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Taking archives to the people: an examination of public programs in the National Archives of the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives

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ABSTRACT

Archives serve as society's collective memory in so far as they provide evidence of the past and promote accountability and transparency of past actions. An appreciation of archives would then result in citizens linking archival records with their identity, history, civic duty and cultural heritage. However, research in Eastern and Southern Africa indicates that most citizens are unaware of archives and rarely use them. Apart from financial constraints, this is often associated with inadequate outreach programs. Taking archives to the people (promoting archives) is one way of making citizens aware of archival holdings and facilitating access and use of these resources. Through the application of three research techniques, this article shows that, although the number of archival users in this region is declining, public programming initiatives were not prioritised. Reasons for this included lack of policies; shortage of staff; lack of skills; reluctance to rope in technology in public programming initiatives; working in silos; and budgetary constraints. This article recommends a framework that may help archivists in the Eastern and Southern Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives region to raise awareness about public archival repositories, despite the existing challenges.

Introduction

The public archives of Eastern and Southern Africa hold an invaluable wealth of information that should be easily accessible and utilised by the citizens of these countries. These valuable records provide accounts of past events, activities and transactions and, therefore, they can be categorised as evidence of history. Menne-Haritz explains that the evidence of past actions enables a society to understand its current contexts and to be better prepared for the future.[1] We live in a society that increasingly relies on information, knowledge and information technologies to function and cope with the demands of our daily lives.[2] In light of all this, Verne Harris questions whether archives are considered by society as important gateways to information.[3] According to the archival literature,[4] the answer to this question is negative. As a result, archivists

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worldwide are continuously considering different ways of reaching out and engaging with their audiences,[5] particularly because archival institutions do not appear to be considered as institutions of choice by information seekers.

Most of the public archives in Eastern and Southern Africa function under their respective national archives, which are affiliated with the Eastern and Southern Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA). Although ESARBICA serves all countries in the Eastern and Southern Africa region, at the time of this study (2013–15) the ESARBICA website indicated that the organisation had 12 active members.[6] These active member countries were: Angola, Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, Zanzibar and Zimbabwe. Research on access and use of archives in the Eastern and Southern Africa region by Kamatula; Njobvu, Hamooya and Mwila; Venson, Ngoepe and Ngulube; Murambiwa and Ngulube; Baker; and other scholars indicates that very few people in this region actually make use of the archival holdings.[7] Changing this experience will require these institutions to increase their efforts in raising awareness about their archives and encouraging people to engage with the records.[8] Public programming initiatives may be one way of approaching this challenge, familiarising more people with the public archives in their respective countries and facilitating access to the records.

McCausland defined public programming as 'a means by which archives present themselves, their collections and their services to their audiences'.[9] Saurombe describes public programming as 'a tool that enables public archives to communicate archives to citizens and receive feedback on services offered through a body of coordinated activities with the aim of developing an effective and efficient archival service'.[10] Overall, public programming initiatives offer archivists a unique opportunity to connect with the people they serve by informing them of their resources and services and to obtain feedback on how best the repository can address their information needs. According to Blais and Enns, and to Craig, archival repositories should not overlook public programming initiatives because they serve as a means to influence not only the public, but funders or administration authorities too.[11] Through the development and implementation of appropriate public programs for their different African contexts, the public archives of Eastern and Southern Africa may be able to generate more interest in their repositories.

In 1999, Ngulube wrote that facilitating access to records in the ESARBICA region was not a new idea, but that most of the national archives in the ESARBICA region had not prioritised marketing of their collections for a long time due to a number of factors.[12] More than a decade later, studies by Ngoepe and Ngulube; Kamatula; Sulej; Onyancha; and others indicate that not much has changed.[13] These studies reveal a number of factors that have resulted in the national archives neglecting the marketing of their repositories and archival holdings. These factors include:

- lack of interest from potential users who are not aware of the importance of archival institutions;
- lack of knowledge about users and use and no matching to relevant services;
- archivists being 'material centred' rather than 'client centred';
- lack of funding;

- exclusion of public programming or outreach initiatives in the strategic plans of the institution;
- non-existent outreach or public programming and lobbying skills that are required to lead such initiatives;
- lack of participation of archival institutions and lack of resources for information literacy training programs at foundation, intermediary and tertiary levels of education;
- archivists lacking the enthusiasm required to embark on outreach or public programming initiatives;
- absence of cooperation between archives and other cultural institutions; and
- invisible archives – lack of websites or other online platforms for archival institutions, as well as archival institutions not taking advantage of information communication technologies to promote archives.

Archives are kept to be used[14] and, therefore, it is pertinent for archivists to seek ways to overcome these challenges and ensure that people have access to their holdings. The Universal Declaration on Archives of 2010 insists that archivists should make their records available for use.[15] The Principles on Access developed in 2012 by the International Council on Archives (ICA) encourage archival repositories to invest in promoting their repositories and facilitating access to their archival holdings.[16]

This article reports on an investigation of public programming practices in the Eastern and Southern Africa region. The intended outcome is to propose a framework that might help the public archival institutions in this region to improve their visibility in society and encourage more people to benefit from the archives. To achieve this outcome, the study applied three research techniques[17] to gather information on public programming practices at selected national archives in this region. Though the study investigated how archival repositories engaged with the public, it excluded the public. The intention was to first determine the status of the awareness activities from the perspective of the archivists. Though the involvement of the public is important, cost, the magnitude of the study and time were some of the factors that made this difficult. The researcher was of the view that a study involving the public should constitute a different research project altogether. The article outlines the underlying research problem which justified the need for this study, the objectives and research questions for this study, and research procedures applied in the study, then discusses the findings of the study. Lastly, it suggests recommendations in the form of a framework for public programming initiatives in the region.

The problem

The discussion in the introduction paints a bleak picture of the use of the archival holdings of the national archives of the ESARBICA region. This was confirmed by the conference theme selected for the 23rd Biennial ESARBICA conference, which took place in June 2015 at the Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe. The theme was: 'Archives: uses, abuses and underutilisation'.[18] Archivists from the entire region were set on discussing and discovering means to curb the challenge of underutilisation of their holdings. There

seems to be an increasing number of research studies focusing on the underutilisation of archives in the region as well.[19]

Effective public programming initiatives may help these national archives to enhance interest in their archival holdings. However, according to studies by Kamatula; Baker; Njobvu, Hamooya and Mwila; Venson, Ngoepe and Ngulube; and Ngulube et al., most of the national archives have not prioritised public programming as a means to raise awareness about their repositories.[20] Although most of these studies lament the lack of effective public programming strategies, none of them proposes a framework for improving existing programs or developing more innovative strategies.

It is evident that existing public programming practice or the lack of such programs has affected the level of use at the national archives negatively, as the numbers of archival users continue to dwindle.[21] It is against this background that this study investigated a number of factors that may support archivists in developing effective programs. The study investigated how a series of factors affected public programming initiatives at the national archives. A range of literature on public programming or related to the terms linked to raising awareness about archives was also consulted to provide an idea of public programming in the ESARBICA region and beyond this region. Seven objectives and a number of research questions guided the study. The objectives and research questions are presented in Table 1.

The following section provides an overview of the literature that focuses on the challenges regarding the underutilisation of archives and on facilitating access to information within public archival repositories.

Literature on public programming: a brief overview

Koopman describes public programming as a 'planned sequence of community out-reach programs or promotional activities which inform the wider community about archival holdings and services and involves the community members directly in the documentary heritage'.[22] Similarly, Bance observes that public programs involve 'educating people about the existence, services and documentary resources of archival institutions'.[23] These definitions speak of archivists connecting and interacting with archival users with the aim of promoting their holdings. Other terms commonly known or linked to raising awareness about archives include: outreach, marketing, publicity, advocacy and public relations.

Public programming of archives

The concept of public programming in archival literature became prominent between the late seventies and early nineties.[24] Cox states that, prior to the twentieth century, archivists were more concerned about the archival functions related to keeping records and neglected the aspect of public service that focused on promoting access and use of the kept records.[25] In spite of the continued interest in raising awareness about the archives, most of the literature provides accounts of Western practice. Raising awareness about the archives does not only involve the public; it also involves reaching out to the authorities that oversee archival institutions and their funding. This is known as advocacy.[26] Brett and Jones argue that archival outreach should not be confused with

Table 1. Objectives and research questions for the study.

No.	Objective	Research questions
1	Assess existing public programming activities in the ESARBICA region	Have there been any public programming activities implemented in the public archives of ESARBICA? If yes, when and how were these programs implemented? If no, why not?
2	Establish the availability of legislation, namely National Archives Acts, that guides public programming activities in the public archives of the ESARBICA region	Does archival legislation from the ESARBICA member states instruct the public archives to promote or market their holdings?
3	Identify if there were policies in place that govern public programming activities in the different public archives of the member states of ESARBICA	Are there any policies in place that govern public programming activities in the different public archives of the member states of ESARBICA?
4	Find out whether archivists had the relevant skills and knowledge that were required to carry out public programming activities	Do the archivists of ESARBICA member countries have the knowledge and skills to carry out effective and efficient public programming activities? What training is available for archivists in this region? Are archivists aware of these public programming training opportunities in the region?
5	Assess the role of user studies and customer satisfaction in public programming initiatives	Do the national archives (and public archives) carry out user studies to get a better understanding of the people they serve? How are user studies conducted in this region? Is the information gathered from user studies used in any way to inform public programming initiatives?
6	Determine whether the public archives of the ESARBICA region collaborated with other institutions or organisations to promote and facilitate access to their resources	Do the public archives in this region collaborate with other organisations to promote use of the archival holdings? If yes, which institutions do they work with?
7	Explore whether the national archives of the ESARBICA region made use of information communication technologies such as social media to increase the awareness of the existence of public archives	Do the public archives in this region incorporate information communication technologies such as social media in their public programming initiatives? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using social media in public programming initiatives in this region? If not used, why not?

advocacy, pointing out that 'archival outreach is a public relations process while advocacy is a political process … advocacy expounds the value of archival materials and services for communities'.[27] Advocacy may lead to the decisions, resources and support required to make public programming projects happen. Not much is reflected in the archival literature about advocacy and public programming initiatives carried out in African archival repositories.[28] Most of the available literature in Eastern and Southern Africa is based on research conducted after the year 2000.[29]

Elements in the outlined objectives for this study were considered as factors that may influence public programming initiatives. These elements were: legislation, policies, public programming activities, the user, information communication technologies, collaboration, as well as the skills and knowledge of archivists on public programming. The literature was consulted to determine how these factors influence public programming initiatives.

Public programming initiatives in the ESARBICA region

Kamatula emphasises the importance of archival repositories having a smooth running operation before marketing their services.[30] Such an operation would include

consideration of opening hours, no fees or affordable fees if necessary, a suitable reading environment, helpful staff and a detailed record of what is available. The consulted literature identifies the following as some of the public programming initiatives conducted by the national archives in the ESARBICA region: websites, social media pages, public awareness campaigns, outreach to education institutions such as schools and universities, conducting 'Archives Week' and 'Archives Day', exhibitions, site tours, workshops, seminars, as well as television and radio program slots.[31] Despite all these efforts, the literature indicates that the level of utilisation is minimal.[32]

Studies regarding public programming in the ESARBICA region have been completed on a small-scale level with emphasis on individual countries, towns or cities.[33] This prompted the researcher to do this region-wide study to provide a collective overview of public programming practices.

Link between legislation and policies and public programming initiatives

Legislation and policies provide a distinct framework within which an archival institution has to function. The ICA states that archival legislation sets out principles that guide the management of archives.[34] The literature indicates that most of the archival legislation and policies in the ESARBICA region are not reflective of the many developments in the management of records and archives.[35] Some of the concerns in the literature are about the management and access of electronic and digital records as well as the incorporation of 'freedom of information' laws.[36] Seemingly, reports on users' right of access to information are more common in the literature than studies of the influence of legislation on public programming initiatives.[37]

Users: key determinants of public programming initiatives

Public programming initiatives should be designed to address the information needs of archive users,[38] but this is possible only if archivists take time to investigate the needs of their users.[39] It would seem that most archival repositories in the ESARBICA region do not consider the needs of their users when planning the public programming initiatives.[40] The literature makes it clear that archival users' information needs[41] should not be ignored; that the element of archival user education should be built into public programs;[42] and that the evaluation of archival services should form part of the public programming strategy.[43]

Archivists' skills and knowledge of public programming

Archivists' knowledge and skills on public programming and advocacy may influence public programs significantly.[44] Archival education should, therefore, include training and qualifications linked to promoting access in their offerings.[45] Training and qualifications offered by archival institutions should evaluate their programs to ensure that the trainees and graduates are equipped to develop and facilitate public programming initiatives.[46]

Collaboration: joint efforts in promoting cultural and documentary heritage

The current economy has put archival repositories in steep competition with other public institutions and organisations involved in the provision of heritage, cultural and civic information.[47] Collaboration efforts may help to overcome issues such as budget

cuts, staff and space shortages and lack of expertise.[48] Collaborative efforts between libraries, archives and museums are on the rise,[49] but Lowry cautions archival institutions to be wary of such arrangements and to ensure that archival institutions do not lose out by conceding their autonomy.[50] The main focus of all participating institutions, including the archives, should be the public.

Reaching out to users through information technologies

Web 2.0 technologies have enabled archival repositories to increase their reach into society by providing information online and encouraging interaction with users.[51] Studies by Ngoepe and Ngulube; Kamatula; Mnkeni-Saurombe and Mosweu; and Garaba indicate that the national archives of the ESARBICA region have not really embraced Web 2.0 technologies as a means of reaching out to people.[52] Such technologies may promise endless possibilities, but archivists should be wary of limitations, such as privacy concerns, preservation of digitisation resources, technological obsolescence, information policies and legislation that all directly affect the sharing of information online.[53]

Overall, the literature does emphasise the necessity for archival repositories to facilitate access to their holdings. Moreover, it has become apparent that there are not many empirical studies on public programming in the ESARBICA region. The archival literature could benefit from further research into this field of knowledge. The next section outlines the research method that was used in this study.

Research procedure

Three research techniques were applied in this study. This approach enabled the researcher to provide an overview of the status of public programming initiatives in the ESARBICA region. The number of factors investigated in the study necessitated the use of more than one research technique, in order to provide a holistic picture regarding public programming initiatives in the ESARBICA region. Bekhet and Zauszniewski claim that the advantages of applying a multi-method approach in research include 'providing confirmation of findings, and [obtaining] more comprehensive data, increased validity and an enhanced understanding of a studied phenomenon'.[54] Garaba and Abankwah also used this approach in their research projects on archives and records management in the ESARBICA region.[55]

To provide a holistic overview of the status quo of public programming activities in this region, the study employed the following research techniques:

- A questionnaire comprising 53 questions. These questions were aligned with the objectives and research questions of this study. The questionnaires were completed by the Directors of the National Archives of the ESARBICA region.
- Two semi-structured interview schedules. The first interview schedule had a set of 12 questions which were directed to archivists who worked in the national archives of the ESARBICA region participating in the study. The second interview schedule had a set of eight questions for members of the ESARBICA Board.
- Content analysis was also employed to get answers for certain research questions. The items that were analysed included archival legislation of the active ESARBICA member states, websites of institutions in this region that offered archival education and training, and ESARBICA Board reports from 2013 to 2015.

The ESARBICA region is vast and travelling to each member state proved to be problematic. Therefore, most of the information for the study was collected at the XXII Biennial ESARBICA Conference, held from 3 to 6 June 2013 in Nairobi, Kenya. After obtaining written permission from the ESARBICA Board to conduct this research project, the 12 consistent ESARBICA members were approached to participate in the study. As this involved reporting on organisational activities, the researcher was of the opinion that the Directors of the National Archives as leaders of these organisations were qualified to complete the questionnaire designed for the study. Uganda was represented at this particular meeting and was also asked to take part in the study. The responses from these respondents were analysed using the Microsoft Excel program.

Twelve archivists representing each member state in the ESARBICA region were asked to participate in semi-structured interviews; eight of them agreed. Additionally, three ESARBICA Executive Board members were also interviewed to obtain the Board's perspective on the impact of public programming in the region. Two of these participants were the incoming and outgoing president of the ESARBICA Board, while one was a regular member. Information gathered from the interviews was thematically analysed to determine common views regarding public programming in the region. Furthermore, the ESARBICA Board made available reports from the respective member states for the years 2013–15, which were analysed by means of content analysis in order to trace any public programming initiatives that were conducted in the region. The ESARBICA strategic plan for 2013 to 2015 was also checked. Archival legislation was examined to determine whether the repositories were required by law to promote access to the archives. Information regarding archival education and training was gathered through the questionnaire and interviews as well as the analysis of course content on the websites of institutions that offer training in archives and records management for archivists in this region. Table 2 provides an overview of the participants of this study.

As Table 2 indicates, with the exception of Lesotho, all of the approached active member states took part in this study in different capacities. Nine (69.2%) of the Directors of the National Archives completed the questionnaire, while eight archivists (66.6%) agreed to be interviewed. The archivists and Directors of the National Archives who participated in this study were not necessarily from the same countries. The National Director of Uganda's National Archives was also present at the conference. Although Uganda is not an active member of ESARBICA, information regarding public

Table 2. Summary of the research participants.

Member state	Director completed questionnaire	Archivist interviewed	ESARBICA Board member interviewed
Botswana	No	Yes	No
Kenya	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lesotho	No	No	No
Malawi	No	Yes	No
Mozambique	No	Yes	Yes
Namibia	Yes	Yes	No
South Africa	Yes	No	No
Swaziland	Yes	Yes	No
Tanzania	Yes	Yes	No
Uganda	Yes	No	No
Zambia	Yes	No	No
Zanzibar	Yes	No	No

programming initiatives from Uganda would add value to the study. For that reason, the Director was also asked to participate in the study. The National Directors of Mozambique, Botswana and Malawi did not participate; nevertheless, it was decided that the information gathered from the archivists from those countries coupled with the country reports prepared by the National Directors would be sufficient to identify whether public programming strategies were a part of their archival service.

Limitations of the study and ethical considerations

The study focused on the national archives of the 12 active member states of ESARBICA. These institutions govern the activities of public archival repositories in their respective countries. Their participation was therefore considered to be advantageous. The region is vast, and due to time and financial constraints it was not possible to travel to each member state. These factors also prevented the possibility of involving users in the study.

ESARBICA provides guidance on archives and records management practice in the region; however, it should be noted that it is not a legislative body. It does not have the power that other legislative authorities in the region such as the Southern Africa Development Community and the East African Community have. Therefore, the proposed framework can be only recommended to the member states and cannot be imposed upon them.

Permission to conduct the study was granted by the ESARBICA Board in 2013.[56] The researcher also abided by the University of South Africa's Research Ethics Policy of 2007.[57] Participants and respondents were promised that their responses would not be presented in a manner that would directly link them to their responses. To respect these wishes, the findings are not organised according to the responses of the respective member states.

Findings and discussion

Existence and frequency of public programming initiatives in the ESARBICA region

The first step in the study was to determine the existence and frequency of public programming initiatives in the ESARBICA region's national archives. All nine National Directors indicated that their respective archives conducted such programs, but half of this group of participants stated that it was only an annual exercise. These findings were further corroborated by the archivists who were interviewed. One of the archivists stated that this was a responsibility of the public relations section of the government ministry under which they fell. The ESARBICA strategic plan for 2013 to 2015 clearly states the need for members to market and promote their archives, but the ESARBICA member country reports for the period of 2013–15 on country activities did not clearly outline projects that were conducted on raising awareness about archives.

Seminars, workshops, exhibitions, websites and tours seemed to be the most common approach of raising awareness about archives (eight national archives). This was followed by media – newspapers, television and radio (six national archives) – and the least favoured approach was the use of a newsletter (two national archives). The

interviewed archivists more or less confirmed the responses of the National Directors, and highlighted that the bulk of their programs was comprised of school tours and group visits, as well as public lectures and exhibitions. Budgetary constraints, lack of space, shortage of staff, lack of marketing expertise and poor attendance of programs were emphasised as some of the factors that hindered the planning and implementation of public programming initiatives.

Advocacy is another critical part of reaching out to those who have influence over the governing and administration of the national archives. All of the National Directors highlighted the need for more effective advocacy initiatives to help them get more funding for running projects such as public programming initiatives. The interviewed ESARBICA Board members insisted that they link up with governing authorities at every biennial conference to inform them of the critical role played by records and archives management in society. In certain instances, the Board did participate in a number of television and radio shows in the host country to raise awareness about archives.

Clearly, more effort needs to be directed towards developing and implementing more public programming initiatives in this region.[58] Mnjama has argued that archivists need to prioritise facilitating access to the records.[59] There is a possibility of lessening the above challenges if governing authorities and the public have a better understanding of the significance of archives.[60]

Archival legislation and policies that support the promotion of archives in the ESARBICA region

Archival legislation from the nine participating national archives in the study were reviewed to determine whether these laws mandated the national archives to raise awareness about their archives to their citizens. The legislation was reviewed to check whether it had sections that fulfilled the following purposes: (a) ensuring access to archives; (b) promoting access to the public; and (c) whether it recommended means on how to promote the archives to the public.

Archival legislation from all of the participating countries mandated their national archives to ensure access to the records. The legislation from two countries was silent with regards to promoting access to the public and means of doing so, while the legislation from seven countries mentioned exhibitions and publications as the means for promoting access to the public.

Policies state actions or steps that should be taken to conform to the legislation. Out of the nine participating archives from the ESARBICA region, only one national archive had a policy for promoting access to the public. When asked why this was the case, most of the interviewed archivists indicated that there were more pressing matters and that, in the meantime, they functioned according to set guidelines within their institutions.

In most cases policies should operationalise legislation, however this does not always happen.[61] Nevertheless, the absence of policies makes it difficult to understand how the national archives which do not have any policies can develop and implement public programs consistently. Archival legislation and policies improve the chances of securing funds and other support for public programs to happen.[62] Therefore, the lack of policies inhibits efforts towards curbing the underutilisation of archives in this region.

Archivists' knowledge and skills about public programming in the ESARBICA region

Promoting access to archives requires careful consideration to enable the archival repositories to capture the interest of their intended audience. Most National Directors (five national archives) stated that their archivists and other staff do have the necessary skills to conduct public programming initiatives. Four National Directors felt that there was still room for improvement. All of the interviewed archivists were of the opinion that they had the right skills and knowledge to promote their holdings. Their major concern was that they did not get many opportunities to enhance these skills.

The study offered the National Directors and the archivists the opportunity to identify areas that they regarded as requiring further training. All of the National Directors and the archivists thought that they needed to know more about the use of social media in promoting archives and how web analytics based on their repositories' websites could help them determine their level of visibility and relevance to their communities. Other areas of concern included conducting guided tours and communicating archives to children. The availability of training in these areas was also a concern among the participants; they had not heard of such training opportunities. The National Directors commented that training was offered mostly by universities in the region and that the offered programs did not cover how to raise awareness about the archives in their communities.

The participants identified 25 institutions in Africa as places where they obtained their archival training and qualifications. The researcher could gain access to the detailed curriculum of only nine of these institutions. Only one of them offered a course on public programming and outreach. The interviewed archivists stated that their marketing training normally formed part of other courses and that the marketing of archives was not offered as a standalone course. Two of the interviewees stated that outreach could solely form part of postgraduate research projects, which translated into a masters or doctoral qualification.

The interviewed ESARBICA members pointed out the necessity for public programming training programs for archivists in the region. It was reported that ESARBICA sponsors and conducts training, which normally takes place as a pre-conference program at its biennial conference gatherings. However, the Board members admitted that public programming has not been one of the subjects of training for a long time.

Promoting access to archival holdings requires certain knowledge and skills.[63] Moreover, archivists need to frequently learn and unlearn different ways of promoting archives. The reason is that change is a constant phenomenon in our society, for instance socio-economic changes, rapid developments in information communication technologies, or other factors. For archives to remain relevant, archivists need to adapt and learn to use trending technologies and methods that the people they serve are familiar with.

Role of user studies and customer focus in public programming initiatives

All the participants were in agreement with the statement that promoting access to citizens requires a sound understanding of their information needs. The National

Directors reported that methods used to determine these information needs included evaluating reading room statistics and reviewing information requests and interviews. The interviewed archivists went further to mention that their institution also had suggestion boxes. One interviewee mentioned that their repository had a standard evaluation form for rating their service. Four of the national archives pointed out that customer satisfaction was determined through interviews and user satisfaction surveys. Two national archives did not have any mechanisms in place to investigate customer satisfaction. New or first-time users were prioritised at these repositories and were given assistance and guidance on how to access information at the repositories.

The National Directors stated that they conducted the following initiatives as a way of trying to attract potential users to their repositories: Friends of the Archives programs; opening the last Saturday of the month to encourage use by researchers/ public; use of the website; visiting and inviting learning institutions; and public media.

Although the participating national archives appeared to collect information on users actively, not much was done with this collected information. The interviewed archivists confirmed that their institutions rarely used this information to plan or improve existing public programming initiatives. Country reports did not shed any light on the link between user studies and public programming initiatives. The ESARBICA Board members pointed out that the users are at the centre of archival services and that the national archives should allow patrons to evaluate their services.

Understanding users will help the national archives develop programs that are relevant for their regular and potential clients.[64] Most archival institutions work with restricted budgets, so researching their users and responding to their feedback will enable them to work more efficiently and effectively.[65]

Collaboration in public programming initiatives in the ESARBICA region

The study aimed to determine whether the participating national archives collaborated with other institutions to raise awareness about the archives. According to seven of the National Directors, national archives collaborate with institutions of higher learning, such as universities and colleges. Other popular collaborators were government departments (for six national archives). Only three of the nine national archives did joint projects with libraries and museums. The most favoured method of collaboration involved joint lectures, seminars and workshops (four national archives), and this was followed by student tours and joint exhibitions (three national archives). The interviewed archivists mentioned joint projects with schools, public media and government departments. Participants pointed out that these collaborative initiatives alleviated budgetary challenges and helped them to reach out to more people.

One of the objectives of the ESARBICA strategic plan for 2013 to 2015 was to promote cooperation and collaboration in the region. However, the plan did not specifically state that these collaborative efforts should also include public programming initiatives.

Collaboration with other organisations could perhaps help to improve the visibility of the archives.[66] This might help the national archives to address their challenges such as lack of space, lack of expertise and financial constraints.

The use of technology, namely social media, to raise awareness about the archives in the ESARBICA region

More people seek information online today than ever before. This is why archives and other information-based institutions have embraced the use of social media and other platforms to connect with online information seekers. The study sought to determine if the national archives of ESARBICA have incorporated social media as a means of engaging with online information seekers and promoting access to their holdings. Seven out of the nine participating national archives did not make use of social media. The two national archives that did make use of social media indicated that they preferred Facebook and Twitter.

Although the majority of national archives did not use social media, participants did agree that social media platforms could help them capture wider audiences, particularly young people. The interviewed archivists stated that they had personal social media accounts, but none of them participated in promoting access to their archives through social media. The National Directors who did not make use of social media stated the following reasons: the lack of social media policies in their organisations; the lack of creativity to design visually attractive repository website pages; and shortage of staff to run such initiatives. The interviewed ESARBICA Board members and country reports did not mention the adoption of social media to promote access to the archives.

It is evident that more people in the ESARBICA region are becoming online seekers of information. This has been made possible due to connectivity becoming cheaper in the region, with increased use of the Internet on mobile devices.[67] It would be wise to investigate means of reaching out to more of these online information seekers.[68]

Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that public programming initiatives were not considered a priority in the ESARBICA region. This was demonstrated through the lack of public programming policies, the irregularity of public programming initiatives, the lack of resources such as funds and infrastructure, the shortage of staff, the need for training and qualifications, superficial collaboration ventures, and a minimal use of information communication technologies.

The consulted literature reported on few people benefitting from the national archives in spite of the fact that they hold important records of enduring value. Undoubtedly, the status quo of public programming initiatives in the ESARBICA region has to change. If this change does not occur, the national archives will fail to fulfil their mandate of keeping records for use by society. This concern led to the investigation of factors that directly influence the success of such initiatives. Taking those factors into consideration may help the national archives to encourage more people to engage with and benefit from their archival holdings. The main recommendation of the study is a proposed framework that could guide the organisation and implementation of public programming initiatives in the ESARBICA region.

The framework outlines six factors that may contribute to the success of such programs, including legislation, public programming policies, availability of resources, user studies, partnerships, as well as archivists' knowledge and skills in public programming. The framework is depicted in Figure 1.
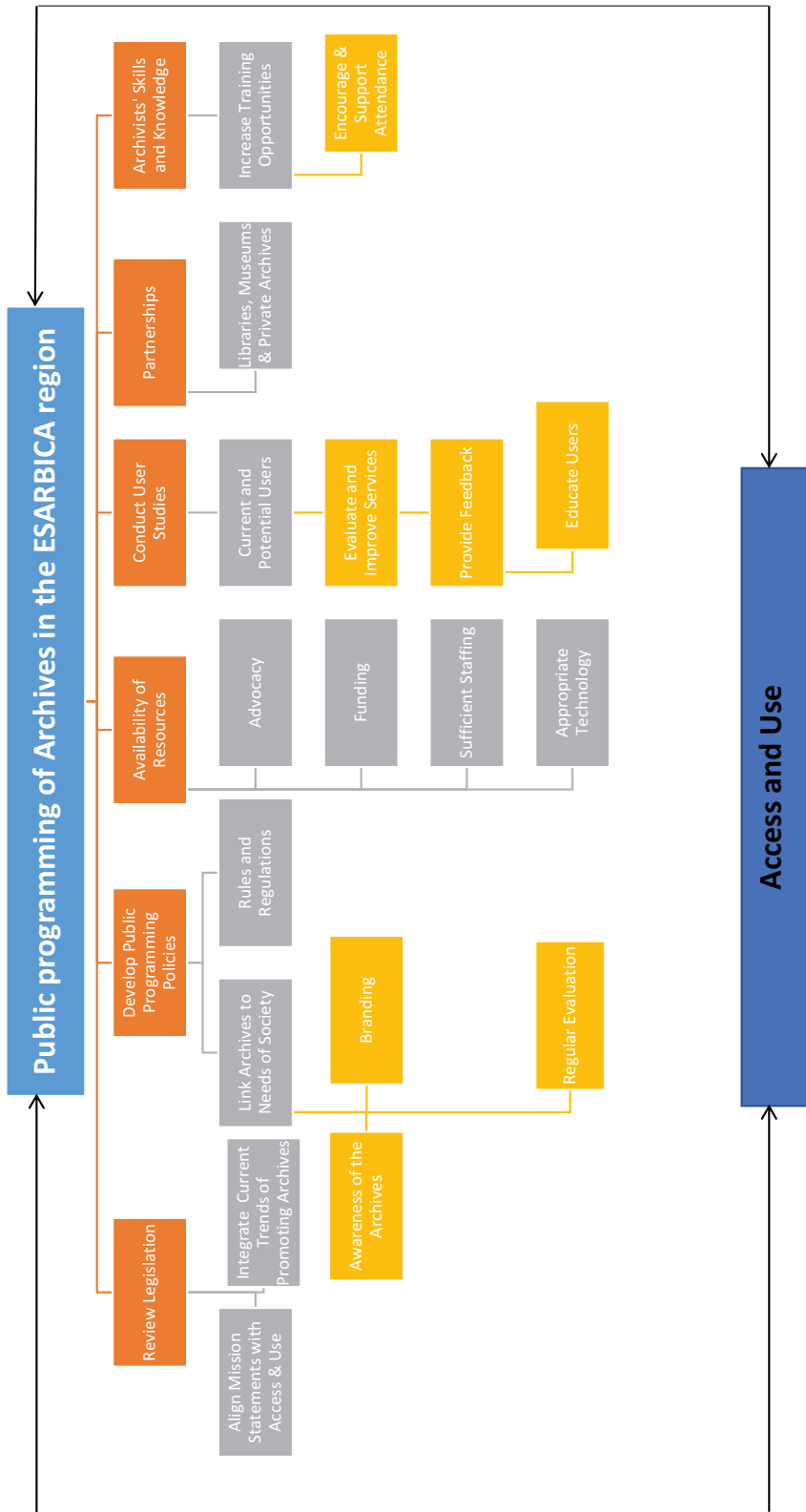
Figure 1. Proposed public programming framework for the ESARBICA region.

The framework shows that the factors are linked through a series of lines, indicating its inclusive nature. Each factor has a number of elements linked, showing the relationship between these factors and elements. The consideration of a combination of factors when conducting public programming initiatives signifies that this is an integrated approach. The arrows demonstrate how promoting access to and use of archival holdings is linked to public programming initiatives and vice versa.

In summary, the study makes the following recommendations:

- The archival legislation of the member states of ESARBICA should be amended to integrate modern methods of promoting archival repositories.
- National archives of the ESARBICA region should strive to develop public programming policies for their repositories.
- The national archives and the ESARBICA Board should intensify their advocacy efforts to ensure that these advocacy initiatives are recognised by their parent organisations and their governments. This may moderate challenges such as budgetary constraints, shortage of staff and lack of infrastructure to organise public programming initiatives.
- The national archives should put more emphasis on user studies to determine the information needs of their users and the evaluation of their services. Data gathered in these instances should have a bearing on outreach and education programs for the public.
- It is evident that there is a need for archivists in the region to update their knowledge and skills on public programming approaches. The national archives, the ESARBICA Board and institutions that offer archival training in the region should address this issue urgently.
- The national archives should seek more opportunities to collaborate with other organisations such as libraries, museums and other heritage or cultural organisations to raise awareness about archives to a wider audience.
- Technology such as social media and other tools could serve as a key enabler in reaching out to the increasing number of online information seekers in the ESARBICA region. The national archives should not disregard this option in their public programming initiatives.

This study has attempted to offer a possible solution to the problem of underutilisation of archives in the ESARBICA region. It is important to note that the study did not cover all aspects related to public programming in the region. Further research is definitely required to popularise this issue and suggest ways to tackle the challenges that hinder public programming initiatives. Perhaps further research could focus on users of the ESARBICA national archives, the archival holdings within the national archives, public programming education and training, advocacy strategies, and the use of technology to mention a few.

Is the framework feasible? The researcher can report that certain aspects have been implemented in a countrywide project in South Africa with the theme 'Taking archives to the people'. More details on this project can be found in the research paper written by Ngulube et al.[69] Furthermore, as of 2016 the Department of Information Science at the University of South Africa has introduced a new Bachelor of Arts Degree in Archives and Records Management. This institution is well known in Africa because it offers programs worldwide through an open distance e-learning mode of teaching. The new degree is a three-year

program which includes a module on archival public programming and advocacy at the third-year level. The module was developed by the researcher based on the findings of this project. Further details about the new degree and module can be found on the Department of Information Science's website.[70] The development of this course is linked to some of the outcomes of the research project described in this article, however; it is important to note that the University of South Africa is not the only institution in Africa that offers a module/s on public programming or advocacy.

Conclusion

Archivists from the ESARBICA region must remember that the main goal of keeping archives is the use of the archival resources.[71] The proposed framework could help archivists in the ESARBICA region and perhaps other regions with similar socio-economic conditions to support their efforts towards facilitating access to and the use of archives. Neglecting use forfeits the purpose of keeping archives. It is therefore critical that the national archives of the ESARBICA region acknowledge that public programming initiatives serve as an important link between records and facilitating access and use. This realisation partnered with efforts to change the status quo will assist many people in the region to access valuable information and further prove that the national archives of the ESARBICA region are an integral part of our society.

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Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

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