ESARBICA JOURNAL

JOURNAL OF THE EASTERN

AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

REGIONAL BRANCH OF THE

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON

ARCHIVES

Volume 36

2017

ESTABLISHING A LASTING SOLUTION TO COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT POLICY: CHALLENGES FOR AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVES TO ENHANCE ACCESS IN ZIMBABWE

Felizarda Mudzaki

National Archives of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe

fkutsakatika@archives.gov.zw; felimudzaki@gmail.com

Abstract

Providing the best blend of national audiovisual archiving resources representative of the national film and sound archival collection is a challenging professional obligation in drafting collection development policies for audiovisual archivists in developing countries. Being tasked to develop a collection policy means to describe the scope, nature of collection, delineate priorities, give guidelines which encourages consistency. This article is driven by practical experiences the author faced in developing the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), Audiovisual Unit Collection development policy. The author believes NAZ experience would benefit other East and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council (ESARBICA) members if they follow the same steps in developing their audiovisual collections. Taking into account the scarce financial resources that most archival institutions in the ESARBICA operate under, there is a need for ways of reaching out to the nation and professional stakeholders to obtain views and ideas in policy formulation. This will enable archivists to make informed decisions and timely resource selection decisions based on carefully prepared up to date collection development policy. One would not want a situation whereby footage matures / appreciates to be archival yet was omitted in the policy and risk being blamed by future generations. The article sought to establish the dilemmas faced by film and sound archivists in developing collection policies. It provides insights on the dilemma faced in order to create a collection policy. The collection policy should be representative of the nation, without bias or prejudice, and present the peculiar circumstances and background of collection acquisition in audiovisual archives. This article pointed out problems relating to document and content selection, problems associated with microforms, media obsolescence, formats, make, use of terms, vendor controlled order plans and journal subscriptions. The article concluded by highlighting possible steps and recommendations that can be used in developing comprehensive collection policies.

Keywords: Access, Collection Development Policy, Audiovisual Archives, Audiovisual Archival Administration, National Archives of Zimbabwe

Introduction

The development, organization, availability, access and preservation of archival collections greatly depend on well-crafted and researched collection development policy. Ngulube (2012: 101) expressed that collection development policy is one of the most "significant processes in the

94

effective performance" of any information system, and the archivist's "most important and intellectually demanding task". Yet, it is one of the tasks neglected in archival theory and practice in sub Saharan Africa. Collection management seems to be random, fragmented, uncoordinated and even accidental as described by (Ham 1975: 6).There is a lack of imaginative acquisition guidelines or comprehensive collecting strategies (Ham 1975: 6). However, the task to coordinate the development of national archives collection development policy is a very contentious subject and challenging task in archival administration on the ground that is not a neglected issue but have obstacles hindering the process (Ham 1975: 6).

The need for collection development policies in an archive is underscored in Section III of the American Society of Archivists' Code of Ethics for Archivists (Ngulube 2012: 103). Collection development policies should be formulated or evaluated in cases where they do exist in order to create some order out of chaos. The adoption and utilization of collection development policies is not yet completely rooted in the archival practices of many archivists (Ngulube 2012:104). At the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), collection management relies on National Archives of Zimbabwe Act Chapter 25:06 of 1986, individual archivists' knowledge of their own past decisions, past accessions, oral tradition regarding the institution's past actions as well as guiding principles and draft working policy document. Notwithstanding the very importance of a written policy, this article presents peculiar circumstances and background of collection acquisition of audiovisual archives in Zimbabwe. It highlights the dilemma faced in order to create a collection policy that is representative of the nation without bias or prejudice. The article brings out obstacles to policy drafting in audiovisual archival administration.

Background information

The National Archives of Zimbabwe Audiovisual Unit (NAZ-AVU) was established in 1988. It is responsible for the acquisition, processing accessioning and permanent preservation of all the audio visual archives which symbolizes and expresses the cultural significance and distinct character of sound and image heritage, in a Zimbabwean perspective. The unit has a collection of over 15 000 materials including films, videos, audio tape cassettes, CDs, gramophone records and slides, on or about Zimbabwe. These productions comprise of moving images and/or recorded sound created or released within Zimbabwe, or by Zimbabweans, or with relevance to Zimbabwe, whether or not primarily released for public release.

Zimbabwe as a nation has passed through various historical stages. There has been growth in the film and sound industry with countless films and documentaries being produced on and about Zimbabwe by different people, expressing different aspects. Technological advances and globalization have made it easy to produce and publish moving images for broadcast, to share on YouTube, WhatsApp, for theatre, and documentaries, etc. There are many good quality informative moving images which tell a story and or have more developed storylines.

Traditionally, the earliest archival collection development policies were written knowing that quality records were scarce and competition fierce (Ericson 1991-1992). Policies were written with a "presumption of competition;" in other words, archivists were well aware that unique and influential collections were very limited and in order to get the best collections and make a name for their archive, they would have to be strong competitors (Ericson 1991-1992). Therefore, archives would amass as many of these influential collections as possible without regard to the archival profession as a whole, in order to bring prestige to the individual repository (Wink 2010: 56).

Because of advances in technology, the number of collections available to archives increased, while the uniqueness of these collections decreased (Ericson 1991; Cox 2002). It also became apparent to leading archivists that the collect-it-all mentality would waste resources and was generally harmful to the profession (Endelman 1987: 340). Because of the nature of collection before the information age, archivists would accept collections without first appraising their future informative or historical value.

There is a dilemma of the urgent need to address what exactly should be accepted into national archives that have value for today and tomorrow, whilst leaving out less valuable material that might never be referred to or requested. Technological advances have led to the creation of huge and more volatile audiovisual archives than those of the past. For example, data saved on media such as CDs if ignored long enough might be inaccessible because the technology used to create it is no longer available. It is no longer possible to place these collections on a shelf and forget about them for many years. The technology to read some of the items contained in the collections changes or degrades so quickly that the collections need to be addressed at the time of accessioning or very shortly thereafter. The needs of these new record and collection types' means that archivists need to

make appraisal decisions much earlier than they traditionally have (Cox 2002). The trend toward overzealous collection results in large backlogs of unprocessed and inaccessible collections of potentially useless materials which take up valuable space and money and is very dangerous. This means thinking proactively rather than reactively and making decisions about what will be accepted into an archive long before the items come into the repository through donors or private collectors (Cox 2002).

Ideologies that shaped the growth of film archives in Zimbabwe

The bulk of the films in the holdings are from the Central African Film Unit (CAFU), a government sponsored institution which operated between 1948 and 1963 during the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (modern day Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi). Apart from CAFU, there are also films produced by British Gaumont, Pathe, international television news, Rhodesia information services and Zimbabwe information service. These are mainly newsreels, instructional films, travel films, interviews, political broadcasts and documentaries.

The British government established the Colonial Film Unit in 1939, as part of a propaganda initiative directed to colonies. The unit was directed by the Ministry of Information. Its purpose was to explain the Second World War to British subjects in the colonies and enlist their support. England's ruling elite had great faith in the power of cinema as an instrument for persuasion when communicating with the masses (Smyth 1988: 8).

The Central African Film Unit (CAFU) covered Southern and Northern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe and Zambia respectively) and Nyasaland (now Malawi) (Smyth 1988: 8). However, after the phasing out of the British government subsidy, there was a shift in priority to making films that promoted the federation overseas and encouraged white immigration (Nell 1988: 10). The federation was a fragile coalition of white interests in the three territories and its legitimacy was undermined by African resistance. These political imperatives compelled the government to spend more on promoting the federation (Hungwe 2005: 3).

Film making for African audiences was informed by a number of assumptions about the audiences. The primary goal of the colonial government was to maintain white standards and privileges, while promoting limited African development to civilize the Africans (Hungwe 2005: 4). Educational films

97

for Africans were presented in an entertaining way, with strong moral messages. Films were to inculcate in the audiences the value and necessity for hard work, and doing things for themselves without payment instead of doing them only if the Government is willing to pay for them (Izod 1950: 12). These values were intended to benefit white controlled capitalist enterprise, in an environment where economic relations were unequal and forced labor (*chibharo*), was a reality for Africans.

Agricultural films were meant to promote good farming methods and prosperity, even though government land tenure and agricultural production policies discriminated against Africans. Other films promoted initiative and community development using heroic figures from the community, for example, *The Wives of Nendi* is a film about Chief Mangwende's wife who was the moving force behind the development of women's club (Hungwe 2001: 5). Some colonial films under-rated their audience, for example, in the popular mobile film *Tiki*, demonstrated a number of barbaric acts committed by the black African comedian.

Propaganda war films directed to African audiences sought to undermine the support of rural communities for the guerrilla armies that were challenging white rule. The goal was to use the excellent medium of film to broadcast propaganda in order to win the hearts and minds of the people (Hungwe 2005: 5). Mobile film units were deployed to show terror films in the war zones, in order to undermine the rural support for guerrilla armies through terror tactics. In 1980, just before independence, the Rhodesia government destroyed some of the film stock used during the propaganda offensive (Hungwe 2005: 5).

After independence, donor funded films like *Neria, Flame, More Time, Everyone's Child* and *Keep on Knocking* became popular. The narratives for these films were in line with emergent donor priorities for a rights-based approach to development (Hungwe 2005: 5). The politics of that agenda have evolved over that time. Changes in narrative have therefore occurred over time, reflecting changing interests and relations and shifting geopolitical interests. On music, there is a wide collection of all gramophone discs aired in Zimbabwe since independence. However, the music industry has grown so rapidly that there are many genres, of which some are advanced and complete versions of previously collected material.

Today, there has been tremendous growth in the film and sound industry. With the growth in the film and sound industry, there are huge collections of film and sound media which are available in the streets. These are so plentiful that following the idea of collecting everything is the most dangerous and unworkable solution to collection development. At the same time, some of the material that was once acquired may actually find no reason for preservation at NAZ because some complete, or better, copies of almost the same product are available in the streets. This calls for collection development policy which provides for selection and deselecting principles, in order to remove from the collection material which is no longer needed.

The dilemma now for archivists will be to justify the reason for existence of certain copies of material in the archive and justify the reasons for weeding out certain material from their current collection which may seem less important in analysis for collection development policy. Improved quality and more complete interesting storylines are now available, yet capacity is not increasing. This makes it difficult to reduce scope of collection policy whilst creating a representative collection with available resources, so as not to omit material that may mature in the near future as well as preserving the nation's audiovisual history.

The importance of collection development policy
One of the main goals of collection development policies (CDP) in archives is to focus a repository's acquisitions. It enables collecting on a limited scope rather than a broad "collect as much as possible" mentality (Wink 2010: 56). It gives archivists distinct, unique collecting goals as well as focusing on collaboration with nearby institutions. Collaboration limits the amount of duplication between archives and stretches the already strained resources further by having one repository sharing its collections with others and vice versa. In other words, collection development policies define the mission and scope of the collections and they also assist archivists in setting priorities for preservation and resource allocation. It provides guidelines for making decisions and their implementation.

CDP limits competition among archives and encourages cooperation and collaboration. This is accomplished through clearly defined collections for each archive. It furthermore, creates a web of knowledge about each archives' collection priorities (Phillips 1984; Reed-Scott 1984). Written, accessible collection development policies gives archivists knowledge about what other archives are

99

collecting. This gives archivists the ability to suggest donors take collections elsewhere if they do not fit into their repository. The fear of record destruction by donors because they cannot find a repository to take them is then reduced (Ericson 1991: 66).

Marshall (2002: 235) alluded that CDP give archivists a polite excuse for not accepting out of scope donations, or those that do not fit in the aims of the archives. It creates avenues for de-accessing and reappraisal of items that no longer fit into the scope of the archive and provides a systematic way for archivists to make decisions about potential collections. This helps to ensure that records with evidential and informational value which are out of scope topically or geographically end up in more appropriate repositories.

According to Ngulube (2012), written collection development policies are a vital tool that archivists may use to build sustainable holdings. Considering exponential growth in information and rapid technological changes in today's information age, user needs and information seeking behavior are also changing. The policies that are developed for an archival collection need to be reviewed over time to cater for the ever changing information environment and should also include procedures for monitoring and revising them in accordance with documented collection development policies. The presence of CDP enables acquiring collections at the same time, capacity and resources to catalogue without causing backlogs, thus saving time, space and money.

Problems faced by film and sound archivists in developing collection policies

Film and sound archivist are faced with challenges in order to come up with a collection development policy for their institutional repositories. Generally, every archivist has their paradigm and what they perceive as natural heritage which is determined by their perceived philosophical orientation. This is affected by one's exposure and is very much subject to bias. Objectivity is thus a matter of who is judging. It is therefore a challenging task to represent a whole nation without bias, or prejudice, as one's knowledge level plays key role in determining their views. At the same time, no individual knows everything that is why it is important to have a committee that come up with a collection development policy that is drawn from a wide array of audience that is at least a representative proportion.

The type of archive determines and defines the scope and limitation of the collection. The category of the archives also influences the methods of building the collection and its ownership. Usually the functions and the scope of collection development are mainly dictated by the law. For National Archives of Zimbabwe, NAZ Act of 1986 governs what should be kept at the archives. However, everything that is of historical or national significance is worthy of permanent preservation. The challenge comes on determining or attaching the value or significance to various media that is growing by the day. National and historical significance depends on who is attaching it and their background and exposure have an effect of bias.

One other challenge faced by archivist in developing a CDP is the absence of interested individuals to partake in the exercise due to lack of incentives, or probably as a result of a tight schedule. During formulation of NAZ's audiovisual archives CDP, it was observed that a lot of people are very busy with a number of issues that is enticing their education with work and other commitments. However, drawing interest to contribute to CDP is a challenge because usually due to financial challenges there are no incentives to take one's time into the project. As a result some important people who can contribute valuably will not have the time and commitment to contribute to the quality of the document.

Financial challenges are a major setback in CDP for AV archives in developing countries. Usually the meager financial resources for archives are quickly consumed in major pressing tasks. These include preservation of existing collections such that there is always a budget deficit to spare little on new projects. However financial investment determines quality of product. With financial constraints workshops and research consulting work requiring money maybe brushed aside, yet it is key in collection management and thus negatively affects the end product. It is important to gather key representative stakeholders together who can share ideas in a refreshing and conducive environment but, these costs substantially.

It is unethical to deliberately omit preserving important heritage. Policy development is also challenged by media choice and institutional capacity. Some material are deliberately left out because of the challenges they present for example some are obsolete, some are very volatile, others are highly unstable and for others there is no equipment for play back of the material. Therefore, because of ethical obligations, AV archivists tend to take those that they can preserve thereby

101

resulting in ethical conflict. The changes in films and sound industry in the digital age now makes identification of good films very difficult. According to Cox, prior to the digital and information age, a good collection was easier for archivists to identify (Cox 2002).

Archivists are also faced with uncertainty due to changing roles in the technological world that results in identity crisis. They are fearful of competition of being wiped out and being rendered useless in the future. They try to balance and fix in everything in policy in order to try to gain relevance and importance because of competition with other institutions as well as digital repositories in the virtual community such as YouTube where you find a very good number of videos widely and easily accessible by all freely. It is difficult to determine whether to keep such videos and preserve them in case they are removed or its wasted duplication of effort.

It is also a dilemma to voice concern on collaboration in developing collection development policies for national archives because usually institutions that are stakeholders are usually on different platforms or levels in terms of governance and mandate. Some are Non Government Organizations, parastatals, private creators and individuals. All these may have different mandates from the institutional repository and it is difficult to include them in the policy as collaborating partners.

Considering the amount of time and research required in collection development, in most cases, when the time is available then resources are not there. When resources are availed there is little time given to submit the final draft document. This places pressure on archivists to produce something meaningful yet, there will be little time to consult more sources and collaborate.

Archivists are actually interested in serendipitously collecting (idea of accepting collections as they come rather than actively pursuing collections of interest). This type of collecting according to Marshall (2002) has created successful interesting strong social action collections at State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Narrow collection development policies limit the collection without thoughtful appraisal of the information contained in the audiovisual media. Formal collection policies actually harm the chances of interesting new collections created serendipitously. This should, however, be acceptable as archivists are not certain of the future. They are scared of leaving out material that may mature in the future to be of high value and requested, yet it was omitted in the collection development policy, thus risking societal blame.

At the same time archivists are overwhelmed with other pressing professional concerns like digital preservation of media as well as the changing role of archivists. They are, therefore, unable and unwilling to shift focus creating collection development policies which take time and effort. They are already overwhelmed with adjusting to the changing face of the profession and types of material coming to the archives. At the same time they are hand tied on other archival duties like access provision and preservation.

Categorizing and determining priorities is another challenge in policy making taking into consideration the broad and diverse nature of the field. It is very difficult to ascertain the present strength and qualify the current collection as this is dependent on cataloguing terms usually used by a different person altogether. Challenges come with geographical representation, language and cultural barriers, which are dependent on the archivists' level of exposure. However, the oral history unit at the archives tries hard to bridge this gap, despite financial and capacity constraints/ limitations.

De-accessioning practices in an archival context are a contested terrain. The implications of de-accessioning are more complex and far reaching, than determining what is to be retained in an archival collection. De-accessioning is a vexed and contentious issue (Ngulube 2012: 105). Reappraisal and de-accessioning of archival records is an inappropriate tool for collection management. Even though de-accessioning improperly accessioned records would save space, material, energy and personnel costs. Whilst at the same time reappraisal of records is an open admission that appraisal methodologies and standards keep on evolving (Ngulube 2012: 104).

Possible solutions / ways of bridging the gaps

According to Hyry (2002: 56), it takes a great deal of time, research and cooperation to determine what is important or necessary to collect. Archivists should however not be pressured to achieve or rush to produce a misinformed document. They need to take their time to research and pass through all the stages in the collection development policy drafting. Recommendations and stages to follow depend on the type of archive.

103

There is interplay of three concepts which are collection management, collection development policy and collection analysis in archives management (Endelman.1987: 34). According to Scott (1984.23), Collection analysis is a very important first step in the creation of a collection development policy and an important part of collection management. Collection analysis is the process by which archivists look closely at their collections to determine the subject content and scope of their holdings (Endleman 1987: 340). Collection management is the systematic planned documented process of building, maintaining and preserving collections (Scott 1984: 23). Collection development policy is however an important part of collection management. It is therefore important for professionals not to treat any of the three in isolation. Failure in collection analysis leads to a poor collection development policy and this results in overall mismanagement of the collection. Therefore, if institutions are committed to collection management they should seriously consider collection development policy and sacrifice necessary resources towards the development of comprehensive and representative collection policies. Reed Scott (1984), Endleman (1987) and Sauer (2001) state that collection development policy is the most important step of larger collecting goals in archives.

Archival competition is the worst enemy of archival development and progress. Archivists need to be aware of collecting goals of their competitor institutions. By so doing they can potentially send depositing donors to other archives if the collection does not fit into the scope of their archives (Sauer 2001). Collaboration is the best solution where there is conflict of interest as is the case of audiovisual archiving. One on one meeting with competing archives is also a solution. Boles (1994) illustrate how collaboration between two rival archives solved the issue of accessing Kluklax Wang materials. Rival institutions, Clarke Historic Society at Central Michigan University and Bentely Library met face to face and compared their Collection development policies and determined where the collection best fits and this was the Clarke Historic Society.

Collection development policy should be used to narrow the focus for future collection development. However, archivists tend to develop policies in order to legitimize and justify existing collections (Ericson 1991: 66). Archivists should desist from the idea of using collection development policy to support collection decisions of the past as this undermines the goals of putting the policy in place. This undermines objectively developing a useful policy.

Collection development policy should be drafted using unambiguous terms and narrowly reduce their focus so as to justify and direct the archivist's action. For example, Ericson (1991: 67) gave an example of "commitment to documenting the lives of ordinary people" and said such phrases do not define directions for collection goals and are unnecessarily broad. The policy should be clear on the geographic areas covered, period, subject, format and language. Unwanted material should be highlighted, for example those that are in poor condition, those with restrictions on use, or those that are in poor conditions.

Since collection development policy is a very vital component of collection management, even though resources and support could be limited, audiovisual archivists should work hard and advocate for investment into its development. With financial challenges, they can use e-mail, Skype, video conferencing and other modern technology to bridge geographical barriers and reach out to various stakeholders. Despite the busy world, they should be patient and persistently draw interest and lobby professionals to get their valuable views to develop comprehensive and informed collection development policies.

Wink (2010: 66) recommended collaboration with other institutions in the field so as to acquire from them as well as empower them with preservation skills. This allows for materials that are not acquired can be easily retrieved and referred to when needed in the future. The Broadcasting Services Act Chapter 41b of 2001 entails that all broadcast material be deposited with the archives. However, this is impossible because some of the broadcast footage fall outside the scope of the NAZ. Collaboration is the only solution for preservation of audiovisual media. It is important to equip all stakeholders with skills to adhere to archival standards on creation and preservation so that material is not lost.

Audiovisual institutions can collaborate and complement each other in filling information gaps. For example, the Mafela Trust may come in with their rich Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) story, Zimbabwe Music Rights Association may focus on music productions, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings and other production houses like Star FM and Zi FM can concentrate on broadcast media, The Jesuits Archives with Catholic history and film schools and filmmakers may concentrate effort and resources on a narrow well maintained and preserved scope. This may improve on quality of materials preserved rather than spread wings in developing collections, and

this should be included in the policy. This also reduces competition rather than having the same footage kept by two different producers. Collection development policy should also have provisions for leasing collections (physical or surrogates) to consortia institutions (Cox 2002: 287) to enable working together for development.

Conclusion

Collection development policy is very important in the management of audiovisual archives. Despite there being collections that accumulated with no policy guidance it remains vital to develop policies that shapes the current and future acquisitions and guides archival decisions. Having considered the various challenges highlighted in this article, it is essential to patiently and vividly work towards collection development policies for guidance and direction in the profession.

REFERENCES

Cox, R. 2002. The end to collecting: towards a new purpose for archival appraisal. *Archival Science* 2(3): 287-309.

Endelman, J. 1987. Looking backward to plan for the future: collection analysis for manuscript repositories. *The American Archivist* 50(Summer): 340-355.

Ericson, T. 1991. At the "rim of creative dissatisfaction": archivists and acquisition development. *Archivaria* 33(Winter): 66-77.

Hungwe, K. 2005. Fifty years of film making in Zimbabwe. Michigan Technological University; Department of Education. [Online] Available WWW: htt./www.archive.kubatana.net/html/archive/agric/051112zol.asp?sector (Accessed 10 November 2016).

Hungwe, K. 1991. Southern Rhodesia propaganda and education films for peasant farmers, 1948-1955. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 11(3): 229-235.

Izod, A. 1950. *The film in native development: transcript of radio talk, 1950*. National Archives of Zimbabwe: Harare.

Marshall, J. 2002. Toward common content: an analysis of online college and university collecting policies. *The American Archivist* 65(Fall):231-256.

Ngulube. P. 2012. Collection development at the National Archives of Zimbabwe: Achilles heel, in *National archives 75@30 75 years of archiving excellence at National Archives of Zimbabwe*, edited by P. Ngulube. National Archives of Zimbabwe: Harare: 101-111

Phillips, F. 1984. Developing collecting policies for manuscript collections. *The American Archivist* 47(1): 30-42.

Sauer, C. 2001. Doing the best we can? The use of collection development policies and cooperative collecting activities at manuscript repositories. *The American Archivist* 64(Fall/Winter): 308-349.

Scott, J. 1984. Collection management strategies for archivists: *The American Archivist* 47(Winter): 23-29.

Smyth, R. 1988. The British colonial Film Unit and Sub-Saharan Africa, 1939-1945. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 8(3): 15-24.

Weideman, C. 2002. "Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't": assessing the value of faculty papers and defining a collecting policy. *The American Archivist* 65(Spring): 56-69.

Wink, T. 2010. Archival collection development policies: a study of their content and collaborative aims. MIS Thesis. University of North Carolina: Chapel Hill.