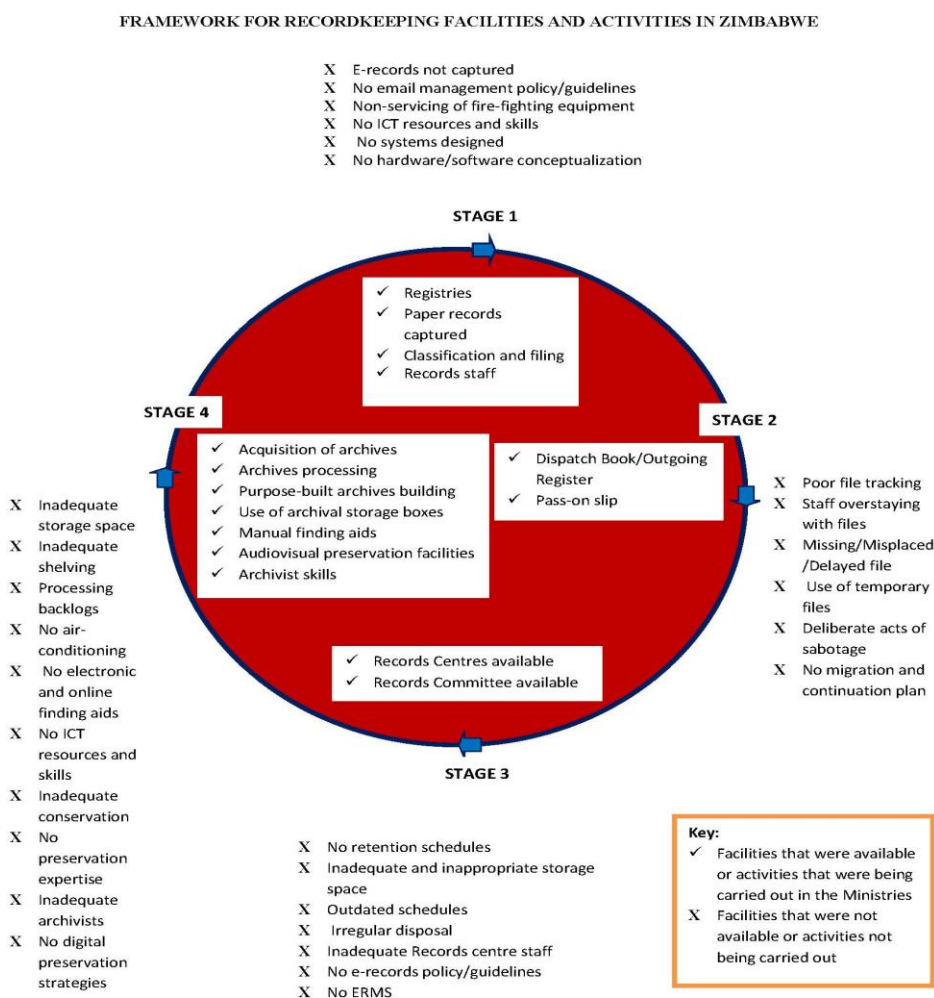


Figure 2: Framework for recordkeeping facilities and activities in Zimbabwe

As illustrated in Figure 2, the study concluded that the life-cycle management of records did not guarantee the full cycle management of records as there were gaps in between the cycle. It is on this basis that the study argues that the poor status of recordkeeping in Zimbabwe is not due to collapsing postcolonial systems, but mainly due to the absence of IT facilities and skills in the system.

Comparison of Zimbabwe with the experience of other African countries

In line with the objective of finding out if what was reported in other countries is applicable to Zimbabwe and the reasons for this situation, the study concluded that the situation in postcolonial Zimbabwe was different from the experiences of some of the African countries where recordkeeping systems collapsed soon after independence. This is because the manual recordkeeping systems in Zimbabwe did not collapse but survived and continued to operate in exactly the same manner as they operated before independence. The survival of colonial recordkeeping systems is attributed to the following reasons:

- Postcolonial Zimbabwe inherited strong recordkeeping systems, which had been well-established and were operating for more than four decades before independence.
- In terms of government administration in the area of records, the country witnessed a smooth transition at the time of independence. This is because there were already local clerks who were working in registries before independence. They continued working in the post-independence period and the active mentorship programme continued with no major disruption.
- Zimbabwe had a strong induction programme, emanating from the colonial period, which prepared registry staff to effectively operate the manual system. The programme actively continued operating in the period after independence allowing recordkeeping work to continue too.
- Immediately after independence, there was a deliberate government move to expand records management and ‘take the archives to the people’. This was a strategic move by the new government whose foresight helped to consolidate the foundation that had been laid in the colonial period.

Transition to independence

The situation explained above on Zimbabwe’s transition to independence provides a platform for comparison with other countries that had strong recordkeeping systems during the colonial era but which collapsed immediately after independence. For example, in Namibia, the desire to re-dress colonial imbalances of the apartheid system saw an immediate replacement of experienced staff with inexperienced ones, who then worked without the benefit of mentorship. This could explain the immediate collapse of recordkeeping systems in Namibia. This study therefore sees the issue of transition to independence as one of the deciding factors in the sustenance of recordkeeping systems in decolonised countries. The same logic could also apply to transitional processes from one government to another as well as in post-conflict scenarios. Such issues need to be taken into consideration when designing solutions to recordkeeping problems.

Manual recordkeeping systems

Much as the manual system survived in Zimbabwe, this became its main source of problems. Many of the problems identified in this study are attributed to the continued use of archaic manual systems and the grave absence of ICTs in the country’s recordkeeping systems. The existing manual system proved to be good but was overwhelmed by too many records generated due to the information revolution. The expansion of government after independence also meant that more records were generated and there were also more records users than before. With more records generated, their circulation also became cumbersome and difficult to control manually. At the same time, the manual system had not been upgraded to incorporate the new challenges of records created in electronic format. In this regard, the experience of Zimbabwe is

similar to that of many other African countries, which are also struggling to move away from manual systems to IT-based operations (Luyombya 2012; Nengomasha 2012; Ngulube 2010).

Neglect of e-records

The neglect of electronic records witnessed in Zimbabwe is prevalent in many other African countries (Luyombya 2012; Mutiti 2001; Nengomasha 2012; Ngulube 2010; Wamukoya and Mutula 2005). Electronic records are a new phenomenon in this technological era. They were not there during the colonial days when manual registry systems were set up making this a non-legacy issue but purely a failure by current African governments to tackle this new challenge. In Zimbabwe, the challenges with managing electronic records were not only about ICT resources but also IT skills. On top of this, lack of serious commitment by the government to embrace ICTs in the management of records and archives also played a big part. The economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe of the 2000s exacerbated a situation that was already a problem and cannot be cited as the sole reason for failure to introduce electronic records management systems. Computers were provided by the government to operate many government processes from the early 1990s but no thought was put on designing systems to manage the e-records generated by the same computers as propagated by the records continuum theory which advocates for pre-designing of systems for the management of e-records generated from IT-based information systems. It was evident in this study that no such pre-planning had been done in Zimbabwe since the introduction of computers in government.

Inadequate resources

The study further concluded that resources, facilities and tools for the management of records and archives in postcolonial Zimbabwe were inadequate; confirming a common problem in many decolonised countries (Okello-Obura 2012; Mazikana 2009; Wamukoya and Lowry 2013). The situation in Zimbabwe was exacerbated, particularly in recent years, by the current economic instability in the country; and under such situations of hunger, disease and a general fiscal deficit, recordkeeping tends to be neglected. The same situation was also experienced in Nigeria during the country's crisis years in the 1980s and 1990s (Abioye 2007); and in Uganda during the crisis of the dictatorship rule of Idi Amini (Luyombya and Sennabulya 2012). Unfortunately, for Zimbabwe, the economic down-turn threatens to destroy much of the strong foundations laid in the past including that which was strengthened in the postcolonial period.

Other than infrastructure, skills, and many other requirements, one of the functional requirements for the move to electronic records management systems is to have basic records management systems running in the manual system. On this aspect only, it could be said that Zimbabwe is e-ready because it has functional classification, indexing and filing systems that could be easily transformed to electronic systems. Comparatively, other African countries with collapsed manual systems may not be able to meet this single e-readiness requirement.

Traditional versus modern archival systems

The study also noted that while Zimbabwe inherited a strong recordkeeping legacy, it also took over a National Archives whose roots and glory were drawn mostly from archives management; particularly to preserve the history of the colonial settler community. The institution had been thriving for many years in the management of archives at the expense of current and semi-current records. The postcolonial government changed this focus, especially in 1986, with the promulgation of the National Archives Act, which added and defined more directly the records management role of NAZ. Consequently, NAZ's role was shifted from one dominated by

archival preservation to more participation in records management at the current and semi-current stages. However, the government failed to increase NAZ's capacity in order to match this increased undertaking.

Thus, even though legally NAZ's mandate was extended, technically it remained operating more as a 'keeper of archives', its original focus without fully playing its records management role. This half-baked solution in Zimbabwe resulted in the national archival institution of the country failing to perform to its full capacity in its records management role. Such a situation whereby the National Archives continues to play the traditional post-custodial role has also been reported in other African countries, even though some of them such as Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania did not have well-established National Archives in their countries before independence (Musembi 1988). However, Tanzania is on record for making efforts to redress this so that its National Archives now participates more in records management right from the creating stage and has introduced measures to ensure this (IRMT 2011a; Magaya and Lowry 2012). NAZ's capacity to fully participate in national records management programmes is very low and thus shares the same problem with other countries in Africa which are struggling to fully execute their records management roles.

Recommendations

Considering that, as found in this study, a framework for the management of records and archives already exists in the Public Service of Zimbabwe, the study proposes a model which includes strategies to strengthen the existing recordkeeping facilities; revamping of those activities that were not being done even though they could have been implemented under the current system; and introducing new recordkeeping approaches particularly on issues of ICTs, which have been distinctly absent in the recordkeeping systems of the Public Service of Zimbabwe. In a broad sense, the main problems identified in Zimbabwe border around lack of capacity, inadequate resources, poor implementation, inadequate legislation, absence of guidelines, misdirected training, low awareness and poor appreciation of record management. The proposed model also draws influence from the models and strategies suggested by IRMT (2011b), ICA (2008a, 2008b, 2013) and the World Bank (2000).

Addressing these issues would significantly close the gaps that presented problems to the life-cycle management of records in the Public Service of Zimbabwe. It should be noted that the situation in Zimbabwe, except in the area of ICTs, does not require only introduction of completely new concepts but rather re-vamping, modernising and increasing the capacity on already existing systems, which are seen as its strengths. This conviction forms the basis for the proposed model (Figure 3). The model also takes into consideration the issues captured in Figure 2, which illustrates some facilities and activities that were not available in the current records management system. The model illustrated in Figure 3 bears the following approaches as points of intervention.

1) Strengthening existing structures

The government of Zimbabwe should take advantage of the existing structures indicated as strengths in this study's SWOT analysis on Table 5. These are, for instance, the availability of functional registries and a good manual system; a pool of qualified records staff; the availability of records centres; the presence of a well-established National Archives. The proposed improvement strategies would include restructuring the registries from manual to computerised systems, improving the operations of the current records centres, and restructuring of NAZ. The current framework in place in Zimbabwe is in line with the records life-cycle model, and through these points of intervention, the country's recordkeeping systems can be strengthened.

2) Incorporating those aspects left out in the current system

This includes aspects that were overlooked in the current recordkeeping set-up and are identified as weaknesses in the SWOT analysis (Table 5). These are issues mainly to do with poor or non-implementation of processes, which could have been done under the current set-up but somehow were not even though they were not directly linked to resource challenges. These include participating actively in appraisal and disposal of records; review of retention schedules; operating a robust file tracking system; and servicing of fire equipment. This point of intervention addresses issues that are constituted in the ISO15489 standard for records management (ISO 2001) as the basic requirements for any records management programme. The other intervention points that address issues noted here relating to the management of archives are in line with the records life-cycle model.

However, as per proposed model, it is suggested that some of the challenges identified in this study be handled through special projects. These are, for instance, clearing the records appraisal and disposal backlogs at the registries and the records centres. This would clear up storage spaces and allow the disposal system to operate more actively. A special project is also required to finalise the drafting of retention and disposal schedules, which are the tools necessary for appraisal and disposal. Another proposed point of intervention is the clearing of the archives processing backlog. The study proved that the current backlog cannot be cleared in many years to come even if all staff were present. Special intervention is also necessary to convert the current manual finding aids at NAZ to computerised archival systems. The purchase and installation of the air-conditioning system is also another project which needs urgent and special attention. Therefore, sorting out all the damage that has occurred to the recordkeeping system would certainly bring Zimbabwe's records and archives management to a level where it can perform better.

3) Introducing new aspects of ICTs

This strategy involves introducing new aspects, particularly the ICT issues, which were completely absent and not part of the current manual system. These were also identified as part of the opportunities and threats in the SWOT analysis. For example, the opportunities brought in by ICTs and the challenges of preserving such formats as well as guaranteeing continued access to them. Thus, the government of Zimbabwe and NAZ can take advantage of the opportunities brought in by the ICT revolution to improve on recordkeeping. Introducing ICTs to the country's records management system is critical because many of the problems identified in this study are due to the continued use of a manual system and an acute absence of ICTs. With this, the country can create a platform to meet the requirements of both the records life-cycle and continuum models. This point of intervention addresses issues to do with the records continuum model.

Taking such a strategy as indicated in points 1-3 above would close the gaps identified in this study. It would bring a more complete life-cycle management of records as well as an integrated approach in compliance with the records continuum model. The introduction of ICTs would also pave way for the government to satisfy the requirements of Open Access and Freedom of Information drives, which are being advocated for today. Open Access and Freedom of Information facilitate citizens' rights to information but this can only be accomplished if related records are properly managed. When records are properly managed and easily accessible beyond the borders of manual systems, they tend to open avenues for citizens to access information and services. Furthermore, the proposed special projects to clear backlogs would clear the way for a smooth operation of any improvements in the recordkeeping systems.



Figure 3: Proposed model to strengthen recordkeeping in the Public Service of Zimbabwe

Conclusion

The study concluded that in the case of Zimbabwe, the problems were mainly attributed to the continued use of archaic recordkeeping systems and not necessarily collapsing systems. Thus, the colonial-postcolonial dimension which seemed prominent in other African countries cannot, in the Zimbabwean context carry the same demarcation of postcolonial collapsing recordkeeping systems. While the systems from colonial times in Zimbabwe were good and still operate today, they have been overtaken by technology. In addition, poor implementation of the records disposal system led to a breakdown in the flow of the records life-cycle.

Other challenges found in the Zimbabwean system are non-legacy issues but purely postcolonial ones; particularly the failure to embrace ICTs; a new development of the postcolonial era in most African countries. The study therefore singled out the acute absence of ICT resources and skills in the recordkeeping systems of the Public Service of Zimbabwe as one of the main contributory factors to poor performance in the country's records and archives management. However, the study cautioned that the issue of ICTs should not just be seen as a resources or skills challenge issue but also an overall government policy direction issue. Issues of mind-set change; poor government commitment; and low awareness and appreciation of the whole spectrum of technology in today's information sector contribute also to the current state of affairs in Zimbabwe. Thus the approach taken in addressing these challenges involves a cocktail of interventions that recognise the strengths of the current system inherited from the colonial past and strengthened in the postcolonial period, and the opportunities at hand, as well as the clearing of huddles that have been blocking the movement of records in the various stages of the records life-cycle.

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