

Chapter 6

Long-Term Preservation for Access of Audio-Visual Archives at Botswana National Archives (BNARS)

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the long-term preservation and access to audio-visual (AV) archives at the Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS). The principal guidance to the study was attributed to international preservation guidelines, standards, and best practices. The study adopted a qualitative approach, along with the employment of these data collection methods: interviews, observation, and document review. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the target population, which included the deputy director, senior archivist, and the archives officer. Data was subjected to thematic analysis in line with the set objectives. The key research findings of the study indicated that there were no long-term preservation strategy for AV archives at BNARS, there was absence of archival access and no acquisition policies in place, various types of AV materials were all stored under the same roof and under the same climatic conditions. Furthermore, some AV archives were not processed thus making it hard to identify, retrieve, and make them accessible for use. Additionally, the research reflected that there was lack of requisite special technical skills needed for long-term preservation of AV archives. Finally, the study revealed that there was no specific budget for the long-term preservation of AV archives at BNARS. In conclusion, therefore, the study recommends that, BNARS develop a holistic AV preservation strategy to ensure the long-term availability and accessibility of AV archives for future use.

“We must learn to manage and migrate collections regularly, and in line with permanence.” - Jane Dalley, 2016, Conservator at University of Manitoba, USA

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results of the study that was carried out at the Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS) on the long-term preservation for access of audio-visual (AV) archives. AV archives come in different forms and various carriers. According to the Society of American Archivists, audio-visual is often used in a general sense within archives to distinguish nontextual materials from written documents. Audio-visual denotes using both sight and sound typically in the form of images and recorded speech or music: drawing, graphic, iconography, imagine, motion picture, moving image, nonprint materials, nontextual records, photographs, picture, special records, video. (Society of American Archivists, 2016). All these different AV formats have different preservation requirements and needs in order for them to be managed and preserved for the long term. For this reason it is necessary for archivist to conduct preservation needs assessments in order to determine the specific needs of each type of AV and set priorities in line with the envisaged use of such materials. “Once priorities have been set, the actual treatments can be undertaken as appropriate.” (Roper and Millar, 1999, p56)

Audio-visual heritage refers to “not just images and sounds but objects and intangibles, perpetuation of obsolescent skills and environments and non-literary or graphical materials selected in their own right. Audio-visual documents are works comprising reproducible images and sounds embodied in a carrier whose records, transmission, perception and comprehension usually requires a technological device.” (Edmondson, 2013, p3). Audio-visual heritage refers to all audio-visual documents, such as movies, audio recordings, and videos, which help to preserve the cultural identity of peoples, and to transform societies; as well as the traditional written documents. (National Archives and Records Administration (NARA, 2014).

The idea of keeping records in an archival institution is a foreign concept in Africa, Botswana included, and that was introduced by the colonialists. According to South African History Online (2019), many African cultures did not write down their history, instead they told stories to their children about what happened in the past, and so it was passed on from one generation to the next. In this way, history was kept alive. Traditionally, Botswana had no culture of reading and writing nor archiving in archival repositories as it is today, rather, they were an oral based society that relied on relating their history and passing down their culture and traditions from one generation to another by word of mouth. Another important part of the cultural practices amongst Botswana society was shown in the song and dance, poems and folklore some of which were captured in some audio-visual carriers like tapes and cassettes. The rock paintings as a form of pictorial art, associated with the Basarwa community believed to be the first people to settle in Botswana also form part of Botswana’s rich history. To this end, the larger part of the Botswana national heritage was primarily captured through oral history by interviewing and recording the elderly people on tapes and video recordings. These recordings today form the rich cultural heritage of Botswana society. Audio-visual materials in Botswana therefore, form a wealthy part of our past that needs to be preserved permanently in the same manner as their paper-based counterparts for future use, educational and research purposes. As Wilson (2003) noted that most African societies place a great worth in oral tradition because it is the primary means of conveying culture. Another integral part of oral tradition is the integrating of music and dance.

Preservation of audio-visual materials is however very challenging because of the nature and diversity of their carriers. As NARA cautioned, when dealing with AV materials due care need to be taken by virtue of their vulnerability to damage from poor storage and handling practices. It is of outmost importance that special precautions be followed to ensure the availability of audio-visual records during

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