

Overview of archival and records management developments in the ESARBICA region

Segomotso Masegonyana Keakopa

Segomotso Masegonyana Keakopa holds a Bachelors of Humanities (History and English) from the University of Botswana, and a Master of Arts in Archives and Records Management and PhD in Electronic Records Management, both from University College London. In addition to archival and records management training, she has certificates in Human Resource Management (BIAC), and Customer Relations (Institute of Development Management, IDM). She started her career in 1993 as an Archivist with Botswana National Archives and Records Services and joined the University of Botswana in 1997 as a lecturer, a position she currently holds. She teaches and researches in the areas of archives administration and electronic records management. She has been in consultancies in records management and is currently on the editorial board of the *Eastern and Southern African Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) Journal*. She has also worked with the International Records Management Trust (IRMT) producing training modules on electronic records management.

This article traces archival and records management developments in the Eastern and Southern African Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA). Using examples from selected countries in the region, the article argues that developments in this region have, ever since the establishment of archival institutions, focused on concerns that have mounted from the independence period. Some of these concerns included: collection and preservation of oral traditions; preservation and conservation of archival materials; congestion of registries; frustrations in retrieval of information; limited budgetary provision; and inadequate staffing levels.

While the article argues that professionals in the region need to reposition themselves to play a new role in the management of electronic records, it recognises the need to also continue addressing the above concerns to ensure that archival institutions remain relevant in their 'traditional' role. To help cope with the challenges faced by archivists and records managers in the region, the article argues that strengthened archival leadership, and forming partnership with stakeholders, would be a good step in the right direction. The article concludes by proposing that the region needs coordinated efforts and detailed research to find better solutions and inform regional policies in archival and records management developments.

KEY WORDS: Archives; ESARBICA; Electronic Records; Records Management

1 Introduction

The Eastern and Southern African Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) is one of the 13 branches of the International Council on Archives (ICA) formed in 1969 to carry out the aims and objectives of the mother body, the ICA. At its formation, the branch was known as the East and Central African Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ECARBICA)¹ because its membership extended to countries in the central African region. The main objective of the ICA is to bring together national archives administrations, professional associations of archivists, regional and local archives, archives of other organisations, as well as individual archivists, so that they are able to share and exchange information and experiences.² Since its formation in 1948, the ICA has played a major role in encouraging the sharing and exchange of information among international archives and records management professionals, and in the creation of practical and professional products. Its role, however, has been focused on providing an international context to projects undertaken around the world on the management of archives and records through its various committees, and ESARBICA could use this platform for getting support.

Drawn from the ICA's main objective, ESARBICA's specific objectives can be summed up as: establishing, maintaining and strengthening

cooperation between archivists; promoting preservation of archival heritage; facilitating use of archival materials; sponsoring professional training of archivists in the region; and coordinating the collection and preservation of oral traditions. Without doubt, ESARBICA has made tremendous efforts in addressing some of these objectives and has been one of the most active branches of the ICA. It has also been able to convene all its meetings without fail since its formation. Its agenda over the years has, as shown in its conference resolutions, focused on the challenges that have mounted since member states gained their independence. Although the regional branch faces an uncertain future resulting from the challenges occasioned by new technologies, it has, however, registered significant progress in a number of areas.³ This article, therefore, is an attempt to trace the challenges and progress made so far in archival and records management developments in the region with a view to proposing ways in which the challenges could be addressed if archival institutions in the region are to remain relevant in the information age. Further, the article is motivated by one of ESARBICA's 1986 resolutions which called for members to undertake detailed studies on the evolution of their archival institutions.⁴

2 Methodology

This paper is based on extensive desk research of studies in archives and records management in the ESARBICA region. Interactions and informal discussions with professionals including directors of archival institutions at different ESARBICA forums, notably at conferences in Mozambique (2003), Tanzania (2007) and Namibia (2009), informs some of the conclusions made. Experiences and observations from a visit to the National Archives of Malawi in 2008 as a trainer have also been used in the paper. Some information used is based on the author's personal experience having worked as an Archivist with the Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS) and as lecturer in archives and records management at the University of Botswana. Reviews of some case studies by the International Records Management Trust (IRMT) in the region have been used to strengthen some arguments in the paper.

3 Purpose and significance of the paper

The main purpose of this paper is to examine archival and records management developments in ESARBICA using selected examples of countries in the region. It also reviews the status of archival institutions and their role in the management of public sector records. By taking stock of developments in the region so far, the paper proposes how some of the challenges could be addressed. The paper will, therefore, be significant in the following ways:

1. it will provide information on developments in the region which will help recordkeeping professionals in reflecting on achievements and challenges, and plan the way forward on policy development;
2. it will also contribute to the literature in the region and will be a useful reference tool for researchers and students in universities in the region; and
3. archival institutions in the region will benefit from information in the paper as they learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses.

4 A brief survey of developments in the region

Since its formation in 1969, ESARBICA's meetings and conferences have focused on the challenges that members faced since the establishment of archival institutions in the region. The concerns raised during these meetings and conferences have revolved around: concerns of building new administrative structures; collection and preservation of oral traditions; repatriation of migrated archives; neglected records and backlogs of unprocessed records in registries;⁵ poorly inherited registries with low status; human resource development including education and training; outdated archival legislation; preservation and conservation issues (including disaster preparedness); unsuitable archival buildings for storage of archival collections; limited budgetary provisions; and incomprehensive findings aids. The challenges have now become complex and at the moment they centre around: the need to raise awareness on the importance of records and archives; design and implementation of integrated records management programs; and the challenges of managing electronics records. In spite of its regional role, ESARBICA has continued to face a number of challenges which

most member states are still grappling with today, with some registering encouraging progress in a number of areas as discussed below.

4.1 Progress on oral traditions programs

Oral traditions play a significant role in preservation of any nation's cultural heritage. This is even more important in Africa where in the past much of the information was not written down but was preserved in the minds of older people and was passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth. Archival institutions in Africa which house archival materials inherited from colonial administrations are today seen as cultural institutions housing Africa's cultural heritage. However, one may wonder how 'cultural' and 'African' these materials are, bearing in mind the fact that they were created by colonial administrators who never understood or appreciated African cultural beliefs and practices. It is, therefore, not surprising that there are obvious gaps in archival collections in Africa, and arguably these collections do not reflect a true and complete story on Africa and about Africans. This is already creating a challenge for archival institutions in Africa to collect and preserve oral traditions to supplement and authenticate colonial records so that these institutions are not seen as only transmitters of the colonial legacy. The need for this has been a concern for ESARBICA member states, as has emerged from a number of its conference resolutions, as in the following years: 1980; 1982; 1984; 1993; 1995; 1997; 1999; and 2001.⁶ From a study conducted in Swaziland by Phumzile and Wamukoya,⁷ it emerged that archival materials still fall short of meeting the information needs of researchers. This could be explained by the fact that in many of the archival collections in the region there is still a need to ensure gaps in existing collections are filled. An oral tradition program is one way which archival institutions in the region should seriously consider to fill in missing information in existing collections. In spite of this, Tough⁸ found that for some there is still a lack of appreciation in capturing oral cultures.

The role that oral traditions can play in reconstructing African history therefore cannot be underestimated. A number of archival institutions in the region, among them Botswana, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Lesotho have recognised the significance of orality and have as a

result established oral traditions programs to collect oral testimonies and fill in gaps in written sources. For example, the Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS) started its oral traditions program in 1982 and was able to conduct interviews on various topics to supplement its collections.⁹ At that time the Oral Traditions Association of Botswana (OTABO) which was coordinated by BNARS was also active and it ensured coordination of efforts.¹⁰ Both the program and the association have since been dysfunctional. In South Africa, the National Archives and Records Service (NARS) established its program to address the imbalances and omissions from the colonial and apartheid era. So far a database of all collections by other institutions involved in the collection of oral history has been created. Institutions are also encouraged to deposit their collections with the National Film and Sound Archives which is a unit within NARS.¹¹ The Oral History Association of South Africa is playing a major role at the national level in collecting the past history and heritage of South Africans.¹² Efforts in terms of national coordination to ensure preservation of oral materials are still needed in other countries.

There are, however, different views among archivists in the region on whether archival institutions should be involved in oral traditions. Those who are against their involvement cite limited resources, and lack of training in the methodology of orality, and argue that other professionals such as historians should be the ones collecting oral traditions. Mazikana has observed that the role of archivists in oral traditions and oral history has generated controversy due to lack of resources.¹³ Many archivists feel that available resources and other pressing concerns of managing current records make them incapable of involvement in oral tradition yet they appreciate its role in filling in gaps in written sources. As observed by Mnjama,¹⁴ Oral Traditions at the Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service is thought to be non-core. Mazikana and Moss have argued that oral traditions and oral history are not welcome as legitimate archival activities.¹⁵ This according to the scholars is because archivists have a lot to cope with in the management of current records and the impact of technology in their work. Regardless of whether archivists get involved or not, the authors contend that oral traditions and oral history will continue to have a significant impact on the role of archivists.

4.2 Migrated archives

Migrated archives in the context of ESARBICA can be defined as those records that were originally created and maintained by colonial administrators in Africa but were moved out of the continent at the end of the colonial period.¹⁶ Repatriation of migrated archives has been one of the topical issues at ESARBICA conferences. Migrated archives are of interest to archival institutions in the region for a number of reasons. Firstly, it could be argued that they were 'inappropriately' removed from African countries and as such should be returned to Africa. Secondly, removal of these records has created gaps in information that exist and as such their repatriation will help filling those gaps and supplementing whatever records are in existence. Appreciating the importance of these records, archival institutions in ESARBICA have made efforts in identifying migrated records related to their countries that were taken away at the end of colonialism and are now in the advanced stages of repatriating them. Kenya has done well in this area as it has been able to obtain copies of their migrated archives from the United Kingdom. Mnjama has covered in much detail specific cases of what he refers to as archival claims relating to the ESARBICA region and Kenya's efforts in repatriation of these records.¹⁷ Botswana has also been able to compile a list of what exists beyond its borders notably in the United Kingdom, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa and efforts are continuing to repatriate them.¹⁸ Copies of microfilms have already been repatriated from the United Kingdom and the Lutheran Hermannsburg Mission with the assistance of the German government. Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland have also migrated archives in South Africa which were part of the High Commission Territories.

Namibia, which until 1991 was administered from South Africa, had most of its records preserved in that country. Efforts to repatriate records from South Africa only started in 1994 after South Africa gained its independence. So far the Administration General records have been repatriated and there is hope in the future to recover military and police files.¹⁹ The records are needed to close gaps in the history of Namibia. The National Archives of Namibia through the Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and Liberation Struggle aims to capture stories from the liberation movement.

Through the Aluka project, collections on the struggle for freedom in repositories in North America and Western Europe were repatriated. A committee has also been set up to identify materials not available regionally so that efforts are made to repatriate them.²⁰ The whole process of repatriation of these records should be handled delicately as there may be legal implications. While archival institutions in the region may have the right to claim ownership to these records, the countries which have custody of these documents may equally claim ownership. This is because they created the records even though the records were about Africa and Africans. A collaborative approach should be used in negotiating the return of these records either as originals or copies.

4.3 Backlogs of unprocessed records in registries

Tough has traced the historical development of archival and registry systems in the Commonwealth countries from the colonial period and argues that for colonies under Britain, recordkeeping was built on recordkeeping systems.²¹ From the colonial period onwards, the responsibility for records management was problematic as there was a shortage of skilled staff and inadequate resources.

It follows, therefore, that most archival institutions in the ESARBCA region inherited registries with low status, a factor which resulted in records being neglected. The situation was such that staff charged with the responsibility for managing records were untrained; records were poorly organised making retrieval difficult if not impossible and there were no systems to ensure a balance between creation and disposition of records, leading to congestion of registries with current, semi-current and non-current records.

Even though a number of archival institutions have been given an additional responsibility to manage records and dispose of those no longer needed for current business, their efforts in doing this are still far from clearing backlogs of records congesting registries. IRMT assisted Tanzania with management of non-current records as part of public sector reforms. The focus at that time was the management of personnel and financial records.²² Videos of the case study are available for download from the IRMT website at <<http://www.irmt.org>>. As part of the project, registries were decongested and accumulations of records

appraised. Tanzania has since established a records management program and the national archive is fully involved in the management of public sector records. There are still many records awaiting appraisal in many countries and archival institutions appear overwhelmed and unable to keep pace with large accumulations of records waiting to be processed. Record surveys are not regularly conducted in Namibia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.²³ Likewise, appraisal is also not conducted regularly and systematically. Inadequate staffing levels and lack of retention schedules have been contributing factors. Appraisal of records at BNARS is still lagging behind and Swaziland only started appraising its records in 2003.²⁴

4.4 Human resource development and training

There is evidence from a number of studies in the ESARBICA region suggesting that staffing has always been a problem since the establishment of archival institutions. As has been observed by Mnjama, many people promoted to senior management and heading archives have since left in Malawi, Tanzania, Botswana, South Africa, Namibia and Zambia.²⁵ Tough argues that problems over staff retention have persisted ever since the independence period, such as in Tanzania where many were lost to the private sector.²⁶ Similar observations emerge from a study by Ngulube and Tafor.²⁷ Just recently (March 2010), the BNARS Director was transferred to head Botswana National Library Services despite the fact that she has no professional training in the area. This has resulted in her juniors being elevated to leadership positions.

There is still a shortage of professional staff to carry out programs in many archival institutions in the region. The situation is worsened by the high rate of professional staff turnover that archival institutions are experiencing as many are now leaving and are able to command better and well-paying jobs elsewhere. As Phumzile and Wamukoya discovered, there is a serious shortage of skilled staff at the Swaziland National Archives, which is affecting services to researchers.²⁸ Worse still, the archives staff available are said to be inexperienced in delivering some professional services at the National Archives. Lack of professional personnel has been one of the main concerns in ESARBICA conferences since the 1970s.

Among concerns raised by those who have left archival institutions are: lack of motivation and support from leadership; slow progressions to positions of responsibility; and low salaries paid in the public service. This appears to be a serious crisis not only in Botswana but also in the rest of the region. Keakopa and Kalusopa have completed a research project entitled 'Professional staff turnover at the Botswana National Archives and Records Services'. This project has, among other things, identified some of the factors that have led to high professional staff turnover and has proposed measures that should be taken to address the crisis.²⁹ Essentially, the results of this study will be of help to other countries in the region facing similar challenges as Botswana. The high professional staff turnover has without doubt affected many archives and records management projects as these have in most cases been shelved pending recruitment of more staff.

As far as education and training are concerned, many archival institutions have since their establishment been faced with the challenges of developing professional courses for officers handling records and archives. At independence, most government agencies inherited a low calibre of staff in registries who had no training. Relevant training has been one of the major challenges in the region but member countries have since made efforts in developing professional courses offered through national and regional training houses.

A significant move in offering training to professional staff in the region in the 1970s was through the regional centre in Ghana which was established following one of the ECARBICA conference resolutions. This centre offered postgraduate training and managed to graduate a handful of the first generation of ESARBICA directors, including those from Botswana and Kenya. A number of universities and other training houses in the region have since been able to offer training, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level in archives and records management, although this still falls short of addressing the current challenges, particularly in the electronic environment.

However, it is worth mentioning that the University of Botswana boasts a sound training base in the region and has been able to attract students from Tanzania, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia, Malawi, Kenya and Nigeria, many graduating with Masters degrees and a few with PhDs

in archives and records management. Many more are expected to enrol in the 2010–2011 academic year. Some of the graduates from programs in Botswana are able to command jobs in the international market, notably in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Botswana has recently revised its program, replicating the approach taken in Kenya which features a core curriculum based on information and knowledge management with specialisations in library studies, information systems, and archives and records management. Kenya started humbly with a certificate program in archives administration at Kenya Polytechnic and today has one of the best training programs offering specialised courses under the instruction of some of the leading experts in archives and records management.³⁰ Kenya today prides itself with some of the finest professionals in ESARBICA.³¹ South Africa offers training in a number of its universities including University of Kwa Zulu Natal, Witwatersrand, the University of South Africa (UNISA) and the University of Johannesburg.³² NARS is also able to conduct training workshops in provinces.

As far as Namibia is concerned, the University of Namibia (UNAM) through the Department of Information and Communication Studies offers diploma and degree programs in librarianship, archival science and records management.³³ The program, like Botswana and Kenya, is also modeled on a harmonised approach which offers core courses during the first years and allows specialisations in the final years. Nengomasha, however, argues that there is still a need to shape the curricula and training needs for professionals. Currently, Namibia faces challenges as it only has one lecturer teaching records management.

Other member countries that have since established training courses at different levels include: Zambia, Tanzania, Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Swaziland, although some of this training is still basic in nature and not rich enough to meet current professional needs in the electronic environment.³⁴

Drawing from lessons in Europe and North America, Katuu argues that there is a need to balance theory and practice and to change the curricula regularly to keep pace with new developments.³⁵ Also emphasised is the role of professional associations in guiding the training agenda and providing curricula guidelines. Building

capacity in human resources should focus on professional education, training and continuing education.³⁶ According to Katuu, the training in the region lacks consensus on design and implementation of various programs.³⁷ However, identification of needs and priorities and strengthening of local training institutions can partly offer a solution.³⁸

Some countries in the region have in the past also encouraged archival staff visits for exchange of technical knowledge and experience. For example, Botswana did attach its officers in South Africa and Zimbabwe in the 1990s to get experience in conservation of archival materials.³⁹ These attachments were helpful as they imparted hands-on experience and prepared staff for further professional development.

4.5 Archival legislation

Most archival Acts in the region date as far back as the 1960s and 1970s and have not kept pace with new realities in the management of records and archives. For example, these Acts do not clearly state the national archives' mandate in the control of records through their life cycle, that is, from creation to disposition. A case in point is the Act of the National Archives of Swaziland which does not give the archives a clear mandate to take full control of records management activities in government agencies.⁴⁰ This, however, does not mean that the mandate is not implied. As Keakopa has observed, the definition of 'records' in these Acts are defined in a way that does not seem to cover electronic records even though these are implied in the definition.⁴¹ Ngulube and Tafor cite other outdated Acts as the *Zambia Act 1969*, the *National Archives of Malawi Act (chapter 228:01) 1970*; and *Namibia Act No. 12 1992*.⁴² Already a number of authors in the region have called for archival institutions in the region to update their governing legislation and some have started working on them. Many of these Acts are still silent on the management of electronic records and the implications of freedom of information Acts.

Issues of access and protection of individual privacy in archival legislation in the region were strongly highlighted in the ESARBICA conference held in Namibia in 1995. An emphasis was placed on the need to revise legislation to clearly incorporate records management activities and responsibilities including closure periods. In fact, the

issue of closure periods emerged from one of the resolutions in 1999 in Zanzibar.⁴³ For example, the 20 and 30 year rules appear too long and this seems to be impacting on access. As Phumzile and Wamukoya argued in the case of Swaziland, the 30 year access rule should be reviewed as it appears excessive, outdated and not in touch with current information age realities.⁴⁴ Researchers can no longer be patient enough to wait for such long periods for materials to be made available for use, especially for national development. Arguably, it would be better to keep the closed records away from the public and not even let them know of their existence. This will do away with public frustrations emanating from failure to access archives which they know exist. As in the case of Kenya, Katuu has argued that related legislation such as the *Secret Act*, the *National Security Act*, *Public Archives Act* and the *Documentation Act*, should all be revised and harmonised with freedom of information legislation.⁴⁵ As far as freedom of information is concerned, Mutula and Wamukoya,⁴⁶ Katuu,⁴⁷ Sebina,⁴⁸ and Keakopa⁴⁹ all concur that closure periods contradict access to information. Also emerging is the realisation that effective records management is important for implementation of freedom of information legislation. As such there is a need for all taskforces dealing with such legislation to work together to avoid contradictions in the provision of these separate Acts. In South Africa, for example, the *National Archives of the Republic of South Africa Act 1996* and *Promotion of Access to Information Act 2000* have been harmonised to complement each other. Another good example is the case of the United Kingdom, where the National Council on Archives and the Local Government Association have collaborated to address issues relating to freedom of information.⁵⁰ ESARBICA member countries still need to work on amending their legislation to cater for the needs of researchers in accessing information. Those countries in the region that have not yet developed freedom of information Acts should do so as their absence may lead to secrecy and corruption.⁵¹

It is, however, worth noting that some countries have made efforts in this regard. South Africa has updated archival legislation that takes care of the records management function and management of electronic records. Tanzania and Uganda have enacted new legislation which gives a clear mandate for management of records in the whole of the public sector.⁵² Botswana recently updated its archival legislation,

but as Keakopa has argued, the amendments fall short of addressing all processes in the management of electronic records such as capture, retention, disposal and custody of archival electronic records.⁵³

4.6 Preservation, digitisation and conservation issues

The provision of good environmental conditions for preservation of records and archives is a critical factor. However, when they were established, many archival institutions in the region did not have suitable buildings to ensure proper preservation of archival collections. Furthermore, the situation in registries was unbecoming as these were not seen as a priority and as such not given any attention. Preservation and conservation were not given any priority in archival institutions in the region at that time and many had no preservation strategies. Most of these institutions relied on donated technical equipment which was out of date and also had no expertise to operate such equipment. In fact, Ngulube has lamented that the situation in a number of countries in the region is worsening as infrastructures have disintegrated with airconditioning and conservation reprographic equipment having become non-functional.⁵⁴ Mnjama has also observed that the lack of facilities and trained staff has only exacerbated this situation.⁵⁵ For example, findings on a survey of institutions revealed that Zimbabwe, which had a long history of excellent facilities, has been affected adversely by its political situation, while Kenya and Swaziland reported on lack of specialist training.

Preservation, as Ngulube argues, is not integrated in collection management policies in respective countries in the region as is the case in South Africa. Archival collections in some institutions visited by the current author, including Botswana, Malawi and Tanzania, are already in need of conservation.⁵⁶ The situation is exacerbated by the fact that there is a shortage of staff, and the few that are available lack the necessary expertise. There is a lack of: clear policies on preservation; comprehensive disaster management plans; and suitably-equipped conservation laboratories. Studies by Ngulube⁵⁷ and Kalusopa⁵⁸ have found that countries in the region still have no clearly written preservation policies. In spite of these challenges, many countries have put up purpose-built structures to ensure the preservation of archival collections.

Long-term preservation of electronic records also poses a serious challenge for the region and the international community in general. There is still inadequate attention for preservation and areas such as: technological instability; complexity of the preservation process; resource constraints; and lack of policies.⁵⁹

Digitisation is becoming a solution to a number of institutions in the region. The National Archives of Zambia is already making progress in this area and has started digitising its collections including newspapers. South Africa has digitised finding aids in the form of the National Automated Archival Information Retrieval System (NAAIRS). Other efforts in the region include a digitisation project by Digital Imaging South Africa (DISA) in partnership with Aluka on the struggles for freedom in southern Africa.⁶⁰ The project has focused on Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa and Botswana. There are, however, plans to expand to Tanzania, Zambia and others. While this is an encouraging development for the region, Isaacman, Lalu and Nygren have observed that the project faces a number of challenges among them: choice of what to digitise; intellectual property rights; and, the lack of technological infrastructure for distribution of digitised collections.

4.7 Outreach programs and marketing strategies

In some archival institutions the use of materials is still relatively low. For example, Phumzile and Wamukoya have observed this to be the case at the National Archives of Swaziland. Further, recognition is also still low on the importance of archival sources and there is a lack of appreciation of their importance. Outreach programs can be used to publicise and take the archives to the people. In the case of Botswana, most people are still not aware of the existence of BNARS or the purpose it serves in their society. For example, most students learned about the archives only when they were introduced to the course on archives and records; others through assignments where they have to visit the National Archives. This seems to suggest that BNARS is not doing enough to publicise its services. There are, however, a number of awareness strategies that archival institutions can employ to raise awareness about their services. For example: use of publications which should reach out as widely as possible to the general public;

use of websites, especially in this age of technology; use of print and electronic media for advertising; and use of launches where someone with a high profile could be invited as a keynote speaker. Although BNARS at times runs exhibitions during international shows such as trade fairs, these appear to have done little in raising its profile. Use of radio programs has been found to be effective by the Swaziland National Archives.⁶¹ The National Archives of Kenya uses publications in the form of brochures on educational materials which are given to schools and training colleges. There is still a need to raise awareness as not much effort seems to have been put into this to publicise the existence and role of archival institutions in society and in its development.

4.8 Establishment of integrated records management programs

The management of records for efficiency and economy in organisations can only be achieved through implementation of an integrated records management program. Such a program should put in place policies and procedures for creation, maintenance, use, retention and disposal of records. In the ESARBICA region, the mandate to ensure effective records management in government lies with the respective national archives. Some countries like Botswana, South Africa and Tanzania have already amended their archival legislation to take care of this added responsibility. To execute this mandate, national archives in the region have made efforts to establish records management programs in the public service in their respective countries. However, many are still facing challenges in this area and have resorted to implementing the program in a fragmented way.

A number of countries in the region have made commendable progress in different areas in records management. During the 1990s registry systems were reformed and this saw the introduction of new classification systems and procedures for management of records, especially in countries such as Tanzania and Botswana.⁶² Even those that have not started implementing the program are beginning to take the need seriously and are already working on strategies to improve recordkeeping for organisational efficiency. Malawi has already shown interest in adapting the Botswana model. However, as

Keakopa has argued, those countries interested in this model should adapt it with caution as the National Archives of Botswana is already facing challenges in implementation of its program.⁶³

Two records management models seem to be emerging in the region. One model is clearly seen in Botswana, and the alternative model is emerging in the rest of the countries in the region. It would appear that Botswana has taken a distinctive approach by empowering the National Archives to take control of records management units (RMUs) and seconding records officers to RMUs. Other countries in the region, such as South Africa and Tanzania, are 'detached' in their approach and only play a supervisory role by offering guidance on management of records through issuing of policies and procedures.

Whichever model these countries have chosen, they all seem to have done particularly well in aligning records management to reforms in the public sector and have as such gained government support in the establishment of records management programs. In Tanzania, for example, the restructuring of archives and records services in 2001 placed the responsibility of records management in an influential department, the Office of the President. This has helped it in getting the necessary recognition and support in terms of resources.

4.9 Management of electronic records

Surveys from the literature in the region have generally shown that member countries are doing well with management of paper records and are still struggling with the management of electronic records. As far as the management of electronic records is concerned, Keakopa has argued that many are computerising, but without clear strategies on how the records generated are to be managed.⁶⁴ In fact Keakopa's critical review of the literature on electronic records management in ESARBICA has highlighted a number of limitations from research conducted in the region in providing appropriate solutions for the management of this new format of records.⁶⁵ In particular, resolutions of conferences held every two years in the region have not been seriously addressed and implemented to address this new challenge.⁶⁶ Reviews by Kemoni,⁶⁷ and Wamukoya and Mutula,⁶⁸ have also established that e-records readiness in ESARBICA poses a problem and falls short as far as skills,

legislation, infrastructure and preservation are concerned. Wamukoya and Mutula advocate for the development of a capacity-building strategy at the regional level with scholars, decision makers and donor agencies working together.⁶⁹ According to Mutiti,⁷⁰ Wato,⁷¹ and Mnjama,⁷² a number of countries in the region have computerised some services, while for others the problem is a lack of access to the technology itself raising concerns of a digital divide. The IRMT global forum e-discussion in South Africa in 2003 identified the key challenges in developing countries as: absence of legislation; lack of training and staffing; and the lack of relationships between information and communications technologies (ICT) and records management professionals.⁷³

It would appear that many countries in the region are still not able to strategise and come up with relevant policies, let alone update their legislation to adequately address some of the challenges of managing records in the electronic environment. Even if some may have drafted procedures, most officers working with records are not aware of their existence. NARS in South Africa already has national policies and procedures for management of electronic records, and government bodies are expected to follow them in formulating their own specific policies which should be consistent with these. NARS is also involved with the South African Information Technology Agency (SITA) to address issues of metadata identification, migration strategies, preservation and security of electronic records.⁷⁴ SITA and NARS have come up with a suite of products called Tender 938 which have 3 classes of solutions: Class A – Integrated Modules; Class B – Core Solutions; and, Class C – Standalone Solutions. Government bodies have to use these products for procurement.

BNARS, on the other hand, started implementation of its National Archives and Records Management System (NARMS) project in July 2009, which would see government ministries and departments using electronic archiving and records management systems and will have records management, records centre and archives sub-systems.⁷⁵ The implementation will be in three phases: the first at BNARS headquarters and the Office of the President; the second at the Ministries of Sports, Culture and Labour and Home Affairs; the third will roll out to other ministries. However, an informal discussion with one of the records managers undergoing the training on the use of NARMS, which uses

TRIM software, has cast doubt on its success and has hinted that it is already experiencing problems. A study by Keakopa has in fact established that the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) which also uses TRIM was experiencing problems as they said the system was not user-friendly.⁷⁶ Botswana, however, still lags behind in the development of electronic records policies and procedures. Archival institutions that have implemented or are implementing an EDRMS still face the challenge of building capacity to take in archival electronic records. In the meantime, they prefer to leave custody of such records to creating agencies.

The Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service (KNA & DS) has undertaken a project to computerise some provincial administration, ministerial and departmental records. Some private and migrated archives have also been computerised. KNA & DS has also developed procedures for appraisal and disposal of electronic records.⁷⁷

There have, however, been a number of successful projects by IRMT in several countries in the region, notably in Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Zambia, Botswana, and Zimbabwe.⁷⁸ These consultancies have helped in assisting the region build capacity for managing records especially in the electronic environment. Practitioners and academics in the region should take advantage of IRMT efforts in the region to build reliable records management systems as part of their public sector modernisation. Already IRMT is working closely with some archival institutions and universities in the region to help develop training manuals.⁷⁹

With the new developments in the electronic environment, archivists and records managers are challenged to reposition themselves if they are to remain relevant. The need to redefine new roles in light of the technological revolution clearly emerged during the ESARBICA conference in 1997 in South Africa. However, the need for cooperation between the region's national archives and the ICT industry was only underscored during the 2003 conference in Mozambique. The challenges of managing electronic records in the region can never be fully addressed if the ICT industry is not brought on board. Experiences from the European Union (through the Document Lifecycle Management Forum (DLM)) have shown that it is possible to successfully address the problems if the ICT industry is a strategic partner.⁸⁰

Other efforts worth noting in the region include: publication of the ESARBICA newsletter; development of websites by some national archives; compilation of findings aids; and encouraging utilisation of archival materials by the public.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

In spite of the enormous challenges that ESARBICA faces, the region is determined to continue soldiering on. Resolutions continue to be drawn from its conferences yet implementation of these has been problematic. Already a number of challenges have emerged that the region still has to battle with, such as collection and preservation of oral traditions, and management of electronic records. Nonetheless, there has been progress in a number of areas as in training and development of integrated records management programs. Governments in the region should be commended as they are playing a supportive role to archives and records management developments as seen in moral support and financial investments.

5.2 Recommendations

From arguments emerging from the discussion in this paper, there is still a need for improvement and action has to be taken urgently in the following areas:

a) The need for national archives to play a more proactive role

It is recommended that the region's national archives should play a more proactive role in ensuring proper guidance is given through national records management policies and other relevant procedures. One way of gaining recognition and support would be through placement of archives under strategic ministries such as the Office of the President. This has proved to work in the case of Tanzania where the move has provided the national archives with improved recognition and support.⁸¹ As Mnjama⁸² and Tough⁸³ have pointed out, at independence the placement of archives in ministries of arts,

culture, sports, gender and tourism has been problematic and partly responsible for their marginalisation. An ongoing study by Ngoepe and Keakopa⁸⁴ argues that archival services, at least using the cases of Botswana and South Africa, should be independent of government if they are to gain the public's confidence.

b) Establishment and strengthening of oral traditions programs

There are still controversies over whether the region's national archives are best placed to collect and preserve oral traditions. The importance of oral traditions can no longer be taken for granted and national archives should take the lead in coordinating the collection and preservation of oral traditions and other forms of indigenous knowledge systems. During the University of Botswana Faculty of Humanities Research Day, the Deputy Director of the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture exposed a development agenda which reflected on collection and preservation of oral traditions as one of its priority areas.⁸⁵ The Botswana National Archives and Records Services should take advantage of this opportunity and work on efforts to resuscitate both its oral traditions program and the Oral Traditions Association of Botswana (OTABO). The need to intensify efforts should be emphasised in the ESARBICA region.

c) Updating archival legislation

There is an urgent need for those archival institutions that have not updated their archival legislation to do so. This will enable them to address new developments especially in the management of electronic records. As has emerged from this paper, amendments in archival legislation should take into account other related legislation, such as freedom of information Acts, so that contradictions on access to information are dealt with.

d) Collaboration and establishing partnerships

Archival institutions in the region should establish strong partnerships with stakeholders. Already, the need to collaborate between archives and records personnel has been raised in a number of research papers

in the region and elsewhere. This collaboration should, however, be extended to all relevant stakeholders. In this case academic institutions and the ICT industry would be ideal strategic partners. At the moment, as is the case in Botswana, there is at most only minimal collaboration between the University of Botswana (archives and records management staff) and BNARS. For example, there are cases where academic members of staff in archives and records management would only learn about projects undertaken by BNARS either in newspapers or from presentations in regional conferences by international consultants. This awkward situation has created a rift between two major strategic partners in the country. Strengthening relationships with other cultural and information institutions like libraries and museums can also help with training and in sharing of resources in common areas such as preservation and conservation. This can also help with exchange programs in the region. Katundu has also reiterated the need for convergence of knowledge through the integration of technological and information management expertise.⁸⁶

e) Regional framework

Regional cooperation in the field of information management is important in strengthening information services in the region. ESARBICA members cannot work in isolation. They need support from each other to be able to come up with regional solutions to common problems.

f) Need for practical research approaches

Apart from lack of collaboration, isolated research activities are also failing the region in coming up with much-needed and appropriate solutions, especially in management of records in the electronic environment. As rightly observed by the *ESARBICA Journal* editors in 2007, scholarly research in the region is still low and very insignificant. As Katuu has also observed, there is a lack of research and education methodologies in universities in the region.⁸⁷ More critical research that can offer solutions to the problems in the region is needed. There is, therefore, a need for archivists, records managers, ICT industry and academic institutions to work together in identifying critical areas that should be the focus of research to inform policy directions. Governments should sponsor such research projects.

6 Final remarks: where can ESARBICA get assistance?

Esarbica cannot work in isolation as there are regional and international organisations concerned with developments in archives and records management which could offer assistance in getting the necessary resources. Such organisations include the ICA, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the IRMT. The ICA, as stated earlier, promotes archives in developing countries, including in ESARBICA. Even though the ICA does not offer financial assistance, its name can be used in regional projects thus giving them an international context. This provides a worthwhile opportunity for the ESARBICA region to develop projects at both national and regional levels in which the ICA can play a major role by lending its name and expertise to these projects. As rightly observed by Ngulube and Tafor, the region can use models offered by IRMT and UNESCO as a starting point.⁸⁸

The ICA and UNESCO have shown particular interest in the status of archives and records management in developing countries. A proposal on Management of Public Sector Records (MPSR) in developing countries by the ICA in partnership with UNESCO, stresses the need to develop existing archival structures through staff training.⁸⁹ Through this project UNESCO has developed training materials in the form of Records and Archives Management Programme (RAMP) studies and is able to sponsor projects with practical value. UNESCO has in the past urged archives and libraries to work together in ensuring participation in conferences on overall planning in documentation, libraries and archives infrastructure. It has also sponsored attendance of experts at ESARBICA conferences to share their experiences with the region. UNESCO can also be of help in supplying equipment for technical areas such as conservation and microfilming which are scarce in the region. The IRMT is already a strategic partner with institutions in the region and this relationship should be strengthened to ensure continued support in building records management capacity.

Endnotes

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- ²² Mnjama, p. 460.
- ²³ P Ngulube and VF Tafor, 'The management of public records and archives in the member countries of ESARBICA', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol. 27, issue 1, April 2006, p. 62.
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- ²⁵ Mnjama, p. 464.
- ²⁶ Tough, p. 190.
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