

**AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVING IN THE THIRD WORLD – PROBLEMS AND
PERSPECTIVES: AN ANALYSIS OF AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVING IN THE EAST
AND SOUTHERN AFRICAN REGIONAL BRANCH OF THE INTERNATIONAL
COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES (ESARBICA) REGION**

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Abstract

In comparison, audiovisual archives are much more difficult to manage than paper documents due to their technical nature. Most institutions in the ESARBICA region are still struggling to put up basic operating structures for audiovisual archiving due to lack of resources, basic infrastructure and inadequate technical skills required to effectively manage audiovisual archiving activities. The paper will look at the current position of audiovisual archiving at national archival institutions in the ESARBICA region, highlights problems being faced and bring out the challenges that are ahead as well as suggests practical starting points for the region.

Introduction

Archival activities at national level have been in operation for a fairly long period for most countries in the ESARBICA region. Some national archival institutions in the region were established as far back as 1935 (Zimbabwe), 1947 (Malawi and Zambia as regional branches of the Central African Archives), 1954 (Zanzibar), 1958 (Lesotho), 1963 (Mozambique), 1965 (Kenya), 1967 (Botswana), and 1971 (Swaziland). The major focus for all these years has been on archiving of paper documents. Faced with the usual financial and human inadequacies, these archival institutions have been struggling to define proper archival acquisition methodologies, preservation, cataloguing and/or descriptive procedures for their institutions in line with international standards and archival ethics. However, generally, most of these institutions are now on a better standing as far as archiving of paper documents is concerned, save for operational problems due to inadequate facilities and resources. Lekaukau (1989) acknowledged the growth and establishment of most institutions in the region and how active ESARBICA has been regarding archives management in the region.

However, the situation is different with audiovisual archiving, which still has a long way to go for it to be properly defined and clearly spelt out for operations to take recognizable shape. It is only in recent years that most of the archival institutions in the region are beginning to think more seriously about audiovisual archives. Many institutions, and indeed the whole world, are increasingly appreciating that vital information is also found in the audiovisual media not just paper documents, and there is more awareness of the need to preserve this media of information. This is also a reaction to the fast growing filmmaking and sound industries as well as an increase in the use of the electronic media. Archives, of late have been encouraged to play their role in ensuring that all these new forms of information are captured and preserved.

However, most archival institutions in the ESARBICA region are still struggling to develop their audiovisual collections. It must be appreciated that audiovisual materials are much more complex and expensive to handle, preserve and provide access to in comparison to paper archives. More technical skills and equipment are required in audiovisual archiving, and this does not bring good news to the overstretched budgets of many Third World countries. However, the question is what has ESARBICA done regarding taking steps in audiovisual archiving in the region and how far has this topic been discussed at its various meetings?

Nature/operation parameters

The institutions under review (in the ESARBICA region) are national collecting institutions with the mandate to preserve archival documentation, regardless of format or media, and that includes audiovisual archives. However, no country in the region has legislation specifically for audiovisual material. In fact, many countries in the world have no legal deposit provision for audiovisual materials, although a trend towards this is now clear, encouraged by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) policy stances and protocols adopted by the European Community. Mandatory deposit systems for audiovisual material now operate in twenty-one countries (including China, France, USA and Russia) (Evans 2002). An analysis of the mission statements of some of the countries in the region shows that there is a general acknowledgement of the need to preserve archives in any media or format:

- The Botswana National Archives and Records Services “*collects, preserves and makes available for public inspection the nation’s documentary heritage (archival)*”.
- The Kenya National Archives’ mission is to “*preserve valuable public records as part of the information resources of the Republic of Kenya and to make them accessible to present and future generations*”.
- The Namibia National Archives “*collects, preserves, and gives access to records of national importance in all media*”.
- Seychelles National Archives “*acquires and preserves archival resources to make them available for research purposes*”.
- The South African National Film, Video and Sound Archives is *responsible for collecting, preserving and making available audiovisual materials made in or about South Africa*.
- The Swaziland National Archives aims “*to foster national identity and protection of rights by preserving a national archival heritage for use by the Government and people of Swaziland and promote efficient, accountable and transparent Government*”.
- The Zambia National Archives aims “*to collect and preserve records; to provide research services to the public and all stakeholders*”.
- The Zanzibar National Archives aims to “*provide service for efficient management of Government records of whatever format and preserve them for posterity*”.
- The Zimbabwe National Archives aims to “*acquire, preserve and provide access to documentation, in whatever format, which comprises a legal and historical record of Zimbabwe’s past and present*”.

Acquisition and collection size

As mentioned before, the focus of collection management in many of the archival institutions has been on paper documentation. However, over the years the institutions found themselves, not by deliberate policy, with a growing collection of audiovisual materials, starting with a very insignificant collection which grew significantly over the years to levels that required some attention. In most cases these audiovisual materials found their way to the Archives through donation or someone deciding to “dump” them at the Archives after facing space problems.

The situation at the Zimbabwe National Archives is that, while the Archives was opened in 1935; the Audio Visual Unit was only established in 1988. Before this, the few audiovisual materials were kept as part of the Library Section of the National Archives. These were “dumped” in a room with no temperature and humidity control required of films and other audiovisuals objects, and were catalogued second class to traditional library material. By 1987, the collection had grown significantly prompting management to start thinking seriously about opening a separate audiovisual unit. When the new large Records Centre building was opened in 1988, space was reserved for housing the audiovisual collection, and this included converting some of the rooms to cold rooms for the storage of film. Plans were also put to acquire equipment such as editing tables, telecine machine, splicing machines, projectors, television, sound equipment and film-cleaning. The Unit also worked to acquire the bulk of the film collection (about 2500 catalogued and a few thousand unprocessed, mostly negatives) that it boasts of today from the Ministry of Information dating back to the 1940s. The Unit’s next biggest collection is the gramophone records (10200) from the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation. It also has a significant number of videos (+250 VHS and Umatic), 1045 slides, +600 audiocassette tapes (music and oral history interviews), 386 reel-to-reel tapes, and 7 CD-ROMs. At present there is no legislation covering audiovisual material. The National Archives is however working towards some co-operation with the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation regarding preservation of television and radio programmes, and an agreement between the two institutions is underway.

South Africa’s National Film, Video and Sound Archives in Pretoria is another well-established audiovisual archive in the region. The audiovisual archive is separate from the main paper documentation archive, with this one being specifically for audiovisuals. Some of the material is obtained from originating offices which fall under the Archives Act. Donations of private productions may be accepted if they supplement official sources. While no legal deposit provision applies regarding audiovisual material, the Archives has been successful in arranging contracts with many producers.

Namibia’s National Archives also has a substantial amount of audiovisuals with the bulk of them being from the national broadcasting institution (Namibia Broadcasting Corporation, formerly South West Africa Broadcasting Corporation). Some of them are by private donation. The collection has 700 films, 250 videos, 1000 audiotape cassettes and over 100 slides.

Zanzibar’s National Archives has not started collecting audiovisual material but has a

small collection of videos and audiocassettes which are mainly from a few government institutions. The Archives, however, works closely with both Television and Radio Zanzibar regarding preservation of their productions resulting in the opening of a Sound Archives Unit in the main library of Radio Zanzibar in 1989.

Zambia National Archives' collection of films (+ 200), 2500 microfilms, 200 microfiche, 25 video and + 200 audiotapes was mostly acquired through legal deposit. Some of the collection is from recordings from the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation and the Zambia Information Services.

Swaziland and Seychelles each have very small collections which found their way into the Archives by donation with very few having been acquired by direct purchase.

Kenya National Documentation Services has a separate unit for audiovisual archives. The collection is mainly from Government institutions which is covered by Chapter 19 of the Laws of Kenya, which makes it mandatory, to receive all publications from Government institutions, including audiovisual material.

Botswana has an audiovisual section under the Archives Administration Division. It does not have a defined acquisition policy, but recently entered into an agreement with the Botswana Television Station (BTV) regarding acquisition of programmes of historical value. Some of the material in the collection at the moment is from Radio Botswana and collaboration with film producers has been done regarding depositing copies of their productions with the National Archives. Part of the material is from the Oral History programme carried out by the institution. Copyright requirements are adhered to. The collection holds more than 400 titles.

Malawi has a big collection of audiovisual materials with about 4000 films, 1000 videos, 7000 audio tape cassettes, 120 vinyl, 20 CDs and about 5000 reel-to-reel tapes. However, the institution suffers from lack of expertise to handle this huge collection.

Tanzania National Archives does not hold any audiovisual archives because the responsibility to collect and preserve audiovisual materials is with the Audio-Visual Institute of Tanzania, which is now known as Tanzania Television (TVT).

Storage conditions

The majority of the audiovisual materials found in the institutions under review are kept under very inadequate conditions, which at most are just air-conditioned rooms. Most institutions lack the resources and skills required for managing audiovisual materials. It is very important to maintain proper storage conditions in order to ensure long-term preservation of audiovisual materials. Archives are there to be preserved for long-term periods, and if possible the aim should be for permanent preservation. As mentioned before, preservation of audiovisual is much more complex and technical than preservation of paper documents. The majority of the materials under review are collections which have accumulated over the years. The institutions suddenly found themselves with audiovisual materials without proper prior planning on how to handle the collection. Furthermore most of the Archivists

responsible for the audiovisual collections in these institutions lack the necessary technical know-how of handling and storage of archives in those media. Films and tapes, for instance need to be kept in conditions with temperature and humidity control, dust free environments and require periodic re-winding to keep them flexible, and avoid magnetic print-through. Film reels can deteriorate due to 'vinegar syndrome' which needs regular testing to detect, and is a major problem in tropical countries. Many of the institutions also keep videocassettes in VHS format even though it is not designed for long-term preservation and may have a short life. They keep them because they do not have or cannot afford better options such as Beta or digital technology.

Access and use

Access to audiovisuals collections at the institutions under review varies. In some cases access is not given to the collection because the institutions do not have playback equipment. In other cases, access is given to preservation or original or master copies because that is the only copy available, and in most cases institutions cannot afford to have multiple copies of the same material. The negative effect of this is that there is no guarantee of long-term preservation of the original or master copy. Sometimes access is not given because the material is not catalogued or described due to lack of viewing or listening equipment in order to describe the content. Access is sometimes difficult as a result of obsolete formats, and institutions often do not have the resources to change to new formats.

Conclusions and recommendations

The general assessment of the region is that very little has been done to develop audiovisual archiving programmes. Archiving programmes in most of the countries in the ESARBICA region suffer from severe shortages of skills, trained staff, finances and proper facilities. The awareness to put more effort to audiovisual archiving is growing rapidly but these efforts are being hampered by lack of both skills and resources. There is need for more exposure to audiovisual archiving through both formal and informal training. Informal training can be done through archivists working together in the region with assistance from well-established institutions. This can be done through organizing workshops under the auspices of, for instance, ESARBICA. This will afford Archivists with more interaction forums on which they can share ideas with professionals in the field. In that regard, the workshop held in Harare in October 2001, (sponsored by the Netherlands Filmmuseum and hosted by the National Archives of Zimbabwe for Archivists in the ESARBICA region), was a good starting point. Archivists who attended the workshop showed a lot of enthusiasm to learn and move forward. A steering committee was formed to look into the possibility of forming a body which is either independent or working under other established bodies such as International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA) or ESARBICA. Despite the eagerness shown by participants, the committee's work failed to take off due to lack of funding.

Regarding training in audiovisual archiving, none of the Archivists in the region have received any formal training (at least none known by the writer). Botswana has recently recruited an Archivist with professional background in the processing of

audiovisual materials. Most of them have just learned 'on-the-job'. In fact, formal university-accredited training in audiovisual archiving is a relatively new phenomenon in the world: emerging only in the last decade, for example, the Master of Arts in Film Archiving offered by University of East Anglia, Norwich (UK); the Graduate Certificate in Audiovisual Archiving offered by distance education by Charles Sturt University and the National Screen and Sound Australia (Australia), and the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York (USA) which in recent years has also hosted the periodic International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) Summer School: an intensive short-term training course in film and television archiving. A few archivists from South Africa have attended the FIAF Summer School.

However, the major barrier to formal training is lack of funds. In most cases, external funding is required to undertake most of the training programmes mentioned above. However, archivists in the region are encouraged to enrol in distance education programmes which can be undertaken while on-the-job. These are relatively more affordable than full-time training. Archivists can also read journal articles, join list serves and browse the Internet to keep up with current trends in audiovisual archiving. It is also worthwhile to browse through websites of other well-established collecting institutions. Assistance on specific areas can then be sought from international professional associations such as FIAF, IASA, International Federation of Television Archives (English version) (FIAT), Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA), South East Asia-Pacific Audio Visual Archive Association (SEAPAVAA) and International Council on Archives (ICA), most of which have affiliates in the ESARBICA region. These bodies in turn are recognized by UNESCO which is a source of guides and reference manuals setting out international best practices. Collectively, these organizations offer standards and recommendations on audiovisual collection handling such as preservation, conservation, storage and cataloguing, which archives in the region can adapt to suit their own individual needs.

Challenges of managing audiovisual archives in the ESARBICA region

As a good starting point, audiovisual archives can work on setting up or formulating collection development policies for their institutions. The policy is a working document for collection development and management which includes issues relating to acquisition, collection building, preservation of the collection and the provision of access. The policy will act as a guideline to archivists and other stakeholders with interest in the collection such as donors, potential donors and users of the collection. The policy will be a document which will help provide a supporting framework through which all collection development decisions can be tested and judged. It will provide a foundation for all other activities such as preservation, conservation and collection management. The policy will also provide a practical guide for, and assist in the day-to-day decision-making of collection building and will enable the making of rationale and principled choices from within the range of material available. Practically, the policy will be a working tool which will delineate key collection principles, key selection/deselection principles, acquisition methodologies, access and intellectual property guidelines and an indication of all the resources required to undertake the process of audiovisual archiving.

All in all, it is clear from the survey of institutions in the ESARBICA region that the major problem facing these collecting institutions is inadequate human and material resources due to lack of enough funding, and lack of technical skills and knowledge. The institutions in the region whose audiovisual archives are relatively better established (for example, Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe), generally suffer from lack of adequate funding to expand what is already there, repair or service equipment regularly and /or purchase new equipment or new formats such as digital technology.

The other problem observed is a “hidden” problem of archivists often not sure of where to begin from regarding audiovisual archiving. A lot of institutions admit that they have audiovisual collections which they do not have the expertise to handle. The challenge for archivists in the ESARBICA region is to take up the initiative to look at the collection, consider the nature of the institution as a collecting body, and to work with experts in order to fulfil their mandate of managing and safeguarding all public records irrespective of storage media. The next step will be the formulation of a collection development policy (outlined above), which will be a guideline for the institution. The policy will also assist institutions to look for funding from within the institution and from outside the organization on specific areas such as training, technical skills and materials.

The way forward

The way ahead is to put radical changes in the routine operations of some of the archival institutions in the region. Some of the issues that need to be addressed in order to forge the way ahead are: training, legislation, and additional funding. This will, to some extent, take care of the usual constraints of lack of adequate technical skills, lack of training, and inadequate funding. Archivists in the region also need to take bold steps and initiate audiovisual archiving programmes. It is said that archivists must always project their thoughts in two directions, backwards and forwards, in order to ensure that the work of the past will remain intact for future generations (SEAPAVAA 2000), and the calling is more so for the highly fragile material in audiovisual media Assmann (2001) asked the question “What does the future hold for Africa’s living archives? Yet Africa will have to find solutions to the problem of preserving its memory”, and she goes on to quote Lekoko Kenosi who said the western world has already provided some solutions and Africa should take advantage of those. So the challenge is with us, let the region take up the initiative, and be prepared to fight the battle!

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