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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ZIMBABWE'S GWERU RECORDS CENTRE

Peterson Dewah

Department of Records and Archives, National University of Science and Technology, Bulawayo
petersdewah@yahoo.com

Nathan Mnjama

Department of Library and Information Studies, University of Botswana
mnjamanm@mopipi.ub.bw

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Abstract

The paper gives an empirical assessment of the suitability of Gweru Records Centre in housing public records. The study employed the descriptive survey method and triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, observation of the building premises and content analysis of institutional reports. The major findings were that records were at risk as a result of the ageing building, Gweru Records Centre's location, lack of funding among other reasons. To improve on the records safety, funds should be channelled to the organization for the purposes of constructing a purpose-built records centre.

Keywords

Converted building, records centre, inactive records management, public records, Gweru Records Centre

Introduction

Shepherd and Yeo (2003) aver that records go through active, semi-active and in-active stages in their life cycle. Active records are required to support the day-to-day activities of the organization and are usually housed close to the creators of these records. During their semi-active stage records are normally housed in inactive storage facilities or records centres which the University of Calgary (2010) defines as “a facility used for low-cost storage of inactive and semi-active records before those records are destroyed or transferred to an archives”. The University of Toronto (2110) indicates that a records centre can be seen as “a facility separated either physically or administratively from the archives, used to store and provide reference service for semi-active and inactive records of the creating agency pending the ultimate disposition of the material.”

According to Mabbs (1974:13) the need to establish records centres stems from “the very large quantities of records which are produced by modern administrative organizations and the necessity to keep them as economically as possible before they can be destroyed or transferred to the National Archives.” Mabbs (1974:23-24) further indicates that the aims of the records centre and the records management procedures associated with its use are:

1. To prevent the unnecessary use of space in premises used as offices for public departments and other bodies for storage of records which are no longer in active use.

2. To prevent the use of the Archives (the historical archives) for storage of papers which retain sufficient administrative use to make impossible the elimination of those which have no value for historical research, and which have not yet reached the age at which they can be made available.
3. To ensure that records which are no longer in active use are subjected to effective procedures for the identification of those which can be destroyed at the end of agreed retention periods, and those which should be transferred to the Archives.
4. To provide a service for making the documents stored in a central repository (or information taken from those documents) available to the various organizations to which they belong
5. To effect economies in the cost of storing and servicing records which are not in frequent use by concentrating them in repositories built, equipped and staffed by economical standards.

Robek, Brown and Stephens (1996:463) best summed the role played by records centres in the management of records when they noted that “a well-run records centre can save an organization thousands of dollars per year, chiefly by economies in space and equipment”. Robek, Brown and Stephens (1996:463) further assert that “the selection of the records centre facility requires among other concerns considerations of space requirements, security and location” while Angel (1968:5) noted that the main function of records centres is “to receive , store, service, process and provide security for records that are not sufficiently active to be retained in valuable office or operating space but are too active to be retired directly to the archives or are still too valuable to be sent to the waste paper dealer”. Angel (1996) compared the functions of the records centre to the Italian deity Janus a god of gates and doors facing two directions- towards the offices from which the records come and towards the archives or waste paper dealer to which the records eventually go. The records centre was also compared to the biblical purgatory or limbo where souls go to await their final fate.

Today, two types of records centres exist: onsite records centres and offsite or commercial records centres. There are several advantages to be gained from operating an onsite records centre. Onsite records centres provide easy and speedy retrieval service to their users and ensure that records security is guaranteed as any lapses in security issues are easily observed by the parent organization. Moreover, onsite records centres may be cheaper to operate as resources can easily be shared with the parent organization. Despite these advantages, onsite records centres suffer from some of the following weaknesses: accommodation is likely to be limited as the focus of the parent organization may not include the storage of its semi-current and non-current records. It is also common practice for onsite records centres to be located in unsuitable storage areas such as basements, or areas with pipes, odd shapes or low ceilings.

In contrast commercial records centres:

are businesses that exist in almost every community that generally provide three levels of service to governmental, non-profit, corporate or firm organizational clients; storage, retrieval, and other professional records management services (Business Records Management 2011).

In most cases, commercial records centres are purpose-built or converted buildings which have been set up with full knowledge of the risks and risks compensated for. These facilities provide

low-cost facilities as they are usually located in cheaper locations far away from high cost business locations. Moreover, commercial records centres provide high capacity storage, thus lowering the costs of storing records and are designed with disaster protection measures in place, thus provide a secure environment for the records. Archival and records centre buildings need to provide adequate facilities for the protection of documents against damage or deterioration (Forde 1999:21).

The actual location of the records centre is of paramount importance if the centre is to achieve the goals for which it was established. Ideally, the record centre should be located in a safe environment preferably isolated from other buildings as a precautionary measure against disasters. Moreover, the site should not be far away from offices it is expected to serve. Areas liable to flooding should be avoided as much as possible as they pose a major threat to the stored records in the event of floods.

The quality of archives is crucially dependent on the way in which the records have been managed during the current and semi-current stages (Mazikana 1993:14). Poor records storage facilities are one of the obstacles hindering access to information in records (Kemoni, Wamukoya & Kiplang'at 2003:40; Mnjama 2003). Wallace, Lee and Dexter (1992:291) posit that a well-thought-out plan is needed in order for the records centre to accomplish its purpose. Mazikana (1990:4.7) has identified the following six basic characteristics related to Records Centres:

- a) They are built away from city centres in areas where land is relatively cheap.
- b) They are situated in areas where there is minimal atmospheric pollution.
- c) They utilize high density shelving in order to maximize floor area usage and lower storage costs.
- d) They provide secure accommodation for records, protecting them from dust, dirt, heat, humidity and sunlight.
- e) They provide access facilities enabling depositors to request and use the records as need arise.
- f) They are also able to act as filtration plants enabling records of an ephemeral and short-term value to be identified and disposed of and those of a permanent and enduring value to be protected and preserved.

It cannot be overstated that a records centre must be environmentally secure, as a place where valuable documents and information must be maintained in a usable state for long periods (Roper & Millar 1999: 8). Purpose-built records centre buildings will ensure prolonged survival of documents due to the strength of their structure, safety and security features built into them and environmental monitoring and control equipment to avoid the irreversible loss of our earliest recorded memory due to deterioration and disasters (Cook 1977: 59; Minicka 2006: 55; Ramokate 2006: 88; Roper & Millar 1999: 45). It is not always possible to obtain funding for a new records centre and most institutions end up utilizing facilities that were never planned as records centres. It is common practice to convert old buildings into records centres or to utilize warehouses for this purpose but converting old buildings into records centres has some limitations. As Mabbs (1974: 27) has rightly observed, converting existing building into records centres has certain drawbacks. He indicates that:

One of the major obstacles to satisfactory conversion arises from the great weight papers, and the high structural cost of providing floors capable of taking the heavy load. It is also necessary in most cases to provide offices, reference rooms, sorting rooms, and perhaps rooms for fumigation, photocopying, conservation work and other services. Rarely is it possible to convert existing buildings so as to make the greatest use of

available space for storage of records, and at the same time provide office space and service areas to make for a high degree of operating efficiently.

Those in favour of erecting new buildings for records centres argue that in designing new buildings it is possible to “impose all on the architect the standards required to ensure good and economical storage with adequate planning of facilities required for handling the records and servicing them” (Mabbs 1974: 28).

The United Nations Archives and Records Management Section (2006) advises that in order to comply with archives and records management standards, semi-active records storage must:

- (i) Allow the timely retrieval of stored records meeting office-defined targets.
- (ii) Protect records from fire, flood and other damage.
- (iii) Restrict access to appropriate individuals and provide adequate security to prevent unauthorized access.
- (iv) Maintain environmental conditions that meet applicable standards.
- (v) Be free of any water, gas or electricity supply running through it.
- (vi) Be racked out with shelving that has a top shelf acting as a roof and a bottom shelf at least 6 inches/15 cm off the ground.

The section that follows provides background information to Gweru Records Centre in Zimbabwe.

Gweru Records Centre (GRC)

The National Archives of Zimbabwe has a statutory responsibility to manage public records throughout the country. The history of records and archives management in Zimbabwe can be traced back to 1935 when an archives office was established in Salisbury; present day Harare (Ngulube, Murambiwa, Masuku & Sigauke 2012). NAZ was founded through an Act of parliament passed on 1 September 1935 and has four professional sections; Public Archives and Research, Library, Technical and Records Management all headed by archivists. All the four sections aim at achieving and fulfilling NAZ’s mission statement which is; “To acquire, preserve and provide access to documentation, in whatever format which comprises a legal and historical record of Zimbabwe’s past and present”.

In its efforts to manage public records, Zimbabwe National Archives has since its inception opened various centres in Harare (1935), Bulawayo (1966), Mutare (1986), Gweru (1989), Masvingo (1989) and Chinhoyi (2000) (Murambiwa, Ngulube, Masuku & Sigauke 2012). Save for Harare and Bulawayo all the other records centres are utilizing converted and rented accommodation. Records Centres are an integral part of the National Archives of Zimbabwe. They are an extension of Government and parastatal registry system providing secondary storage facilities for semi and non-current public records. Some of the above records centres are purpose built structures while others are in buildings that were not initially planned with the storage of records in mind. This study therefore sought to assess the suitability of GRC as a facility for the storage of semi-active public records. The major services provided by the records centers are (Government of the Republic of Zimbabwe 2011):-

- (i) Providing storage facilities for semi-current records (i.e. those under 25 years).
- (ii) File reference service.
- (iii) Conducting records management surveys.

- (iv) Training registry staff through workshops and seminars.
- (v) Industrial attachment for students undertaking relevant courses from tertiary institutions.
- (vi) Providing shredding facilities for time expired records.
- (vii) Facilitating and supervising the destruction of classified records.
- (viii) Appraisal of records in liaison with depositing departments/ministries.
- (ix) Transfer of records to the Public Archives which have been identified for their permanent historical, informational/evidential, legal, fiscal scientific and research values.

GRC is one of the six NAZ records centres that is used for the storage of inactive records. The public sector bodies deposit their semi-current and non-current records with NAZ Records Centre. The records belong to the originating departments which are thus free, for instance to withdraw the records permanently for decision making purposes (Cook 1977:58; Wallace, Lee & Dexter 1992:292; Mazikana 1990:4.9).

Statement of the problem

GRC started operating in 1989. However, since its inception no empirical assessment of the records centre has been undertaken to determine if it is operating within the requirements of any international best practice standards such as ISO 15489 (2001) for managing records. This study therefore sought to assess the suitability of GRC in housing semi-current records. As indicated above, except for Harare and Bulawayo, all other records centres in Zimbabwe were operating from converted or leased buildings which may not necessarily meet records centre requirements. This research was prompted by the desire to establish the housekeeping practices and suitability of GRC in safeguarding public semi-current records and pre-archival materials that had the potential to be part of the nation's documentary heritage. Records of enduring value end up as archives forming part of the cultural heritage hence the need to safeguard them from threats.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- a) establish the location of Gweru Records Centre(GRC);
- b) examine the condition of the GRC building;
- c) find out the suitability of the GRC record storage conditions;
- d) evaluate the effectiveness of housekeeping issues; and
- e) determine the records appraisal practices at GRC.

Methodology

In order to collect data for this study, the researchers used both qualitative and quantitative data gathering techniques for triangulation purposes (Ngulube 2010). The study employed questionnaires, interviews, observations and content analysis as tools for data gathering. The GRC staff, the Chief Archivist (Records, NAZ) and the Director of NAZ were participants in this study. These officers are involved in NAZ policy formulation and implementation. All of these completed a questionnaire. To complement the data gathered through observation and the questionnaire the researchers held interviews with the Director, Chief Archivist (Records, NAZ), GRC Archivist and Records Management Officer (GRC). These were purposively sampled considering their level of education and experience.

Findings and discussions

Section.8.3.3 of ISO 15489 (2001) stipulates that:

appropriate storage environment and storage media, physical protective materials, handling procedures and storage systems should be considered when designing records system. Knowing how long the records will need to be kept and maintained will affect decisions on storage media. The records system should address disaster preparedness to ensure that risks are identified and mitigated. Integrity should be demonstrably maintained during and after recovery.

Based on the above statement, this study sought to determine whether GRC was in compliance with these broad ISO requirements. The findings are reported under various sub-headings.

Location of the Gweru Records Centre (GRC)

The first aspect this study sought to determine was the physical location of GRC. The findings of the study indicated that the records centre is located at the intersection of Main Street (busy main road) and the Harare-Bulawayo railway line. Automobiles and the goods train were the major sources of gaseous contaminants. The records were also exposed to the dangers of the coal dust blown from the trains. Pollutants such as dirt, dust, soot, carbon, tar and other particles are dangerous to records (Shepherd & Yeo 2003: 210; Bottomley, 1986: 240). The railway vibrations continued to weaken the structural designs of the Old Prison Complex building.

From the observations supported by face-to-face interviews held with the Archivist (GRC) the study established that GRC was housed in a converted building built in 1937 and which was initially used as a prison hence its name the Old Prison Complex. Nine other government departments were accommodated there as well. Various categories of people pass through this place in search of various services and this compromised the security of records.

The use of converted buildings was not new. Many records centres and archives offices are housed in buildings that were not initially intended for that purpose (Ngulube 2009). For instance, Cumbria Records Centre in the UK was housed in a converted building, which “provides secure, low-cost storage for the equivalent of 1000 office filing cabinets” (Cumbria County Council 2011). It must however be noted that converted buildings may not meet all the requirements for the storage of records. This is a view that is supported by Roper and Millar (1999: 23) who show that “in many instances, records centers or archival institutions may be in buildings originally used for another purpose; consequently, air circulation may not be adequate.” Similar sentiments were also expressed by Parker (1999: 100) who recommends that the building must be dustproof or at least sealed to prevent dust from being generated by the abrasion of the floor.

From the above findings, it can be argued that the location of GRC did not provide an ideal location for the storage of records. This was so because pollutants, security considerations, fire, theft, vandalism and arson were all potential threats to the records centre holdings. Fire is regarded as one of the biggest hazards for records and besides natural disasters, may be caused by humans through arson and vandalism. The fact that a varied set of people visited the complex for various services posed a security risk to records.

Records security

Section 9.6 of ISO 15489 (2001) states that:

records require storage conditions and handling processes that take into account their specific physical chemical properties. Records of continuing value, irrespective of format, require higher quality storage and handling to preserve them for as long as that value exists. Storage conditions and handling processes should be designed to protect records from unauthorized access, loss or destruction and from theft and disaster.

Security entails providing a safe haven for records in a records centre. The whole records centre must be provided with measures to ensure that there are no routes for unauthorized entry. Windows, doors and emergency exits must be identified and alarms outfitted for intruders (Ritzenthaler 1993; 64). Distribution of keys must be well managed to ensure responsibility and accountability in the event of an query arising. The building must be highly secured to avoid unauthorized intrusion which can result in theft, malicious damage, carelessness, vandalism, abuse and arson on the records and the building (Shepherd & Yeo 2003: 207; Ritzenthaler 1993; 49) because people can be a greater menace than both microorganisms and pests.

As a result, this study sought to determine if the building housing GRC provided adequate security for the records. The findings of the study revealed that the documents at GRC were at risk and that the building did not provide adequate security to the records housed there. It may be too expensive to put up a purpose-built building but Chida (1994:27) argues that:

information professionals today increasingly recognize the fact that it is far more cost-effective and sensible to invest in climate and light control, fire protection, security, good housekeeping and storage, than ignore such crucial issues only to pay far more dearly for the care of needlessly damaged documents.

Storage facilities

Agere, Lemieux and Mazikana (1999:85) posit that for a records centre to serve its purpose effectively the floors should be designed and constructed so as to reduce the accumulation of dust and dirt in the facility. This study therefore sought to determine the suitability of the records storage conditions at GRC. The study established that GRC had five repositories scattered in Gweru town. To a certain extent this compromised security of the records centre holdings as the storage facilities were not well-secured. There were no separate storage areas for the different formats of materials held in the records centre which included serials, maps, files, letters, diaries, account books, photographs, documents, posters, leaflets and brochures. Such materials were just shelved as they were acquired.

The records centre utilised high-density metal shelving in order to make maximum use of space. However, the metal shelves on which GRC records were shelved were not only durable but provided security to records from termites and they can resist fires. The major problem observed in the storage areas was that already the shelves were full and could not absorb any new collections. Regrettably some of the records were directly on the floor in torn storage boxes. The Archivist revealed that there were no boxes to re-box the records due to shortage of funds to replenish the acid free boxes. The results support Ngulube's (2009: 4) view that records and archives are in danger if measures are not taken to improve their storage. This was consistent with Mnjama's (2005) findings that Zimbabwe was reeling under economic hardships which impacted negatively on funding for national archives.

Environmental conditions: temperature, humidity and light

The United Nations Archives and Records Management Section (2006) proposes that:

although paper is surprisingly robust, it is good practice to store paper records in an environment which has low temperature and humidity. Digital and magnetic media as well as audio-visual media such as photographic prints, film and microfilm require more stringent environmental conditions. All these media suffer if the environment fluctuates.

For this reason this study sought to assess the environmental conditions prevailing in the storage facilities at GRC.

Through observations, the researchers noted that of the five repositories, only one had curtains. The windows allowed in sunlight directly on to the storage boxes and bundles of oversized records. The light is even more dangerous in that, besides causing paper to turn brown and whitish, the heat generated by the lamps weakens paper and makes it brittle. The labels on all storage boxes had faded making it difficult to identify and retrieve the records. The direct sunlight had a bleaching effect on the boxes that were close to the walls. The results are consistent with the studies done by Akussah (2006:1) and Ngulube (2005:162).

In order to control the amount of light entering into the Records Centre, it is suggested that light levels in the building be monitored through various means such as curtaining; or installing blinds (Bottomley 1986: 240). Sunlight affects the longevity of collections (Ritzenthaler 1993; 49; Roper & Millar 1999:54; Bottomley 1986: 240).

Fluctuating temperatures and humidity have serious consequences on paper-based documentary heritage. This view concurs with Peters (1998: 42) and Parker (1999: 100) who stated that the environmental conditions in the storage area must be stable with the maintenance of proper temperature and relative humidity (RH) in archives storage areas to avoid the deterioration of materials. Ngulube (2005: 161-2) observes that complete climate control provided by heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are costly and difficult to install, and expensive to operate and maintain. Some alternative strategies such as the “green” environment should be pursued.

On one of the researchers’ numerous visits during a rainy week, the researchers observed mould growth. This could have been encouraged by the stagnant air, darkness and high temperature, as the rooms were relatively warm. The researchers observed that, due to the shortage of shelving space, some records were kept on the floor. From their experience and knowledge about records management all respondents agreed that records were often affected by water either from leaking roofs or dampness and high humidity.

Observation helped the researchers experience heavy smells in the four scattered repositories. By touching the records the researchers noted that some semi-current records were already brittle and breaking, there was evidence of paper decomposition due to poor paper quality and, uncontrolled temperature and humidity. The researchers also observed a total absence of an air-conditioning system yet such a device ensures a dust free environment to improve air quality.

Air quality affects the longevity of the paper collections. As the researchers strolled through the repositories they observed some bound records that had been discolored, soiled and disfigured by particles such as soot from the adjacent smoke emitting industries.

As regards regular cleaning of the records centre, interviews with the Archivist revealed that the frequency of cleaning was erratic. When the Office Orderly (messenger/cleaner) was away, especially on leave, the situation became worse. Another observation was that repositories were not cleaned when the Office Orderly was not at work.

The building and pest management

Harvey (1994:45) asserts that “the insects which mostly cause damage in libraries throughout the world are cockroaches, silverfish, termites, book-lice and beetles.” For this reason, this study sought to investigate the existence of any of these pests in the records centre. The study established that the building was prone to attacks from biological agents such as rodents, mice, rats, termites, cockroaches, vermin which hide in the cracks and other parts of the building. According to the Records Management Officer cockroaches were difficult to deal with at the records centre due to the sharing of accommodation with other departments.

Sharing the premises seems to compound GRC pest management problems thus vindicating Parker (1999:101) who recommends that storage facility itself must be in a detached building and must not share space with other operations on the site. GRC administered its fumigation separately. However, if it were done jointly with all other departments, fumigation would be effective. Fumigation was ineffective because pests would escape to the neighbouring departments. However, rats and mice disappeared after taking the poisonous pellets or any substance used as baits. The damage caused by biological agents such as pests is irreversible since they can nibble away at collection items or eat them in their entirety, as they build their nests with shredded paper (Shepherd & Yeo 2003: 208; Pederson 1987: 44; Ritzenthaler 1993: 49). Their droppings are corrosive and can leave permanent stains (Ritzenthaler 1993: 49) so regular inspections of the building, storage areas and fumigation of the whole building safeguards against pests. The rat population could be explained by the fact that the Old Prison Complex was surrounded by houses and garbage was thrown all over with the Gweru City Council garbage collectors failing to cope due to economic woes. Besides the ageing building’s cracks gave the pests much needed shelter. Termites appeared and reappeared and the damage to records was very severe, soiling the collections. This vindicates Ritzenthaler (1993:46) that insects, rodents such as rats, mice and squirrels, can nibble away at collection items or eat them in their entirety. The effect of termites was attributed to the age of the building and the lack of effective fumigant substances to deal with the termites.

Moreover, inspection of the building housing the records centre revealed that the walls and floors were cracking leaving crevices for insects and other pests to hide in. In one box shown to the researchers rats had chewed up the files, shredding them to make nests. Some of the records observed were stained by the rats and mice droppings. The trains’ vibrations and ageing building explain the emergence of numerous cracks and floor crevices. The roof continued to leak. The corrugated iron sheets were wearing out due to age and rust. The gutters were falling apart as a result of age and were unable to direct collected rain water. Some of the records have been rain soaked to such an extent that if there is need to consult them the decision-maker may not be able to decipher the words or make head or tail of the information contained therein. While some of the above factors were beyond the control of the staff working at the records centre there were aspects which could have been dealt with such as pest eradication which did not require large sums of money.

To deter pests, proper sealing of the exterior of the building may help prevent pests from entering the building and all holes, cracks or openings should be closed (Ogden 2008:1). Periodic

searches and condition surveys may be done for evidence of pest activity and if evidence such as droppings were found then traps may be used.

Condition survey of the building

To establish the suitability of GRC for housing semi-current records a question on the condition of pre-archival records was asked. The study established that some of the pre-archival records were already in poor condition due to the unfavorable environment, ageing building and the storage conditions. During stocktaking and condition survey the staff look for the presence of insects' infestation, mould growth, and identify any physical deterioration or damage of documents.

Funding

Ngulube and Tafor (2006:63) argued that, “[f]unding is key to formulating and implementing effective and efficient records and archival services...”. Another aspect this study sought to determine related to funding. The findings of the study indicate that NAZ is underfunded for it to execute its records management programmes and this has been also echoed in other studies (Kemoni & Ngulube 2007; Mazikana 1990). Funds were required to put up purpose-built records centres. GRC secured a stand in the year 2000 for the purpose-built structure but the project could not take off due to underfunding and the economic woes in the country. NAZ has always received the lowest treatment in terms of fund and resource allocation within the Ministry of Home Affairs, its parent government department, thus vindicating Mnjama (2005:466)'s observation that most governments in the ESARBICA region have rated archival services to be areas of low priority when it comes to national development projects. This is consistent with Mazikana (1990:73) who posits that, “[a]s long as archival institutions continue to be identified primarily as cultural organisations then they will, in the competition for the allocation of scarce resources, continue to be given the low priority that cultural activities generally receive.” This explains why NAZ is failing to put up a purpose-built records centre in Gweru.

Processing of records at Gweru Records Centre

This study sought to determine if records were regularly appraised at GRC. The findings of the study revealed that for various reasons no regular appraisal of records was taking place at the centre, resulting in backlog accumulations of unprocessed records. Zimbabwe is not the only country where appraisal of records is not effectively taking place. During the 2005 ESARBICA conference held at Gaborone Botswana, a Namibian delegate reported that “the main problem with government archives is that no appraisal is taking place, for lack of qualified staff, and therefore the existing space is getting exhausted” (National Archives of Namibia 2005:2). These findings are consistent with those from a study conducted by Garaba (2005: 90) that revealed that “[a]rchival institutions within ESARBICA were currently facing a huge backlog of unappraised records”. The study suggested that “the reason lay primarily in the lack of expertise to conduct the exercise and was also due to lack of co-operation by departments with records whose disposal authority has been applied for, but not affirmed” (Garaba 2005: 90). The failure to appraise semi-current records regularly may partially be attributed to the low staffing level at the records centre. This is a problem which Mazikana (1999:5) also noted when he argues “there is an increasing attrition rate on trained professionals and technocrats who are leaving for what is perceived to be greener pastures”.

Recommendations

The findings of this study have revealed major weaknesses in relation to GRC. The study has shown that the records at GRC were under threat and as such NAZ should put up a purpose-built records centre to avoid further damage of documents in custody. On different occasions termites have soiled records, some records have been rain-soaked because of roof leaks, and rats have shredded some files. It was evident that some of the files were becoming brittle due to fluctuating temperature and humidity.

In view of the above findings, the study recommends that the NAZ should construct a purpose-built records centre. Utilising an adapted government building has problems that come with shared occupation. The study recommends that resources permitting, GRC should be relocated somewhere far away from the railway line, far away from the Gweru CBD and industries. Its current location poses a threat to its documentary heritage.

Resources permitting the government may look for alternative accommodation to house the documents that GRC collects in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. The current adapted building may as well be subjected to basic repairs on the roof, and cracking floors. Both GRC staff and management should regularly inspect the building and premises to ensure that records are not subjected to further damage including biological agents.

The records centre is also urged to embark on an aggressive appraisal programme of records held in the Centre. In this way, records of archival value will be accessioned into the Zimbabwe National Archives, at Harare, and those of no further value will be disposed of at the expiry of agreed retention periods in order to create space for newer records.

Increasingly, archival institutions are finding it difficult to obtain adequate funding from the national treasury. As an alternative, the government may consider operating the GRC as a public-private commercial records centre that may generate income for the government. The Centre may serve such big organisations in the Midlands province such as Bata Shoe Company, Midlands State University, UNKI Mine, and Zimbabwe Iron and Steel Company. If converted to a commercial records centre GRC may offer specialist storage and consultancy services on a commercial basis.

In conclusion, the study recommends that records need to be protected from various threats that can destroy the evidence in the records. Besides material of archival nature may not reach the final stage and if they did they will be in bad shape. As part of records management the records need to be safeguarded, remain intact, secure and accessible to the public.

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