

## A SURVEY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES REFERENCE SERVICES IN SWAZILAND AND TANZANIA: AN EXAMINATION OF THE EXPECTATIONS AND BEHAVIOUR OF USERS

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### **Abstract**

*National archival institutions have a legal obligation to provide access to their collections. By so doing, archivists should adhere to a code of ethics and archival standards in the design and delivery of suitable and sustainable archival access programmes. The significance of an archival establishment is best measured by the services it provides to its clientele. Blais and Enns (1990) argue that archives as government repositories, must ensure visibility and accessibility to archival collections. Nonetheless archival institutions are faced with challenges in providing and promoting public programmes. Using a survey the article examines the relevance of archival reference services at the Swaziland National Archives and the Tanzania Records and Archives Management Department (RAMD) vis-a-vis the expected archival standards. The article focuses on the following factors: main users of archival materials, archival outreach programmes, policies, rules and regulation, facilities and equipment, operating hours, user satisfaction with reference services, and challenges faced. The major finding from the survey is that archivists*

*are not exploiting Information Technology (IT) to meet users' needs. Since users have varied needs and they require services at different hours, online services would be the most effective way to satisfy customers' needs.*

**Keywords:** Archival Reference Services, Archival Public Programming, Access, User needs

## **Introduction**

Archival reference services are vital to the existence of any archival institution. Central to this are access and preservation. Edmondson (2004) argues that preservation without the prospect of giving access to the collections is pointless. It is therefore important that archival institutions align their services to the needs of their users. Blais and Enns (1990) argue that designing public access programmes requires a new understanding of an organisation's image, awareness, education and use, and that the nature and scope of these programmes as determined by the mandate of the archival institution. Moreover, archivists have a responsibility to serve the people who sponsor their activities. Archival institutions are legally mandated to collect and preserve non-active records from various institutions within and outside the country for the purpose of making them available for administrative, reference and research purposes. Reference archivists mediate between the user and the archival repository (Cohen 1997). The implication, therefore, is that it would be useless to build an archive which cannot be accessed and utilised.

## **Review of the literature**

The review of the literature was based on common factors that guide archival references. These are discussed below.

### *Main users of archival materials*

An archival access policy should clearly define the users of the archives. Such access policy is determined by the purpose of the archives, the composition of its holdings, and the resources it has. The kind of clientele an archival access programme is likely to service is largely influenced by the archival collection. If the collection contains court cases, personal records, policy files, historical records,

educational materials, and annual reports, the potential researchers will include lawyers, retired officers, family members, history teachers, students and the accounting professionals. Given this scenario, archivists can determine what access mode is most accessible and relevant to each group of users (McCausland 1993). The mode of access may also be determined by the age, and interests of the potential users.

#### *Archival outreach programmes*

The main purpose of archival institutions is to preserve and avail information to the users. In fulfilling this responsibility archives are expected to come up with a good marketing strategy to market their products (Harris and Van Merwe 2009). The marketing strategy has to appeal to all the users including potential users. Archival outreach programmes include activities such as exhibitions, newsletters, pamphlets, newspaper articles, advertisements on radio television and posters. They constitute the various means through which archival institutions market their services. Crucial to the marketing campaign are issues bordering on promoting access for all users, operating hours, conditions of access, service fees, provision of a suitable environment for research, responding to all enquiries, reprographic services and general expectations from both archivists and researchers in as far as the archival reference service is concerned (McCausland 1993). The above listed marketing tools should meet the general expectations of the users. Nonetheless, effective outreach programmes should be supported by a strong legislative framework upon which rules and regulations can be modelled.

#### *Policies, rules and regulations*

Archival legislation provides the foundation upon which policies, rules and regulations governing the use, access, and preservation of the archival materials are modelled. The policies and regulations should cover issues on access, and other user services. For instance, the Swaziland National Archives (SNA) Act No.5/1971 Section 4 (2) a, grants all users the right to access public archives through the approval of the Director. This guarantees equal access to archival records so long as the minimum requirements (e.g. proof of identity) of admission are met. An effective access programme should not

prejudice other members of society based on their political affiliation, race, sex, and background (McCausland 1993:277).

#### *Facilities and equipment*

Since archival institutions keep records in different formats and media, there is a need to provide necessary equipment and supplies to enable timely retrieval of information contained in the archival collection (Shepherd and Yeo 2003; Edmondson 2004). Equipment such as computers, ear-phones, tape recorders, video players, microfilm readers and projectors constitute essentials if the records that are kept are non-print. The provision of good quality furniture, good tables and a well-lit spacious reading room with air-conditioners can ensure that researchers enjoy their stay in the course of their information search in the archives, (Schwirtlich 1993). Conditions in the reading room should also take cognizance of people with special needs, such as those using wheelchairs and the blind.

#### *Operating hours*

The access programme has to be sensitive to each user group's needs and be convenient. That is to say the opening hours should take into account the needs for the different types of users who may want to access the records. For example the Botswana National Archives and Records Services responded to the user demands by opening on Saturdays from 9:00am -12:00 noon. This was aimed at making the information accessible even to those who might be working in the course of the week. Such arrangements ensure that the access to records is maximized. McCausland (1993) and Shepherd and Yeo (2003) argue that regular and flexible operating hours are a necessity in archival institutions to maximize utilization of the collection.

#### *User satisfaction with reference services*

There is a crucial need to evaluate user needs against the archival reference services offered. Williams (2006) observes that while archivists are well versed on user needs, not much is known about user needs outside the archives. Such a scenario impacts heavily on the determination of ultimate user satisfaction. This calls for an evaluation of archival reference services especially by the users. The evaluation of archival reference services is aimed at assessing customer satisfaction in respect to the quality of services rendered

against prescribed standards, performance judgement on whether rate of customers to the archives do increase or decrease. Furthermore, evaluation assesses the trends and behaviour of on-line and on-site users, their possible implications and future planning to improve the archival access programmes (Williams 2006).

## **Methodology**

The findings are based on a survey questionnaire which was self administered in the two search rooms of the Swaziland National Archives and the Tanzania Records and Archives Management Department (RAMD). The questionnaires were distributed between October and November 2009, covering a period of three weeks. The questionnaires were handed to users of the search rooms at the time of registration with their respective national archives. The completed questionnaires were handed back to the search room archivist before the users left the archives.

### *Response rate*

Results from the survey are based on a combined total of 23 respondents from the two national archives. Eleven were patrons of RAMD, while 12 visited the National Archives of Swaziland. This is a very low number considering the duration of the survey.

## **Discussion of results**

The survey aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of reference services in the two national archives with a view to making suggestions for improvement. The findings are presented according to the main themes/factors that guided the survey.

### *Main users of archival materials*

The users were categorized according to profession, age, gender and educational level. While gender was not a determining factor in the use of archives, educational level and age played a major part. Table I shows the age of the users of archives.

**Table 1: Users of national archives by age**

Age group:	Tanzania	Swaziland	Total	%
Less than 20years	-	-	-	0%
20-29yrs	3	10	13	57%
30-39 yrs	4	2	6	26%
40-49yrs	3	-	3	13%
50 – 59 years	1	-	1	4%
60 and above	-	-	-	0%
<b>Total</b>			<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>

The largest number of users was within the 20-29 age range. These results can be contrasted with the level of education as reflected in Table 2.

**Table 2: Education level of users combining Tanzania and Swaziland**

Education level	Tanzania	Swaziland	Total	%
Phd	1	-	1	4%
Masters Degree	5	1	6	26%
Bachelor Degree	1	5	6	26%
Diploma level	4	6	10	43%
Certificate level	-	-	-	0%

It can be deduced from the results in table 2 that the majority of users who fall in the 20-29 age group are diploma holders (43%). Nonetheless, it was interesting to note that a slightly larger number of users in Tanzania (6 out of 11) were Masters degree holders as opposed to 4 Diploma holders. In Swaziland half of the users (6 out of 12) were Diploma holders while 5 were first degree holders.

The users' areas of interest varied from college/school projects (48%), postgraduate/academic research (26%), teaching materials (17%) to articles on book writing (4%). None of the respondents was interested in business/local government enquiry. Location of the national archives did not seem to be an issue since 17% of the respondents from both repositories indicated that it took them less than an hour to reach the archives, with only 2% indicating that it took them more than a day. None of the respondents indicated that it took the 3-4 hours to reach the archives. This therefore means that

archival services in the two surveyed archives can be effectively provided on the basis of age and educational level.

### *Policies, rules and regulations*

The users were asked to indicate what governed restrictions to having access to their respective archives. Choices included nationality, age group, religion, creed or social status, sensitivity of archival materials, protection of individual privacy and condition of archival materials. Users could make more than one choice as depicted in Table 3.

**Table 3: Factors that govern access to archival materials**

Category	Tanzania			Swaziland			Total			Total Response
	Yes	No	Not sure	Yes	No	Not sure	Yes	No	Not sure	
Nationality	7	2	2	2	2	8	9(39%)	4(17%)	10(43%)	23 (100%)
Age groups	2	4	4	1	4	7	3(13%)	8(35%)	11(48%)	22 (96%)
Race	2	5	2	-	7	5	2(9%)	12(52%)	7(30%)	21(96%)
Religion	4	2	4	-	6	6	4(17%)	8(35%)	10(43%)	22(96%)
Creed or social status	4	4	2	-	7	5	4(17%)	11(48%)	7(30%)	22(96%)
Sensitivity of archival materials	8	-	3	2	1	9	10(43%)	1(4%)	12(52%)	23 (100%)
Protection of individual privacy	6	-	4	2	1	9	8(35%)	1(4%)	13(57%)	22 (96%)
Condition of archival materials	8	2	1	3	-	9	11(48%)	2(9%)	10(43%)	23 (100%)

Based on Section 4 (2) of the Swaziland National Archives (SNA) Act No.5/1971, one would assume that at the SNA all people regardless of race, creed, sex, and social status have equal access to all records declared open for public scrutiny. Nonetheless, the results from the current survey show that out 12 respondents from Swaziland, two indicated that access to archival materials is governed by nationality, four indicated that it is governed by age, seven by race, six by religion, seven by creed or social status, and one by sensitivity of

archival materials and by condition of archival materials. On the other hand, when asked if they had ever been denied access to archival materials, one of the respondents from Tanzania answered in the affirmative while none of the respondents from Swaziland was denied access. In the case of Tanzania, general reasons for denial of access included; no electricity, staff not available, documents not found, just denied access if the material was not to be found, and the materials cannot be access before 30 years.

### *Facilities and equipment*

The question on the most frequently used formats of the archival materials revealed that all the respondents consulted papers format, four consulted microform while only one respondent consulted digital materials. These findings support the earlier revelations that the two national archives surveyed do not use online outreach programmes. On the question of availability of facilities in the reading rooms, the Table 4 shows combined responses from the two repositories.

**Table 4: Availability of facilities and equipment in the search rooms**

Service	Tanzania			Swaziland			Total			Total Response
	Yes	No	Not sure	Yes	No	Not sure	Yes	No	Not sure	
Microfilm readers	8	-	3	2	5	5	10(43%)	5(22%)	8(35%)	23(100%)
Computers	4	5	2	1	8	3	5(22%)	13(57%)	5(22%)	23(100%)
Scanners	5	4	2	1	8	3	6(26%)	12(52%)	5(22%)	23(100%)
Photocopier	8	2	1	6	5	1	14(61%)	7(30%)	2(9%)	23(100%)

It can be concluded that the two search rooms are well equipped in terms of photocopiers, relatively equipped with microfilm readers but low on computers and scanners.

### *Operating hours*

When asked how often they visited the archives, only 9% of the respondents from both repositories (Swaziland and Tanzania) indicated that they visited the archives weekly, 35% said they visited the archives monthly, 9% visited the archives quarterly, while 48% merely indicated 'other'. The frequency of visitation did not seem to be influenced by the operating hours. A combined response to the



question of operating hours revealed that 22% of the respondents indicated 8.00 am – 4.30 pm, 4% indicated 7.30 am - 5.30 pm, 52% indicated 8.30 am - 3.30 pm while 22% indicated 'others'. In order to probe further, there was a question which required users to indicate if archival reference services were offered during lunch breaks, holidays and weekends. Table 5 shows the responses.

**Table 5: Services offered during other periods**

Category	Tanzania			Swaziland			Total			Total
	No	Yes	I don't know	No	Yes	I don't know	No	Yes	I don't know	
Lunch break	8	1	2	4	8	-	12 (52%)	9(39%)	2(9%)	23(100%)
Holidays	10	-	1	12	-	-	22 (96%)	0(0%)	1(4%)	23(100%)
Weekends	11	-	-	11	1	-	22(96%)	1(4%)	0(0%)	23(100%)

To drive the point further, the users were asked if they were comfortable with the current opening hours. Results from the two repositories show that 52% of the responses were in the affirmative while 48% said no. Those who said 'no' were asked to indicate the convenient hours. Their general responses are summarized below:

#### Tanzania

- From 8:30am to 6:00pm (1 respondent)
- I would like to stay up to 5:00pm (1 respondent)
- It could stay open later (1 respondent)
- 7:30am to 5:00pm (3 respondents)

#### Swaziland

- Open during weekends(2 respondents)
- Extend closing time (4 respondents)

It appears failure to open the repositories outside normal working hours could be a contributory factor to the low usage of search rooms in the two archives repositories that were surveyed. This partly explains the low number of visitors to both repositories in a period of three weeks. The low level of usage could also be attributed to the fact that archival advocacy programmes may not be aggressive enough to reach potential users.

### *User satisfaction with reference services*

Although customer satisfaction can be derived from the factors that have already been discussed, specific variables were targeted to gauge users' satisfaction. These are presented in Table 6.

Service	Tanzania				Swaziland				Total			
	G	A	P	NP	G	A	P	NP	Good (G)	Average	Poor	Not provided
Registration at security desk	5	5	0	1	9	3	0	0	14 (61%)	8(35%)	0(0%)	1(4%)
Security of personal belongings	8	3	0	0	3	5	0	4	11 (48%)	8(35%)	0(0%)	4(17%)
Entry interview	3	3	3	2	8	2	0	2	11(48%)	5(22%)	3(13%)	4(17%)
Registration (search room)	2	7	1	1	6	5	0	1	8(35%)	12(52%)	1(4%)	2(9%)
Rules	6	1	2	1	3	8		1	9(39%)	9(39%)	2(9%)	2(9%)
User guides	5	5	1	0	4	5	2	1	9(39%)	10(43%)	3(13%)	1(4%)
User orientation/education	6	3	2	0	4	6	0	2	10(43%)	9(39%)	2(9%)	2(9%)
Staff assistance/cooperation	7	2	2	0	10	2	0	0	17(74%)	4(17%)	2(9%)	0(0%)
Services to disabilities	3	4	4	0	3	2	0	7	6(26%)	6(26%)	4(17%)	7(30%)
Manual finding aids	5	4	1	1	7	3	0	2	12(52%)	7(30%)	1(4%)	3(13%)
Computerized finding aids	0	2	2	5	1	0	1	10	1(4%)	2(9%)	3(13%)	15(65%)
Online finding aids	0	1	2	6	1	0	1	10	1(4%)	1(4%)	3(13%)	16(70%)
File request slips	2	2	5	1	2	4	0	6	4(17%)	6(26%)	5(22%)	7(30%)
Time to Access the materials	3	5	2	0	11	1	0	0	14(61%)	6(26%)	2(9%)	0(0%)
Condition of archival materials	2	7	2	0	3	8	1	0	5(22%)	15(65%)	3(13%)	0(0%)
Sitting arrangement	5	5	1	0	9	1	2	0	14(61%)	6(26%)	3(13%)	0(0%)
Comfortability of the furniture	5	6	0	0	11	1	0	0	16(70%)	7(30%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Control of noise	6	5	0	0	10	1	0	1	16(70%)	6(26%)	0(0%)	1(4%)
Air conditioning	7		4	0	9	2	0	1	16(70%)	2(9%)	4(17%)	1(4%)

**Table 6: Customer satisfaction with archival reference services**

It appears lack of computerized finding aids, online findings aids and non availability of file request slips are among the causes of users' dissatisfaction. Users were mostly contented with registration at

security desk (61%), access time (61%), sitting arrangement (61%), comfortable of the furniture (70%), manual finding aids (52%), security of personal belongings (48%), entry interview (48%), rules, (39%), and user guides (39%).

### *Archival outreach programmes*

When asked how they knew about the national Archives in the current survey, 35% of the respondents from the two repositories indicated word of mouth, 22% indicated radio programmes, 26% indicated publications, 17% indicated archives staff, 4% indicated TV, while 4% indicated 'other'. It was evident that none of the respondents knew about the archives through online websites. This implies that although the archives surveyed are using various means to reach out to their users/potential users, none of the outreach programmes applies the internet.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

Archival institutions have an important role to play in every society. They should provide a model of best practices to enhance people's knowledge in providing access to and effective utilisation of the documentary heritage. There is a need to carefully identify user needs, their attitude and behaviour regarding the use of archives. In essence, designing and delivering successful archives access programmes requires strategic collaboration with relevant stakeholders. The findings from the survey show that the two national archives are challenged to meet diverse needs of users. This could be costly in terms of human financial resources but it is worth doing provided users' needs are met. The observation by Williams (2006) that archivists are knowledgeable on user needs within the archives, with limited knowledge on user needs outside the archives, calls for an aggressive archival advocacy programme aimed at to reach out to potential users.

Based on the findings from the survey, we recommend that:

- Archivists should be more outward looking rather than being self-contained when designing their access and reference programmes. They need to come out of the shade as Williams (2006) alluded to their image problem;

- Archivists are expected to open their doors to researchers who conduct research on their services. This means that archivists should be prepared to work beyond normal working hours to meet the varied needs of users;
- Computerized finding aids, online findings aids and scanners should be optimized to meet user needs;
- Archivists should consult the registration book frequently to determine users' age, profession, educational levels and research interests in order to direct them to the right sources of information;
- Internet connection will go a long way towards connecting users to other repositories online; and
- Archives should market their services aggressively to attract potential users.

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