# ESARBICA JOURNAL

# JOURNAL OF THE EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA REGIONAL BRANCH OF THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES

**Volume 32**

**2013**

# MAPPING ACCESS AND USE OF ARCHIVAL MATERIALS HELD AT THE BULAWAYO ARCHIVES IN ZIMBABWE

Patrick Ngulube

Department of Interdisciplinary Research and Postgraduate Studies, University of South Africa

*ngulup@unisa.ac.za*

Patience Sibanda and Norah LS Makoni

Department of Records and Archives Management at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST)

*patiencesibanda82@gmail.com; norahmukura@yahoo.co.uk*

## Abstract

*The purpose of this qualitative case study was to map access and use of archival materials at the Bulawayo Archives (BA) in Zimbabwe. The study investigated how access policies influenced access and use of archival collections at BA; the finding aids used to provide access to archives; the use of information and communication technologies to provide access to archives; how backlogs of unprocessed archival materials affected access to the collection; the systemic barriers that influenced access to archival materials; the skills and knowledge of staff in promoting access and use of archival materials; and the profile of the users of archival materials and the purpose that they utilised the information for. A case study research design was employed with face-to-face interviews, observation and artefact analysis as data collection methods. The respondents included the Director of National Archives of Zimbabwe, Acting Principal Archivist who was in charge of BA, two archivists and two records management assistants working with him, and ten users who consulted archival materials at BA during the period 1 August 2012 to 30 May 2013 when the study was conducted. Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis with an interpretevist perspective. The results showed that legal authorization of access to archives exists, archival finding aids were not adequate, there were huge backlogs of unprocessed archives, systemic barriers hindered users from accessing archives, staff had limited knowledge of promoting access to archives and the major users of archival materials were researchers from various fields. The study recommended that BA should improve their policies, procedures and practices by making them access-friendly so that they do not adversely impact on access and use of archival materials.*

## Keywords

## Introduction and background

Facilitating access and use is fundamental to all archival functions such as acquisition, accession, appraisal, arrangement, description and preservation, which are undertaken to facilitate access to the information contained in archives for the present and future generations. Accessible archives are keys to developing national awareness and identity, preserving national memory and national heritage, building information and knowledge-based societies, encouraging responsible citizenship, facilitating research and education, supporting decision-making, fostering accountability and good governance, promoting transparency and justice, and protecting human rights and entitlements (Couture & Rousseau 1987; Hlophe & Wamukoya 2007; International Council on Archives 2010; Kecskeméti & Székely 2005; Mazikana 1999; McKemmish, Reed & Piggott 2005; Murambiwa & Ngulube 2011; Ngulube 2002; Ngulube 2009; Zolotarevsky 2010). It is in this light that the Universal Declaration on Archives adopted by the Annual General Meeting in Oslo in 2010 underscored the need for archives to be made "accessible to everyone, while respecting the pertinent laws and the rights of individuals, creators, owners and users"; in order for them to "contribute to the promotion of responsible citizenship" (International Council on Archives 2010).

The definition of access as "the ability and opportunity to discover, use, and understand" the nation's documentary heritage by Loewen (2008:164) provides the background to this study. Some readers may not agree with this perspective, but we hope that by the end of this article they may be able to express the extent to which they do and criticise aspects that they disagree with. Access facilitates reference and use of archival materials "through the use of catalogs, indexes, finding aids, or other tools" (Pearce-Moses 2013).

The notion of the accessibility of the archives to the public dates back to the Greek Metroon, however, it was the influence of the French Revolution and philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries such as Rousseau and Voltaire that gave the liberalisation of access to archives a great impetus (McKemmish, Reed & Piggott 2005:184; Ngulube 2002:567; Zolotarevsky 2010:48). By promulgating the first law on archives, the declaration of Archival Rights of 25 June 1794, the state formally acknowledged the responsibility for caring for archives and making them accessible to citizens for the first time in history (Couture & Rousseau 1987).

Providing access to primary data contained in archives as constituted in the documents, housed in archival buildings, and managed by a requisite archival institution is an important component of archives administration. Any comprehensive access regime should take into consideration the interplay between these three major components of an archive. These components assist in establishing physical, intellectual and administrative control over archival documents so that they may be available to users and provide an opportunity for the users to consult them. The Public Records Office UK (2009) underscores the fact that if users are to use archives then they must have intellectual, legal and physical access to them.

It is only when records get utilised that archives can best justify their utility to society. The custodial ethos that narrowly interpreted the role of archivists and archives in society as espoused by archivists such as Sir Hilary Jenkinson (1947), is being increasingly challenged by the current discourse which underscores the need for archivists to aggressively promote access to their holdings for consultation by users if they are to remain relevant in a changing archival landscape.

Archivists are bound to fail to make the documents in their custody available for consultation if (Evans 2007; Moyo 2002; Murambiwa & Ngulube 2011; Ngulube 2002; Ngulube 2009):
- the materials are not processed (arranged and described) as a result of accumulated backlogs;
- the equipment to access archives is obsolete;
- finding aids do not exist;
- there is no legal authority to access information (closed periods and conditions of access);
- physical access to archives is difficult; and
- there are systemic barriers to accessing information contained in archives.

Practical and empirical research on access to archives in sub-Saharan Africa is sparse and limited (Harris 1992:12; Murambiwa & Ngulube 2011:2; Ngulube 2002:563; Ngulube 2006: 107). Furthermore, the literature from elasewhere makes it plain that:

> archivists know very little about their users and that there is an immediate need for systematic and broad research in order to define archives users, their information needs and their use of archival finding aids" (Zolotarevsky 2010:48).

Kilasi, Maseko and Abankwah (2011) carried out a study in Swaziland and Tanzania in order to understand the expectations and behaviour of users of archives. The major finding from the survey was that archivists were not exploiting information technology (IT) to meet users' needs. Hlophe and Wamukoya (2007) investigated the utilisation of archival information at the Swaziland National Archives by researchers from the University of Swaziland and concluded that the search-room was not suitable for research purposes and the search-room staff took long to retrieve required documents. Little has been written about physical, intellectual and legal access to archives in Zimbabwe in general, and BA in particular. Studies on access to public archives conducted in Zimbabwe by scholars such as Dube (2011), Murambiwa and Ngulube (2011) and Moyo (2002) were mainly theoretic-analytical and were not based on empirical evidence. Therefore the present study sought to map access and use of archival materials at BA in order to add to the literature on the access discourse and to influence policy and practice.

## Statement of the problem

Access to archives is one of the keys that guarantee the utilisation of information. The right to access information is a human right as it promotes responsible citizenship and supports democracy and the rule of law (Kecskeméti & Székely 2005). From that perspective, archives should be open to use by people from all walks of life and for various reasons. The growth of an information-based society is predicated on open and equitable access to information, however, some policies and systemic obstacles may hinder unfettered access to information contained in archives. Little is known on how BA deals with the challenges and opportunities of facilitating open and free access to archives as envisaged by the International Council on Archives (2011) and as envisioned the National Archives of Zimbabwe's strategic goals that aimed at increasing Empirically investigating access and use of archives at BA is likely to uncover the current practices and provide a window of opportunity to reinforce the positive ones and improve on any deficiencies.

The following questions that ultimately guided our research:
- How do access policies influence access to, and use of archival collections?

- What finding aids are used to provide access to archives?

- How do backlogs of unprocessed archival materials affect access to the collection?

- To what extent is information and communication technologies (ICTs) utilised to provide access to archives?

- Which systemic barriers hinder access and use of archival materials?

- Who are the major users of archival materials and for what purpose do they utilise the information for?

- Do staff members have knowledge and skills for providing and promoting access to archival materials?

## Contextual profile of Bulawayo Archives

In the course of restructuring and decentralisation of its services, the National Archives of Zimbabwe established the Bulawayo Records Centre at the Tredgold Building Complex in 1966 (Murambiwa, Ngulube, Masuku & Sigauke 2012). The Bulawayo Records Centre of the National

Archives of Zimbabwe shared accommodation with other government departments in an office complex until the year 2000 when it officially began its operations from a new purpose-built repository in the suburb of Khumalo. Its operations are also governed by the National Archives of Zimbabwe Act of 1986 (Government of Zimbabwe 1986). As with the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), the mission of BA is to "acquire, preserve and provide public access to Zimbabwean documentation in whatever format in an efficient and economic manner" (National Archives of Zimbabwe 2012a). The question is: Why does its mission have the same focus with NAZ if its purpose is collecting and archiving materials relating to the Matabeleland region? This is also true of the other provincial archives offices such as Gweru, Mutare, Masvingo and Chinhoyi which also have their respective provincial foci.

The National Archives of Zimbabwe Act of 1986 is silent on the establishment of regional archives. The lack of an official proclamation on regional archives may partly explain why there is no consensus on the name of BA. When we were conducting this research we encountered various versions of the name that was used to refer to BA. On the one hand, some referred to BA as National Archives Bulawayo or Bulawayo Archives and on the other, the *Director's Annual Report* (National Archives of Zimbabwe 2011) referred to it as the Bulawayo National Archives. The confusion over the name is compounded by the fact that the current signage at the entrance to the archives complex reads "National Archives of Zimbabwe" (Murambiwa, Ngulube, Masuku & Sigauke 2012:9). The inferences that this may be a case of a crisis in identity or branding or a lack of a clear legislative framework that may help in the predicament of labelling the institution is inescapable.

At the time of the research, Bulawayo Archives held 46 200 cubic feet of records in the Records Section and 3 500 half cubic feet of processed ones in the Archives Section (National Archives of Zimbabwe 2012b). Processed archival materials were arranged according to their provenance and described at the fonds level. Accessing information contained in archives at BA can be achieved by visiting the Archives or remotely by inquiring through the telephone, postal, fax, and electronic-mail. Materials are consulted in the reading room which accommodates 15 users at any given time.

## Conceptual framework

Seven of the ten fundamental principles of accessing archives developed by the International Council on Archives (ICA 2011) were used as a conceptual framework. Conceptual frameworks are a set of lenses that assist in directing and grounding the research process (Ravitch & Riggan 2012; Ngulube, Mathipa & Gumbo 2014). The conceptual framework situated the research questions within the wider universe of what is already known about access and assisted the researchers in making decisions during data collection, analysis and writing.

The ten principles provide archivists with an external baseline against which to measure their existing access practices and to support archivists who seek to adopt new or modify existing access rules. The following seven access principles were selected for their relevance to the study (*numbering corresponds to the original document*):

> (i) The public should have the right of access to archives of public bodies. Both public and private entities should open their archives to the greatest extent possible.
> (ii) Institutions holding archives should make known the existence of the archives, including the existence of closed materials, and disclose the existence of restrictions that affect access to the archives.
> (iii) Institutions holding archives should adopt a proactive approach to access.

(iv) Institutions holding archives should ensure that restrictions on access are clear and of stated duration, are based on pertinent legislation, acknowledge the right of privacy in accordance with cultural norms, and respect the rights of owners of private materials.

(v) Archives should be available on equal terms of access.

(vii) Users should have the right to appeal a denial of access.

(viii) Institutions holding archives should ensure that operational constraints do not prevent access to archives.

**Research methodology**

The qualitative methodology was employed in this study. The case study design provided a blueprint for this study (Rowley 2002; Yin 1994). The design was attractive to the researchers because Zolotarevsky (2010) also used a qualitative case study over a period of six months, which was slightly shorter than time span of our study. The use of case study design in this research enabled the researchers to focus on the Bulawayo Archives as a single entity and obtain comprehensive information pertaining to the case, and to achieve high ecological validity because the study took place with minimum disruption of the participants' everyday activities (Plowright 2011:30).[1]

The population of the study included the Director of National Archives of Zimbabwe, Acting Principal Archivist who was in charge of BA, two Archivists and two Records Management Assistants who worked there and the ten users who visited BA during the time of the study. The study triangulated data collection comprising face-to-face interviews, observation techniques, and document review or what Plowright (2011:91) labels as artefact analysis. Plowright (2011:16) argues for the use of "artefact analysis" to describe objects or events that are produced by people. The artefacts that were analysed included NAZ website, control desk registers, policy documents, catalogues, indexes and accession registers. The observation technique was instructive when conducting reading room inspections and the facilitation of access to archives by the physically challenged. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse data. The research questions formed the basis of the themes that were used as categories of analysis. The first phase involved data coding followed by data reduction to establish how patterns occurred and answered the research questions. The codes were then combined to form themes that addressed the research questions (Matthews and Ross 2010: 372).

**Findings and discussions**
The following subsection presents and discusses the results that emanated from the research.

**The influence of policies on access to archival collections**

Policy comprises a set of principles, which guide a regular course of action (Menou 1991:50). According to Menou (1991:50) all social formations have policies that may be:

- de facto, that is, they can be inferred by observing patterns of action and behaviour among key players;
- de jure, that is, they are stipulated in documents such as legal acts and regulations; and

---

[1]. For further information and clarification on ecological validity, *see* Plowright (2011).

- formalized policies codified in documents originating from stakeholders like professional associations and organisations.

Menou's (1991:50) representation provides a useful background for discussing policies in general and access policies in particular. This formulation about policy dispels the commonly held notion held by some organisation may operate without policies. It is evident that organisation may have policies at various levels of the schema, that is, at an informal, formal and legislative levels. Both de jure and formal policies govern access and use of archives in Zimbabwe. The National Archives of Zimbabwe Act, 1986 {Chapter 25:06} as amended is the de jure policy while the access policies crafted by NAZ and made available on its website are the formalised ones.

NAZ legislation is not explicit when it comes to matters of accessing archives. As compared to the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (NARSA) Act No. 43 of 1996 as amended (South Africa 1996), for example, NAZ legislation is vague on issues of access and use. The purpose of the National Archives of Zimbabwe Act, 1986 is stated as to:

> provide for the storage and preservation of public archives and public records; for the declaration and preservation of protected historical records; and for matters incidental to or connected with the foregoing (Government of Zimbabwe 1986).

Conversely, NARSA Act of 1996 as amended specifically state its purpose as to:

> provide for a National Archives and Record Service; the proper management and care of the records of governmental bodies; and the preservation and use of a national archival heritage; and to provide for matters connected therewith.

The need to "use" archives is upfront in the South African legislation and Section 3(b) of the Act further states one of the functions of the National Archives as to "make such records accessible and promote their use by the public". On the other hand, section 9 of NAZ Act hazily refers to access and use in the following fashion: "Every person shall be entitled to inspect any public archive... subject to such terms and conditions as may be imposed by the Director or the Secretary, as the case may be" (Government of Zimbabwe 1986). There is a need to review the Zimbabwean statutory framework in order to underscore the fact that archives should be used rather than being simple "inspected" as it is currently the case.

The access policy of BA is similar to the one of NAZ and it is available on NAZ website (National Archives of Zimbabwe 2012a). The publishing of the access policy is in conformity with the second ICA access principle and the third one which underscores the need for use of information and communication technologies (ICT) for the pro-active promotion of access to archival holdings by archivists. Observations revealed that the access policy was not available in the reading room. Face-to-face interviews revealed that users were given the policy upon their arrival at the control desk. However, the access policy does not spell out the restrictions that affect access to archives and the recourse that users have if access were denied.

In order to access the archives, the researcher is required to produce a national identity document so as to prove that the user is above 18 years as access is not rendered to an unaccompanied person who is under 18 years of age. Foreigners may not be granted access unless they have obtained a research permit from the Research Council of Zimbabwe, and paid

an admission fee of USD 1.00 to BA. The need for foreigners to pay access fees runs against the spirit of Principle 8 by ICA (2011), which partly stipulates that governmental archival institutions should "not charge a fee for access to archives for either national or foreign users".

The Director of NAZ stressed that there was a need to review the statutory and regulatory frameworks governing access to archives so that they meet needs of 21st century users. However, it is clear that whatever the law and policies may stipulate, users cannot have access and consult archival materials unless there are current, accurate and adequate finding aids in line with Principle 2 of ICA (2011). The major barrier to accessing archival records in Africa is not the legislation that limit and prevents access, but simply the lack of finding aids (Mazikana 1999:75; Ngulube 2002:575; Ngulube 2009). As we were conducting the research, it was interesting to discover that little has changed in respect of the inadequacy of finding aids at BA since the mentioned studies were conducted.

## Finding aids used to provide access to archives

The relationship between access and processing is not adequately addressed in archival discourse (Prom 2010:146). Processing of uncatalogued archives is key to providing access and making reference to archival materials possible. The two major activities associated with processing archival materials after accessioning are arrangement and description of archives. The scheme of description is not always perfect but it provides users with tools to access the archive. Indeed:

> Archivists know that archival description creates a unique bridge, sometimes narrow and tenuous, often less than perfectly engineered and, in all honesty, more rickety than we would care to admit, but for all its shortcomings, a bridge always helping the user move from what they know to what they wish to learn (Boles 2009: 6).

In other words, finding aids that result from the processing of archives communicate information about archival materials to users. They are the signposts which lead the archivists and the researcher to the information they are seeking about or from archives (Prom 2010). The existence of finding aids reduces what Blais (1995) referred as the intellectual barriers to archives and allows as many individuals as possible "to read, touch, learn from, and enjoy those documents that illuminate past experience". File lists, descriptive inventories, calendars, item catalogues, card indexes, registers and guides are some of the type of finding aids that result from processing.

Responses from interviews with staff and observations revealed that finding aids that were available at BA included indexes, accession registers for archival materials and descriptive inventories. The finding aids were not based on an international standard such as ICA (2000) archival descriptive standards. Users bemoaned the difficulties they experienced when trying to access the finding aids. For instance, only card catalogues that provided the location and the rudimentary description of the archival record were accessible, whereas some other users preferred to have access to the indexes so that they would have an overview of the holdings without having to peruse each and every card catalogue. Interviews with BA staff indicated that a few indexes were accessible and more were still being developed. The finding aids on NAZ website were not helpful as the link takes the researcher to a list of services that are not linked to any database (National Archives of Zimbabwe 2012a).

Users and staff were in agreement that the existing finding aids were detailed enough to enhance fast retrieval if only they could be complete rather than being available unsystematically in bits and pieces. However, one respondent who was an experienced user and researcher, felt that more details were required to make finding aids more informative. From his verbatim response,

one can deduce that he is referring to calendars which are becoming very rare in archival practice nowadays (Pearce-Moses 2013). In his own words:

> *As a historian from the old school I prefer finding aids that chronologically list the documents in an archive giving a comprehensive summary of content, type of document, and page or leaf count. Such finding aids are prevalent worldwide in archives that were processed up until the 1950s I suppose. These are becoming rare, but some of us who belong to the old school are more comfortable with such finding aids than mere lists and inventories. One tends to waste a lot of time retrieving and consulting records whose content and quantity is not known. It's just like looking for a needle in haystack. I suppose the constraint of resources does not make it possible for Archives to come up with such chronological inventories any more.*

The Acting Principal Archivist tried to explain the inadequacy of finding aids:

> *Bulawayo Archives has been very slow in providing finding aids due to staff shortages and focusing on clearing backlogs of unprocessed archival materials. It is probable that completely satisfactory finding aids will never be available for all our materials.*

This information was corroborated by the Director of NAZ. A lack of finding aids negatively affects access to information. Their absence is a clear indicator that access to records and archives is limited or not possible (Mazikana 1999:75; Moyo 2002; Ngulube 2002:575; Ngulube 2009). The inadequacy of finding aids means that the public is deprived of the right to access to archives of public bodies as enshrined in the first Principle of ICA (2011).

**Effects of backlogs of unprocessed archival materials on accessing the collection**

One of the major obstacles to reference and use of archival materials is unprocessed backlogs of materials. The face-to face interviews revealed that BA was snowed under backlogs of unprocessed archives. An examination of accessions registers and records transmittal lists revealed that 20000 cubic feet of public archives were lying in backlogs. This number is huge given that BA came into operation less than a decade ago. From the responses, it became clear that a number of factors caused the backlogs at BA, including high staff turnover, a lack of skilled manpower and a shortage of storage space in the public archives section. BA staff pointed out that BA has been proactive in dealing with the backlogs. It has taken advantage of its good relations with the National University of Science and Technology to get students to assist with the backlogs as part of their experiential learning and practical exposure to the field.

The "curse of backlogs" as Boles (2009:7) would term it, is not a phenomenon that is peculiar to BA. Nengomasha (1998:15) reported that Botswana once struggled with backlogs of unprocessed records for a long time. Ngulube (2006; 2009) once observed that many countries in Africa were struggling with backlogs of unprocessed records, and archives were completely inaccessible because most unprocessed records did not have any rudimentary tools for retrieving them. Ferriero (2009) reported that the United States National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) was plagued by backlogs to the extent that it committed itself to processing 95 percent of its holdings "to the point where researchers can have efficient access to them by 2016".

Users complained about the difficulty of accessing archival materials as a result of backlogs of unprocessed archives. Some of the problems caused by backlogs of unprocessed archives were underscored by the Director of NAZ in the following fashion:

> *Backlogs of unprocessed archives hinder access to public archives. Some archives are physically present at Bulawayo and the closure period has expired as stipulated in the Archives Act, but they are inaccessible to those who may need them as they lie unprocessed in archival repositories. It is extremely difficult to locate unprocessed materials in the absence of some rudimentary finding aids. However, it should be noted*

> *that backlogs are not confined to the Bulawayo Archives, the National Archives of Zimbabwe in Harare is plagued by the same problems albeit in varying degrees.*

The findings also revealed that there were no plans to reappraise the backlogs or the processed archives in order to enhance access as envisaged by Garaba (2005).

## Utilisation of information and communication technologies to provide access to archives

The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has affected user services (Zolotarevsky 2010:48). As result of the advent of ICTs, users expect public archives to make their services available remotely 24/7 and 365 days of the year (Hlophe & Wamukoya 2007). Finding aids should be made available online as envisaged by Principle 3 of ICA (2011) which was used a conceptual framework for this study.

Face-to face interviews revealed that BA did not have its own dedicated website and most of the information on NAZ website (National Archives of Zimbabwe 2012a) was marginally relevant to the mission, activities and functions of BA. They bemoaned the fact that the "electronic database" link on NAZ website was *"useless"* as it led the user to a dead link. The researchers visited the website and confirmed that the link was dead. The users also said the information provided on the website was inadequate as it was biased towards NAZ instead of BA. The users held that the finding aids available online only described the highest level fonds which did not give enough detail to assist the would-be researcher to make an informed decision on whether to visit the National Archives or not.

Users held the view that the finding aids on the website should include the description of archival materials at all levels down to and including the file level and should be relevant to BA. They also wanted to have access to the actual archival document online rather than the information on its existence, though they conceded that the expectation was a bit difficult to meet given the resource constraints that BA faced. The low level of use of ICTs to provide access to archival materials held in public archives was reported by Kisali, Maseko and Abankwah (2011). The need to exploit the advantages offered by ICTs to provide access to archival holdings at BA was expressed by one international researcher in the following words:

> *In this time and age the National Archives should make sure that finding aids for their collections are remotely accessible online. That will be of big services to the users. One would visit the archives knowing very well whether the information one requires is available or not. Something like the National Automated Archival Information Retrieval System (NAAIRS) at the National Archives of South Africa would be of great help for off-site access. Though the South African system is not that perfect at least it is a good starting point in making access to bibliographic details of archival materials possible. I would have easily given you examples of advanced online presence of archives from Europe where I come from but I do not want to fall into the trap of comparing oranges with apples. Conditions in Africa may be different to conditions in the West, hence I am giving the South African example.*

The Director of the National Archives conceded that the 21st century is largely defined by ICTs and the needs of the digital natives. He also added that the use of ICTs made providing access to archival holdings more "efficient, more effective and a whole lot easier". We put the last part of the response in quotation marks because the words are very close to those of Ferriero (2011) said. On the need to automate the finding aids the Director of NAZ said:

> *South Africa has an automated archival system, National Automated Archival Information Retrieval System (NAAIRS) which is regulated by section 3(e) of the National Archives of South Africa Act (No. 43 of 1996) as amended. In Zimbabwe, there is a big gap between digital technology and outmoded regulations. The legislation is silent about automating finding aids, for example as compared to the situation in South Africa. Automating the finding aids may help off-site researchers to determine whether or not it was necessary to visit the National Archives. That may also save users a lot of costs.*

In 2011, Dube observed that "access to archives was slow and unreliable" (2011:285) as result of the use of manual systems. This study revealed that there have not been any changes to the state quo.

## Systemic barriers that hinder access and use of archival materials

There are also "systemic barriers" that may influence physical access and the opportunity to accessing information (Wilson 1991:97). They include office hours, providing services to the physically disabled, location of the archive and technology. Physical access can be facilitated by regular and sufficient hours of operation by archival repositories, providing space for consulting the records and enabling users to copy information from records.

McCausland (1993) and Shepherd and Yeo (2003) argue that regular and flexible operating hours are a necessity in archival institutions to maximize the utilisation of the collection. BA regularly uses the traditional Monday to Friday working week. This tends to exclude many working class people from accessing archives, although the reading room is open during the lunch hour. That seems to be unhelpful for a user who would be interesting in accessing archival materials as the access policies makes it clear that information retrieval services were not available during the lunch hour. Kisali, Maseko and Abankwah (2011) also found that users expected archival institutions to be flexible and accommodative of users who may not be able to use archives during the traditional working week. Hlope and Wamukoya (2007) established that inadequate opening hours contributed a low usage of archival materials in Swaziland. Some users told us that the location of BA in a suburb that is not centrally situated may be contributing to low usage. Some staff members who were interviewed agreed with the users' observations.

Another systemic hindrance to accessing archives is the capacity of some of the reading rooms in some national archival institutions. The reading room capacity at BA is 15 and that may not be adequate if the number of users were to increase. The adequacy and suitability of the reading room facilities may contribute to efficient and effective access to archives (Hlophe & Wamukoya 2007). A lack of reprographic equipment to reproduce archival materials may also be a hindrance to the use of archives. Archives should provide researchers with photocopies or scans of requested documents a fact that is implied in the access policy of NAZ (National Archives of Zimbabwe 2012a). It was observed that if users wanted to photocopy something from the archival materials they had to provide transport for one of the staff members to accompany them to town to photocopy the required material from the archives. Though this was helpful to the users, it was in contravention of its own access policy which in part reads: "No archives materials may leave the archives building" (National Archives of Zimbabwe 2012a). A study by Dunlop (2009) showed that even in South Africa archival materials may not be removed from the archival building (Dunlop 2009).

People with disabilities that may visit archival institutions may include those with restricted abilities for walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, perceiving or understanding, or physical coordination (Serene and United States National Archives and Records Administration 2011). The physically challenged or persons with disabilities face a lot of problems when accessing archives (Murambiwa & Ngulube 2011). Interviews with BA staff revealed that procedures for responding to disability needs were not established as reading room staff were not prepared to respond to users with various needs. One respondent summed up the situation thus:

> *BA is not serious about giving access to people with disability, for instance to the best of my mind facilities have not been surveyed to determine public areas that have barriers. That shows that giving*

> *access to people with disabilities is not on the agenda of BA. Consequently, some people with disabilities do not enjoy the same benefits from the goods and services of the archive as able bodied users.*

Most archival documents are inaccessible to blind people. Interviews with staff also revealed wheelchair access in the building was limited. Observation revealed that reference room tables were not accommodative of wheelchairs, for instance. One of the archivist pointed out that the archives rarely encountered such users if at all. The fact that disabled people were not catered for at BA means that conditions of access were not fair, equitable and timely to persons with disabilities. This is obviously not in line with Principle 5 of ICA (2011). Archivists must contend with all these group of people if they are to give equitable access to their holdings. The archivists should not explicitly or implicitly give any preference to any category of users on the basis of their nationality, level of education the nature of the research or any other criterion whatsoever, for instance. Granting equitable access to users is also in line with ICA (1996) Code of Ethics. In short, all privileges available to all other people should be available to those with disabilities as well.

## Skills and knowledge of staff in promoting access and use of archival materials

Knowledge and skills in promoting access and use of archival materials is fundamental to implementing and promoting access and reference activities. People who implement access programmes must understand why providing access is an important element of the archival administration equation. Knowledge on promoting access and use of archival materials is essential for making critical decisions about human and financial resources to support access programmes. It is apparent that a lack of financial resources does not greatly hamper efforts to promote access and use of archival materials as the lack of skills and knowledge of communicating archives. Staff with the requisite skills and knowledge is likely to use the limited financial recourses judiciously and make appropriate choices and priorities when allocating resources for archival activities. Interviews with staff revealed that none of them had been trained on providing access to archives. They also revealed that they were not adequately trained to conduct a reference interview.

A study by Hlope and Wamukoya (2007) found that a lack of skilled personnel with proper knowledge on promoting access and marketing of archives contributed to low levels of the utilisation of archives. Similarly, staff members at BA also bemoaned a lack of structures and processes to enable staff to effectively promote access to archives. They argued that the archival products and services should be improved before they may be promoted. One staff member said: "*We do not want to raise the expectations of our users by promoting to them a virtual non-existent product*". They conceded that they were hungry for knowledge on promoting access to archival materials in their holdings. Furthermore, the participants said that they urgently needed to be capacitated with skills related to processing of archives, including arrangement and description, designing finding aids and outreach activities. They thought that acquiring basic knowledge was going to enhance their professionalism. Some of these skills were identified by Walch (2006) as essential.

## Major users of archival materials and the purpose that they utilised the information for

The control desk register was the major artefact that provided information on the major users of the collection at BA. The control desk register captures data on the profiles of researchers and their research areas. The control desk register revealed that the major users of archival materials were academics, family history researchers, and media workers looking for photographs to

illustrate their stories. A study by Kisali, Maseko and Abankwah (2011) established that students were major users of the archives. However, the control desk register revealed that academic researchers were the major users of archives followed by students who were consulting printed library and published materials as compared to archival sources. The academic researchers were not confined to historians as would have been expected. The users' areas of interest varied from land issues, the Fifth Brigade (Gukurahundi) activities in Matabeleland, Njelele shrine and the economic development of Bulawayo. Some of the ten users who were interviewed confirmed that these areas were topical and popular with researchers in Matabeleland, an area covered by BA. Although archives may be used for recreational purposes none of the users utilised them for that purpose.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Each environment has its own unique features, which means that the findings from this study may not be generalisable to all archival contexts. However, the findings are instructive and they may assist other archival institutions in planning and implementing an archival access programme if they are suitably applied.

- Legal authorization of access to archives exists but the legislation needs to be revised to emphasise on providing access and the use of ICTs to enhance access to archival finding aids. BA was not effectively using ICTs to provide access to its holdings.
- BA uses the access policy of NAZ. It needs to come up with an access policy that is applicable to its context.
- The existing policies on access assist in facilitating the use of archives, but they need to be more comprehensive than is presently the case. The policy should include restrictions that affect access to archives and the recourse that users have if access were denied so that it articulates the ICA principles of access to archives.
- Foreign researchers pay in order to access archival materials at BA in contravention of ICA principles.
- Finding aids available at BA included indexes, accession registers for archival materials and descriptive inventories. Some finding aids were incomplete and were not compiled according to any international standard. Some finding aids available from NAZ website were not detailed enough. The inadequacy of finding aids means that the public is deprived of the right to access to archives of public bodies as enshrined in first Principle of ICA (2011).
- Backlogs of unprocessed archives were rife. Users complained about the difficulty of accessing archival materials as a result of backlogs of unprocessed archives.
- The systemic barriers hindered users from accessing archives were the opening hours, a lack of access by people with disabilities, limited capacity of the reading room and lack of reprographic facilities such as photocopying. BA should address some of these operational constraints so that they do not limit access to archival materials in line with ICA principles.
- Staff had limited knowledge of promoting access to archives.
- The major users of archival materials were academics, family history researchers, media workers looking for photographs to illustrate their stories.
- Students did not utilise a lot of archival materials as they were interested in library books.

## References

Blais, G. 1995. *Access to archival records: a review of current issues.* Paris: UNESCO. (PGI-95/WS/5). [Online]. Available WWW: http://www.unesco.org/ (Accessed 10 January 2012).

Boles, F. 2009. But a thin veil of paper. 64th Presidential Address of the Society of American Archivists, Austin Hilton, Austin, Texas, 14 August 2009. [Online]. Available WWW: www.archivists.org/.../Boles-PresidentialAddress-Aug2009.pdf (Accessed 19 July 2013).

Couture, C. & Rousseau, J. 1987. *The life of a document: a global approach to archives and records management.* Translated by David Homel. Montreal: Véhicule Press.

Dube, T. 2011. Archival legislation and the challenge of managing archives in Zimbabwe *ESARBICA Journal* 30: 279-305.

Dunlop, J. 2009. Policies and services in the reading room. *ESARBICA Journal* 28: 222-229.

Evans, M. J. 2007. Archives of the people, by the people, for the people. *American Archivist* 70(2): 387–400.

Ferriero, D. S. 2009. Address to the Society of American Archivists. [Online]. Available WWW: http://www.archives.gov/about/speeches/2009/august13-2009.html (Accessed 19 July 2013).

Ferriero, D. S. 2011. Making access easier. *Prologue Magazine* 43(2). [Online]. Available WWW: http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2011/summer/archivist.html (Accessed 29 July 2013).

Garaba, F. 2005. An investigation into archival appraisal practices in the member states of the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA). Masters thesis. University of KwaZulu-Natal: Pietermaritzburg.

Government of Zimbabwe. 1986. *National Archives of Zimbabwe Act* [*Chapter 25:06*]. Harare: Government Printers.

Harris, V. 1992. Public access to official records and the records management function of the South African State Archives Service. *Innovation* 4:12-16.

Hlophe, P and Wamukoya, J. 2007. Utilization of archival information at Swaziland National archives by researchers at University of Swaziland. *ESARBICA Journal* 26: 65-85.

International Council on Archives. 1996. Code of ethics. Available WWW: http://www.ica.org/?lid=5555 (Accessed 23 July 2013).

International Council on Archives. 2000. ISAD(G): *General international standard archival description.* 2nd ed. Ottawa: ICA.

International Council on Archives. 2010. The Universal Declaration on Archives adopted by the Annual General Meeting in Oslo. [Online]. Available WWW: http://www.wien2004.ica.org/en/2010/09/28/universal-declaration-archives-adopted-annual-general-meeting-oslo (Accessed 13 July 2013).

International Council on Archives. 2011. Access principles. [Online]. Available WWW: http://www.ica.org/ (Accessed 2 June 2011).

Jenkinson, H. 1947. The English archivist: a new profession (inaugural address). In: Ellis, R. (ed.) *The selected writing of Sir Hillary Jenkinson.* London: Alan Sutton, pp. 236-259.

Kecskeméti, C and Székely, I. P. 2005. *Access to archives: a handbook of guidelines for implementations of Recommendation No R (2000) 13 on a European Policy on Access to Archives.* Strasbourg: Council of Europe, Department of Culture and Cultural Heritage.

Kilasi, M., Maseko, A and Abankwah, R. 2011. A survey of national archives reference services in Swaziland and Tanzania: an examination of the expectations and behaviour of users. *ESARBICA Journal* 30: 102-114.

Loewen, C. 2008. Transformation, exploration, innovation: library and archives Canada's access policy framework. *Archives and Manuscripts* 36(2): 148–168.

Matthews, B and Ross, L. 2010. *Research methods: a practical guide for social sciences.* Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Mazikana, P. C. 1999. Access to records: conditions and constraints. In: Harris, V. (ed.) *Proceedings of the 15th Biennial General Conference of the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional branch of the international Council on Archives and the protection of people's rights.* Pretoria: National Archives of South Africa, pp 74-81.

McCausland, S. 1993. Access and reference services. In: Ellis, J. (ed.) *Keeping archives.* 2nd ed. Port Melbourne: The Australian Society of Archivists Inc, pp. 273-305.

McKemmish, S., Reed, B and Piggott, M. 2005. The archives. In: McKemmish, S. Piggott, M., Reed, B. and Upward, F. (eds). 2005. *Archives: recordkeeping in society.* Wagga Wagga: Centre for Information Studies, pp.159-195.

Menou, M. J. 1991. National information policy in the less developed countries: an educational perspective. *International Library Review* 23:49-64.

Moyo, C. 2002. Preservation versus access: the user and archives. *ESARBICA Journal* 21: 105-113.

Murambiwa, I. M and Ngulube, P. 2011. Measuring access to public archives and developing an access index: experiences of the national archives of Zimbabwe. *ESARBICA Journal* 30: 83-101.

Murambiwa, I. M., Ngulube, P., Masuku, M and Sigauke, D. T. 2012. Archival development in Zimbabwe 1935-2010: setting the scene. In Ngulube, P (ed.) *National Archives 75@30: 75 Years of Archiving Excellence at the National Archives of Zimbabwe.* Harare: National Archives of Zimbabwe, pp 1-20.

National Archives of Zimbabwe. 2011. *Director's annual report.* Harare: Government Printers.

National Archives of Zimbabwe. 2012a. About National Archives of Zimbabwe. [Online]. Available WWW: http://www.archives.gov.zw/index.php/home (Accessed 19 July 2011).

National Archives of Zimbabwe. 2012b. *Director's annual report.* Harare: Government Printers.

Nengomasha, C.T. 1998. Strategic planning in the Botswana National Archives and Records Services. *ESARBICA Journal* 17 18-20.

Ngulube, P. 2001. Archival appraisal and the future of historical research in southern Africa. *South African Historical Journal* 45: 249-265.

Ngulube, P. 2002. Future of the past: access to public archives in southern Africa. *Historia* 47(2): 563-82.

Ngulube, P. 2006. Nature and accessibility of public archives in the custody of selected national archival institution in Africa. *ESARBICA Journal* 25: 106-124.

Ngulube, P. 2009. *Preservation and access to public records and archives in South Africa.* Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing.

Ngulube, P., Mathipa, ER & Gumbo, MT. 2014. Theoretical and conceptual frameworks in social research, in Mathipa, ER & Gumbo, MT. (eds). *Addressing research challenges: making headway for developing researchers.* (Noordwyk, R.S.A: Mosala-MASEDI Publishers & Booksellers cc, pp. 47-68.

Pearce-Moses, R. 2013. A glossary of archival and records terminology. [Online]. Available WWW: http://www2.archivists.org/glossary (Accessed 20 July 2013).

Plowright, D. 2011. *Using mixed methods: frameworks for and integrated methodology.* London: Sage.

Prom, C. J. 2010. Optimum access? Processing in college and university archives. *American Archivist* 73(1): 146–174.

Public Records Office UK. 2009. How to access UK public records. [Online]. Available WWW: http://www.howtobooks.co.uk/family/genealogy/public-records-office-asp (Accessed 21 March 2013).

Ravitch, S. M and Riggan, M. 2012. *Reason and rigor: how conceptual frameworks guide research.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Rowley, J. 2002. Using case studies in research. *Management Research News* 25(1):16-27.

Serene, F. H and United States National Archives and Records Administration. 2011. *Making archives accessible for people with disabilities.* Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration.

Shepherd, E and Yeo, G. 2003. *Managing records: a handbook of principles and practice.* London: Facet Publishing Ltd.

South Africa. 1996. *National Archives of South Africa Act 1996. Act No.43 of 1996.* Republic of South Africa Government Gazette, Volume 376, No.17471.

Walch, V. I. 2006. Archival census and education needs survey in the United States. *The American Archivist* 69(2): 294–309.

Wilson, I. E. 1991. Towards a vision of archival services. *Archivaria* 31 (Winter): 91-100.

Yin, R. 1994. *Case study research: design and methods.* 2nd ed. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Zolotarevsky, M. 2010. The information retrieval needs of archival users: a case study from the Jabotinsky Institute, Israel. *Comma: International Journal on Archives* 2008-2: 47-53.