

## UTILIZATION OF ARCHIVAL INFORMATION AT SWAZILAND NATIONAL ARCHIVES BY RESEARCHERS AT UNIVERSITY OF SWAZILAND

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper discusses the findings of a study that was carried out to assess the utilization of archival information at Swaziland National Archives (SNA) by researchers at the University of Swaziland (UNISWA). Its purpose was to establish the researchers' information needs and their information seeking behaviour, as well as to determine how these needs were being met. It further wanted to establish the factors that hindered access and use of the archival information and how those factors could be addressed. The study methodology involved questionnaires, face to face interviews as well as structured observations. The respondents included lecturers, postgraduate students and archives personnel. The study results revealed that the SNA was underutilized by researchers at UNISWA, the search-room was not conducive for research purposes and the search-room staff took long to retrieve required documents. Factors contributing to this were found to include lack of skilled personnel, lack of proper marketing strategies, lack of user studies, lack of relevant information and inadequate opening hours. The authors' recommendations include training of existing staff and recruitment of additional personnel, conduct of user studies, improved marketing strategies, and extension of opening hours to include weekends.*

### Introduction

Archives are the memory and conscience of the information society. By providing evidence of human activities and transactions, archives underlie the rights of individuals and the society, and are fundamental to democracy and good governance. They safeguard the memory of mankind by preserving records of its past.

In addition, Musembi (1979) argues that archives provide background data and information useful for national economic planning. He describes archives as a good and reliable source of important information on which the decolonisation of a country's economy and culture is based. He further argues that archives are important in stimulating national identity, which in turn is closely related to national stability and economic development.

In all countries, responsibility for the custody and care of public records and archives is bestowed upon the National Archives. The role of the National Archives is therefore to ensure that valuable records generated by government agencies in the course of their business activities are preserved for future use. National Archives also guide government agencies concerning the management and disposal of current records and are the custodians of every nation's documentary heritage. Their other role is to provide access to the preserved information for use by government officials, business people, researchers and the general public.

#### *Information seeking behaviour*

A number of studies have been carried out on how archival researchers seek for information from the archives. Findings revealed that researchers used both published and unpublished archival sources. They used print-based retrieval tools including lists, guides, registers and footnotes to locate and retrieve archival information. It was also revealed that the researchers had shown a willingness to use electronic retrieval methods. The studies identified barriers that hindered access and use of archival information. These ranged from lack of finding aids to access restrictions imposed by privacy legislation; archivists' lack of adequate knowledge of the profession; emphasis on retention of archives rather than on use; and unsuitable opening hours (Yakel 2003; Duff, Craig and Cherry 2004; Kuglin 2004; Johnson and Duff 2004; Anderson 2004).

#### *Use of archival information*

On use of archival information, the findings revealed that the researchers did not always involve archivists in locating information they wanted. Kemoni (2002) indicates that the researchers came to the archives with significant information about their research topics and the majority found relevant information. He further indicates that the researchers used the archives for different purposes which included academic, personal and occupational and that very few were engaged in genealogical research.

#### **Role of archives in research and education**

Studies carried out by Cook (1998) and Gilliland-Swetland, Kafai and Landis (1999) revealed that archives played a crucial role in research and education. Findings revealed that teachers used primary sources as illustrations to supplement classroom theory. They further revealed that archival sources helped students to understand and experience the contexts and environments in which

archival materials were originally created and housed. It also helped them to understand the role of archival repositories in retaining the materials.

### **Factors hindering access and utilisation of archival information**

The primary responsibility of archival institutions is not only to collect, organise and preserve archival information but also to make the information easily available and accessible to researchers and the public at large. If the information is stored and not made accessible, it is as good as being non-existent.

A number of studies carried out by Duchein (1983), Blaise (1995), Khamis (1999), Mnjama (1999; 2002; 2006) and Kemoni, Wamukoya and Kiplang'at, (2003) identified the following as some of the obstacles that hindered access and optimum utilisation of archival information. They include poor filing systems; inadequate finding aids; lack of skilled personnel; inadequate opening hours; lack of awareness of the existence of the archives; rigid access regulations and conditions; shortage of storage facilities; backlog accumulation of records; and ineffective marketing and promotional strategies.

### **Enhancing access and utilisation of archival information**

A number of archivists and scholars observe that despite the constraints faced by archival institutions in an effort to make archival information available to researchers, archivists must strive to make the information accessible. They further observe that access and utilisation of archival information could be enhanced in a number of ways that include marketing and creating awareness of the services; adoption and use of information technology; digitisation; education programmes to instruct both actual and potential users in research strategies and techniques; and publication of finding aids (Blaise 1995; Ngulube 2002; Kormedy 1997; Mutiti 1999; Mazikana 1999; Ngulube 1999; Lekaukau 1989; Mnjama, 1989).

### **Problem Statement**

Archives are important not only for their use as a record of past achievements but also as a working research tool for information which affects decisions and actions taken today. The records of governments at both local and national levels can between them offer a wider picture of the governance process. Moreover, official governmental records cover a variety of subjects, activities and transactions ranging from health, history, geography, demography, culture, education, to name but a few. Government records and archives therefore contain valuable information sources that can be utilized by researchers, scholars, planners, decision makers, teachers etc.

Although the Swaziland National Archives like most other archival institutions has in its custody valuable sources of research information, their utilization by researchers generally and UNISWA researchers in particular remains relatively

low. This was confirmed by the Director of SNA, Mthethwa (2002) who declared that although the SNA preserved the nation's documentary heritage for prosperity, recognition of the institution was still lacking. She went on to state that in order for the archives to be recognized, a culture of appreciation for historical information had to be cultivated.

A preliminary survey conducted at both UNISWA and SNA as part of this study indicated that archival sources were predominantly utilized by students and staff of the History department of UNISWA. At the beginning of each academic year, the History Department sent new students, undergraduate as well as postgraduate, to the National Archives for orientation. However, for purposes of research, it is largely the staff and postgraduate students who use the materials in the National Archives.

A review of statistical information for the year 2002/3 further indicated that 3,070 researchers visited the archives. Out of this figure, only 52 (1.7%) were from the university, of which 39 (75%) were from the History Department. This information confirmed the relatively low use of archival sources by the university community, a trend that could be redressed by SNA through aggressive publicity and marketing. The remaining 13 (25%) researchers came from other departments within the University.

This was in spite of the fact that the Government of Swaziland continued to commit substantial resources in the development and running of the National Archives. Failure to adequately utilize the records is tantamount to wasting scarce public resources that could be directed elsewhere in the economy. Increased use of archival sources is one way that SNA can justify its existence to the government, potential donors and the public.

SNA has a variety of research materials that include primary sources from government departments, NGOs and individuals. The materials include files dating from 1800, newspapers, reports, gazettes, photographs, drawings, charts and maps. It also has secondary sources at the library that include books and journals. In spite of these holdings, the utilization of SNA still remained low. It's in this context that the study set out to investigate the researchers' information needs, factors response for the low utilization of SNA sources, and what could be done to address the identified obstacles.

#### *Objectives of the study*

The main objective of the study was to assess the utilisation of archival sources by researchers at UNISWA with a view to formulating and recommending practical solutions to the identified problems. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- Establish the information needs of researchers' at UNISWA and the extent to which those needs were being satisfied by SNA;

- Establish the information seeking behaviour of the researchers and the channels they employed in seeking for archival information;
- Establish the extent of use of archival sources by researchers at UNISWA and the obstacles that hindered optimum utilization of the sources;
- Establish why potential users did not utilise archival sources and the factors that prevented them from doing so;
- Establish problems encountered by the archives personnel in satisfying the information needs of the researchers;
- Identify marketing strategies employed by the archives personnel in promoting awareness of the information services they provide and their effectiveness

### *Research questions*

The study sought to answer the following questions:

- What are the information needs of researchers at UNISWA and to what extent are the needs being satisfied by SNA?
- How do UNISWA researchers go about finding relevant information sources from the National Archives and what channels do they employ?
- For what purposes do the researchers utilize the information they seek from the National Archives?
- What obstacles hinder the use of archival sources by both existing and potential researchers?
- What marketing strategies are employed by SNA to promote awareness of their information sources?
- What problems does SNA encounter in providing archival information to researchers at UNISWA?

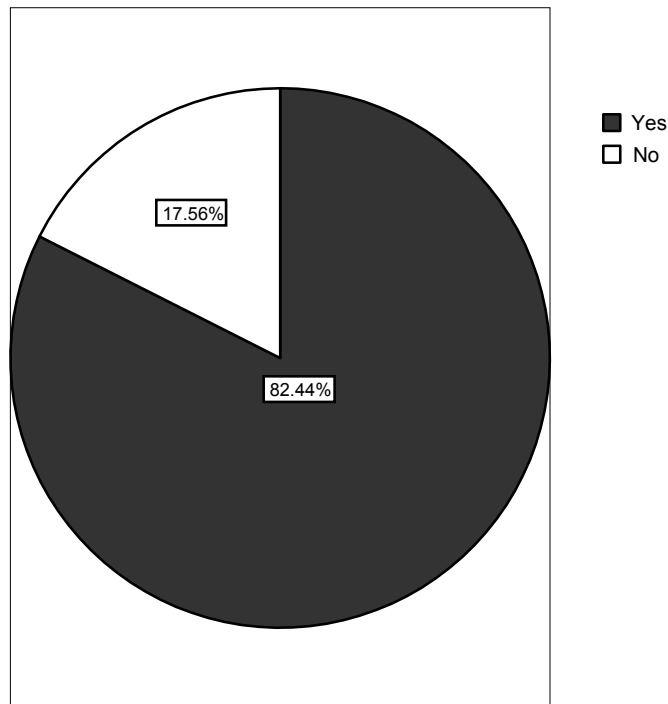
### **Methodology**

The research design was based on questionnaires, complimented by interviews, document review and observations. The population of the study was drawn from among lecturers, postgraduate students and archives personnel. Systematic random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were used to come up with a population of 174 respondents, consisting of 120 lecturers, 47 postgraduate students and 7 archives personnel. Out of the 174 questionnaires distributed a total of 138 respondents completed and returned the questionnaires, representing a response rate of 83.5%.

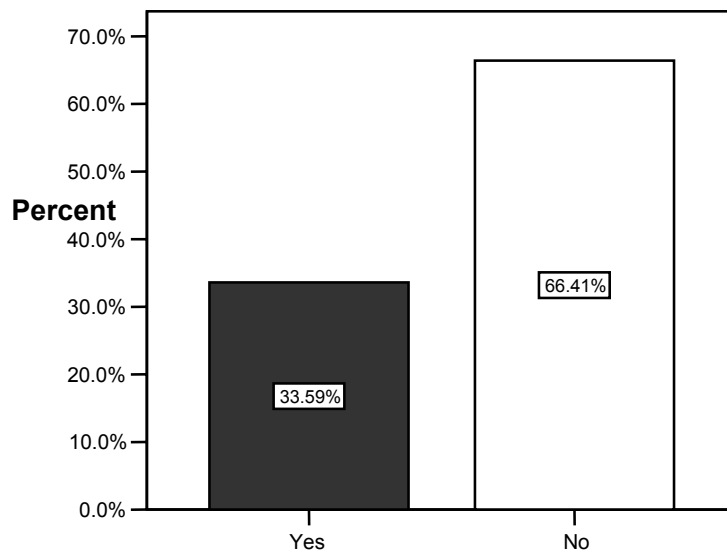
### **Findings of the study**

#### **Knowledge about SNA's existence and its utilisation**

The findings revealed that although many researchers (82.4%) were aware of the existence of the SNA, only a few (33.6%) made use of its services as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 1: Knowledge about SNA's existence (N=131)**



**Figure 2: Utilization of the Swaziland National Archives' services**

The low usage of the SNA could be attributed to many factors such as lack of marketing of the services by the institution. This in effect renders the researchers

ignorant of available services. It could also be due to lack of adequate information, lack of time to visit the archives and the apparent uncondusive environment in the National Archives search-room.

### **Research materials maintained by the archives and the extent to which they satisfy the information needs of the researchers at UNISWA**

SNA has a variety of research materials that include primary sources from government departments, NGOs and individuals. The materials include files dating from 1800, newspapers, reports, gazettes, photographs, drawings, charts and maps. It also has secondary sources at the library that include books and journals.

#### *Availability of requested information*

The researchers were asked if they always found information they sought.

**Table 1: Availability of requested information (N=44)**

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	13	29.5
Sometimes	25	56.8
No	6	13.7
Total	44	100.0

The findings, as seen in Table 1, reveals that 13 (29.5%) out of 44 respondents always found the information. The majority, comprising 25 (56.8%) sometimes found the information, while 6 (13.6%) were unable to find requested information. Overall, the findings show that a majority of UNISWA researchers were unable to find the information they required.

#### *Whether available sources satisfy archival information needs*

When the respondents were further asked to state whether available information sources satisfied their archival information needs, the responses were varied. Eighteen (47.3%) out of 38 respondents agreed that the information sources met their needs, one (2.6%) indicated that they sometimes met his/her needs while 19 (50.0%) declared that they did not meet their needs. From these findings, it is evident that the information maintained at the SNA fell short of meeting the information needs of the researchers at UNISWA.

**Table 2: Whether available information satisfy archival information needs (N=38)**

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	18	47.3
Sometimes	1	2.7
No	19	50.0
Total	38	100.0

Table 2 indicates that most of the information maintained at the SNA does not meet the information needs of the researchers at UNISWA. This could be attributed to the failure by the SNA to conduct user studies or surveys in order to understand the information needs of the researchers.

### **Determining needs of researchers at UNISWA**

The archives personnel were asked to indicate how they determined the information needs of the researchers at UNISWA. Responses were varied. Four (57.1%) out of 7 respondents indicated that they had fairly good knowledge of the researcher's information needs since they worked hand in hand with the Oral History Society of the History Department at the University when appraising records. Two (28.5%) respondents indicated that they learned about the researchers information needs when they came to the National Archives while 1 (14.2%) was not sure. These findings do not point to any strategy employed by SNA in assessing the information needs of the research community. Secondly, the National Archives only involved the History Department in the records appraisal process. The conclusion to draw from this is that the National Archives in appraising records largely concentrates on the historical uses of archives whereas records and especially public records contain information that cuts across many subjects and uses.

They were further asked if they met the information needs of the researchers. Five (71.4%) respondents indicated that they sometimes met the researchers' information needs while 2 (28.5%) stated that they felt the researchers' information needs were being met since they did not complain. When further probed on what they do in the event they did not meet the researchers' needs, 5 (100.0%) out of 5 indicated that they referred them to Pretoria in South Africa where some of Swaziland's documents are still kept. These findings reveal that SNA does not always meet the information needs of the researchers.

### *Uses made of the information sought*

One of the objectives of the study was to find out what the information sought by the researchers' was used for. Responses were varied as shown below.

**Table 3: Uses made of the information sought from SNA (N=44)**

Use	Respondents	Percentage of Total
Write research proposal/papers	30	68.1
Prepare lecture notes	14	31.8
Write thesis/dissertations	9	20.4
Write books	9	20.4
Write term papers	5	11.3
Write assignments	2	4.5
Supplement lecture notes	2	4.5
Others	2	4.5



### \*Multiple Responses

Table 3 indicates that 30 (68.1%) out of 44 respondents used the acquired information to write proposals and papers; 14 (31.8%) to prepare lecture notes; nine (20.4%) to write thesis/dissertations and books respectively; while five (11.3%) used the information to write term papers. Two (4.5%) used the information to write assignments and supplement lecture notes respectively. The other 2 (4.5%) indicated that they used the archival information for general knowledge.

The archives personnel's view on the same question was not different from those of the researchers. Seven (100.0%) out of seven respondents indicated that the researchers used the information for scholarly research such as writing of research papers and projects, thesis and dissertations, as well as for general knowledge purposes. From these findings, it can be concluded that the information sought by the researchers is mainly used for academic purposes. Only a small percentage of the population used the information for general knowledge.

### Tools used to access and retrieve information from the SNA

There are a number of retrieval tools that are used to access and retrieve archival information from SNA. One of the main objectives of the study was to find out the retrieval tools used by researchers at UNISWA to access information from the SNA.

**Table 4: Tools used to access and retrieve information from the SNA (N=44)**

Tools	Respondents	Percentage of total
Search room staff	44	100.0
Finding aids	13	29.5
Card catalogue	12	27.2

#### \* Multiple Responses

Table 4 indicates that 44 (100.0%) out of 44 respondents used the search room staff, 13 (29.5%) used finding aids while 12 (27.2%) used the card catalogue to access information kept at SNA. These results indicate that all the respondents 44 (100%) relied on search-room staff to locate information for them. 13 (29.5%) used the finding aids as well as search-room staff, and so did the 12 (27.2%) respondents who used the card catalogue. These findings reveal that search-room staff in Swaziland provided essential support for researchers when retrieving and accessing information at SNA, they however contradict earlier findings by Kemoni who found that researchers did not involve archivists in locating the information they wanted. This could be attributed to the weaknesses of the finding aids and retrieval tools at SNA which the researchers described as outdated and misleading. It could also be due to the fact that researchers were hardly ever taught how to use available finding aids.

### Knowledge of SNA access rules and regulations

The study sought to establish if the researchers were aware of the access rules and regulations governing their access and utilization of the SNA services.

**Table 5: Knowledge of SNA access rules and regulations to researchers (N=44)**

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	21	47.7
No	23	52.3
Total	44	100.0

The findings as shown in Table 5 reveals that 21 (47.7%) respondents were aware of the access rules and regulations while 23 (52.3%) were not. It is clear that the majority of the researchers are not aware of the rules and regulations governing access and use of the SNA services. The same question was posed to archives personnel that were interviewed. The findings were varied. Five (71.4%) respondents stated that the SNA has rules and regulations that govern access and use of archival sources while two (28.6%) were not sure. No copies of rules and regulations were found to have been pinned on the tables as claimed by some of the archives staff.

**Table 6: Knowledge of SNA access rules and regulations to staff (N=7)**

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	5	71.4
No	2	28.6
Total	7	100.0

From the findings it can be concluded that rules and regulations governing access and use of archives materials exist. However, it is also clear that the rules and regulations have not been publicised or widely circulated for the benefit of both staff and researchers.

Researchers who knew about the existence of the rules and regulations were further asked to state if there were any rules and regulations they found not suitable for research. Their responses were varied. While some stated that the 30 year access restriction rule was excessive and should be reviewed, others complained about the restrictions placed on the number of files one is allowed to order at a time and the restriction on removing files to use them outside the National Archives. From the findings, it is apparent that there are rules and regulations that researchers don't like and may need to be reviewed by SNA or the researchers educated on their necessity.

### **Channels used in accessing information from SNA**

One of the objectives of the study was to establish channels used by the researchers in accessing information from the SNA. The responses indicated that the respondents used multiple channels to access information.

**Table 7: Channels used to access information at SNA (N=44)**

Channel	Respondents	Percentage of Total
Personal visit	43	97.7
Telephone	5	11.3
E-mail	2	4.5
Postal mail	1	2.2
Others	1	2.2

**\* Multiple Responses**

Table 7 indicates that that 43 (97.7%) out of 44 respondents used personal visits, five (11.3%) used telephone, two (4.5%) used e-mail while one (2.2%) used postal mail and research assistants to access information at SNA. The findings show that a majority of the researchers (97.7%) accessed information at the SNA through personal visits, followed by telephone, e mail and lastly postal mail and research assistants.

**Conducive environment for research**

One of the objectives of the study was to find out if the search-room provided a conducive environment for research.

**Table 8: Conducive environment for research (N=44)**

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Somehow conducive	24	54.5
Conducive	12	27.3
Not conducive	8	18.2
Total	44	100.0

Out of the 44 respondents, 24 (54.5%) found the search room environment to be somehow conducive, 12 (27.3%) to be conducive while eight (18.2%) found it not to be conducive. The majority of the respondents found the search room environment to be somehow conducive for research purposes.

From the findings, it can be deduced that the search room environment did not provide a conducive environment for research. The search room space was rather small with a sitting capacity of only about 20 researchers. To compound the space problem, the search room also served as an office for the librarian and her Assistant as well as a work room. This was very disruptive to researchers since the staff made and received telephone calls, and also discussed work related issues in the presence of the researchers.

**Marketing strategies employed by SNA personnel to promote awareness of the information services they provide and their effectiveness.**

The purpose of this question was to establish the marketing strategies, if any, employed by the SNA personnel in promoting awareness of the information services they provide to the researchers. It also aimed at establishing how

effective these strategies were in creating awareness and promoting the services to UNISWA researchers and the public at large.

The SNA personnel gave varied responses as follows. Four (57.1%) respondents agreed that they marketed their services not only to the researchers at UNISWA but also to the public at large. Two (28.5%) were not sure while one (14.2%) claimed that they did not market their services at all.

They were further asked to state the strategies they used in marketing the services. Four (100.0%) respondents out of four stated that they marketed their services in a number of ways including a radio programme that runs every Thursdays for 15 minutes from 1615 to 1630 hours; exhibitions such as Swaziland International Trade Fair (SITF) which runs for two weeks annually; special exhibitions which are meant for schools during which they are given talks about the importance of the SNA and the information it maintains. The National Archives also has reserved space in the local newspaper where they inform the nation about their services. Other strategies include the use of brochures and pamphlets which are distributed to the public at the SITF and from the SNA. They also run an exhibition during the book fair week which is carried out by the SNLS.

Asked to comment on the effectiveness of the marketing strategies, all four staff (100%) interviewed stated that they were very effective, more especially the radio programme which was introduced in 2004. One (25.0%) observed that this had resulted in more researchers visiting the SNA whom they were not able to serve effectively due to staff shortages. SNA's total staff capacity is seven, of whom only four are professionals and three para-professionals.

Though these findings show that SNA makes an effort to market its services through radio, newspapers, exhibitions and shows, it nevertheless contradicts findings obtained from both actual and potential researchers that indicated a lack of marketing. This could imply that the marketing strategies they employ are not effective and therefore need to be reviewed.

### **Factors that hinder potential researchers visiting SNA**

The study sought to establish the factors that hindered potential researchers from visiting SNA in order to access and utilise archival information. Respondents gave varied responses as shown below.

The findings revealed that 24 (27.5%) out of 87 had not used the SNA because they were of the view that the information maintained there was irrelevant to their needs and that SNA maintained information for historians. Another 24 (27.5%) felt there was no need to visit SNA because their information needs were met by the UNISWA library, the internet and the other libraries such as the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) library, while 23 (26.4%) were not aware of the existence of the SNA. Four (4.5%) stated that they had no time to travel to the SNA while

three (3.4%) complained that SNA's opening hours coincided with their working time. Three (3.4%) felt the place was too sacred (a reference to its proximity to the royal palace), 5 (5.7%) stated that the National Archives was too remote and getting there was difficult while another five (5.7%) stated that the SNA was not marketed.

From the findings above, it is apparent that a majority of the potential researchers from UNISWA do not use the National Archives because they assume that the information it maintains is irrelevant to their needs. Another significant group did not use it because it was unaware of its existence. These findings confirm the view that SNA is not effectively marketed. Therefore, lack of effective marketing and promotional strategies are partly responsible for the under-utilization of the SNA. Others considered its location at Lobamba, which is an area mainly occupied by the royal family, rather sacred. This discouraged some researchers from visiting the Archives. These findings point to the fact that there are a number of obstacles that prevent potential researchers from using the SNA which the authorities need to address.

### **Access and use of archival sources by researchers**

The study sought to establish if there were any factors that affected the utilization of archival sources maintained at the SNA. Twenty four 24 (54.5%) respondents indicated that they did not encounter any problems while 20 (45.6%) respondents encountered problems. The 20 respondents who indicated that they encountered problems were further requested to state the specific problems that hindered access and utilization of archival information at SNA. Their responses were varied.

**Table 9: Problems encountered by researchers in utilising information at SNA (N=20)**

Factors	Response	Percentage of total
Failure to locate files	7	35.0
30 year restriction rule	7	35.0
Irrelevant information	5	25.0
Remote location of SNA	5	25.0
Incompetent search-room staff	4	20.0
Rigid opening hours	4	20.0
Outdated finding aids	4	20.0
Inadequate information	3	15.0
Old/torn files	3	15.0
Biased collection	2	10.0
Mixed correspondents within files	2	10.0
Outdated information	1	5.0
Lack of staff's co-operation and commitment	1	5.0
Unavailability of information 2	2	10.0

\* **Multiple Responses**

Table 9 shows that seven (36.8%) out of 19 respondents at times failed to locate files from the repository, a fact attributable to lack of an effective file retrieval system and lack of proper finding aids. Another seven (36.8%) respondents singled out the 30 year access rule as being too long and a hindrance to access. Five (26.3%) respondents found the information to be irrelevant to their needs. Another five (26.3%) stated that the institution was too remote and not easily accessible especially given that there was no reliable transport to Lobamba. Other problems highlighted included shortage of skilled search room staff (21%); unsuitable opening hours (21%); an out-dated card catalogue and the finding aids (21%); inadequate information sources (15%); old, torn and faded files (15.7%).

On the whole, the findings reveal that SNA has a shortage of skilled staff thus making it difficult to serve the researchers effectively. The fact that staff take time to locate files is indicative of the lack of an effective file retrieval and tracking system. This was further undermined by what respondents described as the in-experience of the SNA staff who could not be relied upon to retrieve information whenever search room staff were unavailable. Sometimes, researchers were turned away as some of the staff members could not be of any assistance.

It is also apparent that the opening hours are a hindrance to the access and utilization of information at the SNA by researchers at UNISWA as well as the public at large. When the institution is open, the researchers are at work and when they are free, the institution is closed. SNA may have to consider extending opening hours to weekends albeit for short periods. However, this may have staff implications for a service that is already constrained in terms of manpower.

From the findings, it is also apparent that the 30 year access rule is a hindrance to the researchers and to national development. At the expiry of the 30 years, some information is already out of date and therefore of little significance to the researchers. Since the information is of different security classification, ranging from sensitive to non-sensitive, the archivist should be allowed to use her discretion to decide on whether it should be availed to the public or not, depending on sensitivity.

The findings also revealed that some files were at times withdrawn from the repository for reasons only known to the institution. In future, SNA should be more cautious when classifying information so that information which they feel is too sensitive for public consumption should never be at any stage taken to the repository and later withdrawn. Secondly, a policy to declassify sensitive records before they are accessioned or transferred to the archives should be put in place.

The findings also revealed that 26.3% of the researchers found the collection to be irrelevant to their information needs. This means that SNA needs to carry out user needs assessment as the basis of building its collection development policy.

**Table 10: Problems faced by SNA in serving researchers (N=7)**

Problems	Respondents	Percentage of total
Shortage of staff and funds	7	100.0
Poor handling and mutilation of files	3	42.6
Demand for more files by researchers	2	28.6
Lack of relevant information	2	28.6
Manual system	4	57.1
Lack of induction to new staff	1	14.3
Lack of equipment	2	28.6

**\*Multiple responses**

As shown in Table 10, the responses were varied. Seven (100%) respondents cited the shortage of staff and funds as a hindrance to serving researchers more effectively. Three (42.8%) cited potential loss of important documentation due to improper handling and mutilation of files by researchers. They explained that the researchers did not know how to handle fragile files and some, due to ignorance, removed pages from the files if they came across interesting information. Two (28.5%) stated that the researchers demanded more than five files at a time yet the rules and regulations were clear that a researcher was entitled to not more than five files at a time. Two (28.5%) pointed to the lack of relevant information at SNA as a hindrance to its effective use while Four (57.1%) blamed the manual system as a hindrance to the provision of effective services to researchers.

**Conclusions and recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the problems relating to the under-utilization of the Swaziland National Archives can be addressed through the adoption of a number of strategies. First, there should be proper finding aids to enhance efficient tracking and retrieval of files. This will not only speed up the retrieval of files for researchers but will also promote efficiency in serving the research community. Another seven (36.8%) advocated for a reduction in the time allowed to access archival records, arguing that 30 years was too long for some of the files. Five (26.3%) respondents stated that SNA staff should conduct user needs assessment to find out the information needs of the researchers so that they maintain relevant information. Seven (36.8%) respondents suggested that the institution should employ more qualified staff to undertake professional tasks such as updating the catalogue and preparing finding aids, acquiring more information relevant to the needs of the researchers and regularly checking the documents within the files to ensure they are properly filed. Four (21.0%) respondents suggested that the staff should try to repair the files, at least by laminating the papers so that they stay longer because they carry information which is hard to find anywhere else once lost. Four (21.0%) respondents recommended that the SNA should open on Saturdays, at least from 0900 to 1300 hours like the SNLS to enable them do their research. Another four (21.0%) felt that the institution should automate its services so that they can be able to access the institution's information resources from their workstations.

### *SNA personnel's views*

The SNA personnel were also asked to air their views on the same subject. All seven (100.0%) respondents said the government should employ more qualified staff, three (42.8%) further stated that the researchers should be taught about the importance of archival records; the consequences of losing them; as well as how to carefully handle them. Another two (38.5%) respondents stated that the researchers should be provided with the rules and regulations at the entrance of the archives so that they know them prior to forwarding a request for records to the search room staff.

Various conclusions and recommendations can be drawn from the findings of the study. It was revealed that although the SNA is trying hard to market its services, the rate of utilization of its services at 33.6%, is still relatively low. This goes to show that the strategies employed are not effective. This is also evidenced by the fact that a majority of the researchers knew about the existence of the SNA through colleagues, ranked first at 31.4%; followed by radio programme at 19.4%; orientation at 11.1%; and SITF at 10.1%. The other sources such as newspapers, television programme, websites, brochures and others were ranked below 10.0%. The fact that colleagues, which is a casual source was ranked high might be due to the failure by SNA to proactively market itself thus forcing people to use alternative channels to find information. Another factor might be that the radio programme is run during working hours while the researchers are not at home. On the other hand, the SITF is held only once a year.

It was also revealed that potential researchers were not using the SNA due to various reasons. Many felt that the information kept there was irrelevant to their needs as the information was perceived to be for historians. Some felt there was no need to visit the SNA as their information needs were met at UNISWA library and other libraries such as UKZN and SNLS; and also through the use of their personal collections and the internet. It was also revealed that time constraints and inappropriate opening hours were a further hindrance to their visiting and using the SNA. The fact that the SNA was not effectively marketed was also another contributing factor. Without publicity, it was easy to forget about the existence of SNA let alone the services it provided. Others felt that the institution was remote and sacred given its location within the precincts of the royal court.

The information needs of the researchers were not always met as 56.8% indicated that they did not always find information they requested for while 13.6% had never found information relevant to their requests. This could be attributed to the fact that the SNA does not conduct user studies as revealed by the study. Turnbaugh (1986) states that archival user studies help archives staff keep in touch with their users and are thus able to know their information needs; their information seeking behaviour; how they use the acquired information; as well as establish if their needs are met or not. Dowler (1988) concurs with Turnbaugh



(1986) by crediting user studies as a 'periodic check' for the effectiveness of archival programmes.

It was also revealed that the researchers used a number of information sources at the SNA such as thesis and dissertations; reports; conference proceedings; archival files; journals; reference materials; and text books. The information sought by the researchers was mainly used for academic research as attested to by all the respondents (100%) who used it for writing research proposals and papers; writing thesis and dissertations; writing term papers; writing assignments; writing books and preparing lecture notes. These findings concur with those of Kemoni (2002) who found that a majority of the researchers used archival information for academic research purposes.

The study revealed that records in paper formats were the most consulted compared to the electronic formats preferred by the potential researchers. This means that the introduction of IT could enhance the utilization of the SNA with more potential users visiting and using the National Archives. It was also established that the researchers relied more on search room staff than on finding aids to locate and retrieve information. This agrees with the findings by Kemoni (2002) which revealed that the researchers relied more on archival personnel to access information. This could be attributed to the fact that the finding aids at SNA are not up to date. Furthermore, SNA does not induct researchers on how to use the finding aids. This goes to show that despite the poor quality of services rendered by the search room, the demand for information remains high. Therefore, SNA needs to improve the quality of search room services, including the production of better finding aids.

The findings also established that the search room was not conducive for research purposes. It was revealed that the space was too small, not air conditioned and too noisy. The search room is also shared with the library staff. This finding is in line with Duchein's (1983) study which recommended the construction of archival repositories conducive for research purposes. Mnjama (2005) also points out that most archival institutions in the ESARBICA region face challenges of inadequate storage facilities. To rectify this, he recommends a re-appraisal of the records so that those which are no longer used be discarded.

A majority of the researchers were not aware of the rules and regulations that govern access and utilization of archives at SNA as attested to by 52% of the respondents. Two of the SNA personnel were also not aware of them yet they provide services to researchers. Some of those who knew about the existence of the rules and regulations raised concerns about some of the regulations such as the 30 year access rule; restriction of the number of files given to the researcher at a time; restriction on loaning of documents and the inappropriate opening hours, which they said were not suitable. Mnjama (2002) pinpoints the lack of an access policy in the archives and records management as one of the factors hindering access and utilization of archival sources in developing countries. SNA

too does not have an access policy and it is time one was developed to regulate the use of archival information by various users.

### *Recommendations*

To maximize the access and utilization of the SNA, the authors have the following recommendations to make:

(i) Marketing of SNA: A proactive marketing strategy of SNA should be adopted. Such a strategy should include segmentation of users on the basis of their specific archival information needs, introduction of current awareness programmes, and use of selective dissemination methods. More importantly, services rendered by SNA should be marketed on an on-going basis.

(ii) User studies: The study revealed that SNA did not have a structured mechanism of determining archival user needs of the research community at UNISWA. Therefore, SNA should urgently embark on conducting user studies as a way of determining the archival information needs of both actual and potential researchers. This should be done once every two years.

(iii) Quality and quantity of staff: The study revealed that SNA has a shortage of staff in terms of quality and quantity. The entire staff compliment consists of, other than the director, three archivists, two records managers and two library staff, two of whom are presently pursuing further studies. With such a lean staff compliment there is no way SNA's services can be effective especially since it is expected to cover the whole country advising on the management of records, appraising valuable records for transfer to the National Archives, as well as processing and making archival records available to researchers. Secondly, the staff lack adequate professional skills with the exception of four members of staff including the director who have relevant training in archives and records management. The study therefore recommends that a survey be carried out by SNA in conjunction with the Ministry of Establishment and Information to determine among other things, an appropriate establishment for SNA. The survey should specifically focus on staffing levels, qualifications, training, skills and competencies, as well as the establishment of career paths.

(iv) Search room environment: The study revealed that the search room environment was not conducive for research due to a number of factors identified by among others researchers and archives personnel. Some of the problems identified included a noisy environment, limited space and lack of air conditioning. The study recommends an urgent rehabilitation and extension of the archives building as part of solution to the present situation.

(v) Search room personnel: The study revealed that the search room is manned by library staff with no training in archives and records management and who have little understanding of record keeping processes. This inconvenienced researchers who have to start at the security desk at the entrance, then to the

librarian, and then the archivist before the query is taken to the director for approval. The set-up gives the impression that the archives exist to complement the library. The study therefore recommends a re-organisation of the setup to give more focus and attention to archival services.

(vi) Access rules and regulations The findings revealed that a majority of the researchers were not aware of the existence of access rules and regulations. The same applied to two of SNA personnel who did not know about the existence of the rules. The implication is that the rules and regulations are not well advertised to both the researchers and the staff. The study recommends that the rules and regulations governing access to archives be made available to all researchers and SNA personnel. Furthermore, SNA needs to undertake a review of the current rules and regulations on access to bring them in line with current trends which favour increased access with or without the enactment of access to information law.

(vii) Review of the Archives Act: A revision of the present Archives Act No 5 of 1971 is long overdue. The Act does not mandate the SNA to take full legal control of the records produced by the departments throughout their lifecycle. It is also silent on electronic records which are increasingly being generated by government ministries and departments. The Act is also silent on the acquisition of private and individual collections. Though the study revealed that a draft had been prepared for the purposes of amendment, this process needs to be expedited. The Director of SNA needs to liaise more closely with the Ministry of Justice to get the Act revised. The issue of an outdated legislation as discussed in this study is similar to the findings of a survey conducted by Mnjama (2005) who found that one of the factors hindering effective utilisation of archival sources in the ESARBICA region was outdated archival legislations. It is thus recommended that amendment of the Act be speeded up to give the National Archives more legislative authority to carry out its mandate.

(viii) Feedback: The study revealed that there was no effective mechanism of getting feedback about the services provided by SNA from the researchers including those from UNISWA. Feedback could help the SNA assess the effectiveness of the services it provides to the researchers as well as establish why potential users are not using the archives. This would in turn help SNA develop a user centred information system to meet the archival information needs of the researchers. Feedback would also provide a means of evaluating the services with a view of making improvements. It is therefore recommended that a feedback mechanism be developed and implemented on a regular basis to determine the effectiveness of the services provided by SNA. Such a mechanism could be carried out using assessment forms, surveys, suggestions box, and talks, among others.

(ix) Archives space and condition of the building: The study revealed that the archive building was too congested due to insufficient space. This is due to the

fact that the building is rather small and yet it serves both as an archives and a record centre. Apart from the size, it also leaks during rainy seasons destroying valuable documents and the furniture. It is therefore recommended that the government the option of setting up regional record centres to ease the congestion at the archives. It is also recommended that the rehabilitation and extension of the archives building be speeded not only to ease the congestion but also to rescue the furniture and documents that are deteriorating due to rain.

(x) Automation: The findings to the study also revealed that the operations of SNA were carried out manually. ICT enhances collection, organization, storage, manipulation and exchange of archival information. At the SNA, it can also help to preserve the deteriorating fragile records due to frequent handling by researchers, and poor storage conditions. The introduction of ICT could further enhance access and thus increase the utilization of the archives. It is therefore recommended that the government considers automating the SNA, financial implications of the project (purchase, maintenance and staff training) notwithstanding.

(xi) Exhibitions: The findings of the study revealed that SNA promoted its services mainly through exhibitions at the SITF and at the archives itself. This strategy can be augmented with others such as displaying relevant materials during other important cultural events such as *incwala*, reed dance, *butimba* and Independence Day celebrations.

(xii) Access policy: The findings of the study revealed that SNA does not have an access policy. An access policy is important because it states and clarifies the conditions of access and use of archive materials in the custody of the National Archives. This study recommends that the SNA formulates an archives policy to guide researchers on the conditions of access to its holdings.

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