

MANAGEMENT OF RECORDS IN ADAPTED BUILDINGS AS RECORDS CENTRES IN ZIMBABWE

Samson Mutsagondo
Zimbabwe Open University
57649308@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Getrude Maduyu
Zimbabwe Open University
58554742@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Godfrey Tsvuura
Zimbabwe Open University
gtsvuura@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the challenges of records management that arise from the use of adapted buildings as records centres in Zimbabwe, despite the advantages of using such buildings. A qualitative research approach was used as well as a case study research design. Data were collected from seven officers of the Gweru Records Centre through semi-structured interviews. Personal observation was used to triangulate findings from interviews. It was found that the use of adapted buildings as records centres was a cheaper and quicker way of establishing records centres throughout the country. However, a number of preservation, security and management challenges cropped up as the conditions of the buildings and the environment of the adapted buildings were not conducive to the proper and professional management of records. This study is important in that it explores the prospects and challenges of using adapted buildings as records centres in Zimbabwe, an area that has not been researched by many authors. This provokes archival authorities and the government to seriously consider establishing purpose-built records and archival centres.

Keywords: adapted archival buildings; Gweru Records Centre; managing semi-current records; National Archives of Zimbabwe; preventive conservation challenges

INTRODUCTION

A records centre is a depository facility for semi-current records. Public departments transfer to records centres those records they no longer frequently refer to, for secondary storage. Zimbabwe has six public records centres, namely, Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru, Masvingo, Mutare and Chinhoyi. While the Harare and Bulawayo Records Centres are purpose-built, Gweru, Masvingo, Mutare and Chinhoyi are not and they use adapted buildings as records centres. These buildings were initially intended for other purposes. For example, the Gweru Records Centre was initially a prison, while the Chinhoyi Records Centre used to be a block of construction offices. The use of adapted buildings is cheap and has resulted in the proliferation of records centres in four of the country's ten provinces. Nevertheless, the strategy has resulted in numerous challenges regarding the manner in which semi-current records are managed, a situation which compromises the future of the country's documentary heritage. This study used the case study of the Gweru Records Centre, an intermediary public records depository in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe, to assess the pros and cons of using adapted buildings as records centres.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2010), to adapt is to alter or to modify or to make something suitable for new use. In the context of this study, an adapted building is one which is turned from its original use, for example, as an office, hotel or prison, into a records centre or records repository. The term "adapted building" has been used before by Dewah (2008), Murambiwa et al. (2012), and Khayundi (1993) and Mbaye (1993) as cited by Murambiwa et al. (2012). Other scholars have used others terms. For example, Dewah (2008, 47) refers to these buildings as "converted buildings", while Bhebhe, Masuku and Ngulube (2013, 48) use the term "rented premises". For the purposes of this study, the term "adapted buildings" was used most preferably.

Although some purpose-built archival centres have been established, the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) still uses adapted buildings as records centres in the provinces. These buildings are in two categories. Firstly, there are adapted private buildings that the NAZ leases from private individuals and organisations. The Mutare and Masvingo Records Centres fall into this category. Secondly, there are adapted public buildings which the NAZ uses. These buildings belong to the Government of Zimbabwe and no rentals are paid. In this category are the Gweru and Chinhoyi Records Centres. Bhebhe, Masuku and Ngulube (2013) hold that while the NAZ continues to use these buildings as records centres, the structures are not suitable for archives and record-keeping.

The use of adapted buildings as archival centres dates back to 1935 when the NAZ was founded. According to Murambiwa et al. (2012), the first archival building in Zimbabwe was situated at the corner of Central Avenue and 5th Street in Harare, then

known as Salisbury. From there, the NAZ moved to Bechuana House along present-day Robert Mugabe Way and later to the Munhumutapa Building before a purpose-built archival centre was established in Gunhill, Borrowdale, in 1961. The use of adapted buildings as archival centres spread to Bulawayo (Zimbabwe's second largest city) in 1966 when the NAZ made use of the Tredgold Building at the corner of Fort Street and Leopold Takawira Avenue (Bhebhe, Masuku, and Ngulube 2013). The purpose-built Bulawayo Archives and Records Centre (BARC) was established in 2001 and is situated along Pieterse Road in Khumalo North. In 1986, records management services spread to Mutare. The NAZ adapted as records centres Natvest House in the high density suburb of Sakubva and Embassy Building in the city centre. The Masvingo Records Centre, established in 1987, firstly used the then Old Victoria Hotel and later moved to the ZIMRE Building, a tower of office flats in the city centre. In 1988, the Gweru Records Centre was founded. It firstly made use of the Rural Police Station building in 1988, then Patel's Building in 1991, and finally the Old Prison Complex in 1992 (Mutsagondo 2013). The Rural Police Station building is still used as one of the five repositories of the Gweru Records Centre to this day. Lastly, the Chinhoyi Records Centre is using the Old Chinese Complex as a records centre. This building was formerly used as construction offices by Chinese contractors in the 1980s.

Many times, the idea to establish an archive precedes the establishment of one. Thus, when authorities move to establish an archival or records centre, they are forced to use rented or adapted buildings which are quickly turned into records centres with minimal adjustments and renovations. According to Nyoni (2009), the seeds of the NAZ were sown in 1922 when the British South Africa Company was preparing to terminate its administration of the country which in turn had passed on to the responsible government. The bone of contention then was what to do with old company documents and thus the idea of setting up an archive was mooted. The idea remained dormant until 1935 when William Hiller formed the National Historical Committee which later transformed into the Government Archives of Southern Rhodesia in 1935. Southern Rhodesia is the colonial name for Zimbabwe. The idea to have an archive came to fruition, but no archival building was in existence. Thus the Ministry of Internal Affairs (now the Ministry of Home Affairs) transformed a building with two rooms at the corner of Central Avenue and 5th Street in the city centre into an archival centre (Murambiwa et al. 2012).

The sporadic and fast-track establishment of records centres also owes much to the Government of Zimbabwe's decentralisation programme which was adopted in 1986. According to Bhebhe (2011, 30), the then Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, declared in 1986 that the government was to

decentralise archival services and extend records centre facilities to reach the larger urban and provincial administrative centres. This year [1986] will see the opening of Mutare as the beginning of the decentralisation process ...

Following the establishment of the Mutare Records Centre in 1986, Masvingo followed suit in 1987, Gweru in 1988 and Chinhoyi in 1999 (Mutsagondo 2014). All this was done almost spontaneously and amid unavailability of the necessary resources. Adapted buildings were the panacea to make the decentralisation dream come true.

Roper and Millar (1999) opine that the control of environmental conditions is very much related to the type of building which houses records. Many times, rented and adapted buildings fall short of expectations for the efficient and professional management of records. Towing the same line is Ramokate (2006) who holds that a records centre should be purpose-built and with structures that embed safety and security features to make it possible to prolong the life of records.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The NAZ has established provincial records centres by turning existing buildings into records centres. This is a positive move which has made the decentralisation of archival services a reality. Nevertheless, the use of adapted buildings has largely compromised the management, security and preservation of semi-current records. As Murambiwa et al. (2012) note, some adapted buildings are old and dilapidated structures. The use of such buildings for the commercial storage of records should be closely monitored lest the future of documentary heritage in Zimbabwe is at stake.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The study sought to examine the rationale of using adapted buildings as records centres and how this had an impact on the management of semi-current records.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study sought to

- establish the rationale of using adapted buildings as Gweru Records Centre repositories,
- outline structural and physical conditions of the adapted buildings,
- assess the environment of the Gweru Records Centre's adapted buildings, and
- examine the challenges of semi-current records management that emanate from conditions and the environment of the adapted buildings.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative case study research design. As put forward by Crowe et al. (2011) a case study helps to generate in-depth and multi-faceted understanding

of a complex issue in its real-life context. The NAZ has six records centres. Only Harare and Bulawayo have purpose-built records centres, thus were not part of this study. Reference to them was just for comparative purposes. This makes the remaining four records centres of Gweru, Chinhoyi, Masvingo and Mutare the population of the study, from which one case, that of the Gweru Records Centre, was singled out for closer and more in-depth study. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and observation. Seven participants were interviewed. Among them were four officers of the NAZ and three students on work-related learning. Researchers observed the conditions of buildings and the environment of the buildings relative to the expectations of professional records management. The findings of the study were first outlined before they were thematically analysed.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Findings of the study were presented in line with the four research objectives.

The Rationale of Using Adapted Buildings as Records Centres

Seven officers of the NAZ were each asked to state one major advantage of an adapted records centre building as opposed to a purpose-built records centre. Two participants replied that it is easy and quick to set up a records centre when an archival institution just acquired and made use of an existing building. One participant cited the cases of the Mutare, Masvingo and Gweru Records Centres which were established one after the other in quick succession, that is, in 1986, 1987 and 1988 respectively. Existing buildings were acquired and turned into records centres with minimal adjustments and renovations.

Three participants expressed that it is cheap to make use of adapted buildings. The NAZ pays rentals for the use of adapted private buildings in Masvingo and Mutare. This is cheaper in the short term as opposed to establishing a purpose-built records centre. The participants added that it was even cheaper for the NAZ to rely on adapted buildings in the case where the institution made use of public service buildings where rentals were not paid. The Gweru and Chinhoyi Records Centres made use of such buildings.

One participant stated that the use of adapted buildings enabled the NAZ to market itself by spreading its services and products throughout the country. This made the NAZ better known and possibly appreciated more than what the situation could have been had the NAZ remained in Harare, the capital city.

One other participant claimed that the use of adapted buildings enabled the government to realise its archives decentralisation programme. The decentralisation programme is not restricted to archival centres, but extends to state universities, growth points and major health service centres, among other equity-driven projects. The

participants added that had the government waited until it established purpose-built centres, the decentralisation dream could have been miles away.

Structural and Physical Conditions of the Gweru Records Centre's Adapted Buildings

According to the Midlands Provincial Archivist, the Gweru Records Centre comprises three separate and independent buildings, that is, the Rural Police Station Complex, the Old Prison Complex and the offices of the Ministry of Lands. All three are adapted buildings. The NAZ adapted the use of part of the Rural Police Station building in 1988 when the department spread its wings to the Midlands province. In 1992, the NAZ expanded and acquired part of the Old Prison Complex building following the relocation of the Zimbabwe Prison Services to Whawha and Connemara Prison Complexes on the outskirts of the city of Gweru. In the same year, the NAZ also acquired two offices from the Ministry of Lands which they converted into records repositories.

Through interviews and personal observation, the following were noted with regard to the conditions of the three buildings: (a) the roofs and ceilings, (b) the walls, (c) the floors, (d) the windows, and (e) the doors and doorways.

All four NAZ officers indicated that the three buildings were roofed using corrugated iron sheets. Due to old age, some of the iron sheets at the Rural Police Station were rusty and were now leaking. The Rural Police and Ministry of Lands repositories had ceilings while the Old Prison Complex repositories did not have a ceiling. Personal observation confirmed this, but the researchers noted with regret that the ceiling at the Rural Police repository had curved in and had some water marks which indicated that the roof leaked or once leaked in the past. The ceiling at the Rural Police repository was also damaged resulting in it having some holes. Although there was no evidence of the existence of marauding rodents, holes in the ceiling provided a hibernating place for cockroaches, pests and rats, a situation that made fumigation rather ineffective. All three buildings had gutters. However, some gutters had ceased functioning normally as they had holes while some had completely broken down.

The walls of the buildings were also an issue for concern. The Old Prison Complex had very thick walls, which made them suitable as prison cells, the initial and intended use of the building. Some of the walls had cracks and fluffy plaster which indicated the presence of moisture and termite infestation. The other two buildings had normal walls, but due to old age, some plaster was peeling off. The Provincial Archivist indicated that the Old Prison Complex was built in 1937, thus, the building is 80 years old.

Researchers observed that the NAZ offices at the Old Prison Complex were fitted with carpets. However, the repositories had ordinary cement floors. The same applied to the repositories of the Ministry of Lands. Floors of the two buildings had cracks and had stains of chemical treatments which indicated that at one time, the repositories were infested by biological agents. Some of the floors had holes due to damage by rails of

steel shelves. The situation was more worrisome at the Rural Police repository which had a suspended wooden floor. Through observation, it was noted that at some points, the suspended wooden floor had collapsed downwards due to the weight of records and the steel shelves. Although termite infestation was under check, there was evidence that the wooden floor was once attacked by termites.

The Rural Police repository has very large windows. This is owed to the original function of the building. Two NAZ officers indicated that before the building became a police station office, it used to be a hospital ward, thus it had large windows to enhance air circulation. The very opposite applied with regard to the repositories of the Old Prison Complex which had very small windows since the two repositories at the complex used to be prison cells. The repositories of the Ministry of Lands had normal office windows since the rooms were formerly used as offices for prison warders.

The study also focused on doors and doorways. Except for the Rural Police repository, the buildings did not have steel screens or burglar-barred doors. All three buildings had wooden doors. Some doors indicated moisture attack while others were giving in to old age. Some doors were affected by rain since they were not covered by a veranda or door caps. This was one reason why some doors had become deformed while others were rotting. Renovations were made at the Old Prison building where door caps were installed to ward off rainfall from doors and doorways. Unfortunately, such renovations were restricted to offices and not records repositories.

The Environment of the Gweru Records Centre's Adapted Buildings

The study also assessed the environment of the adapted buildings. It was noted that the Rural Police building was in the city centre. The greatest part of the complex is a police station. The complex is bordered by private office buildings, shops, a university library, administration offices and a flea market. The buildings of the Old Prison and Ministry of Lands are on the outskirts of the city. They share the same complex with other public departments, namely Education, Social Services, Women Affairs, the Electoral Commission, the Labour Court and Employment Services. The two records centre buildings lie between two railway lines and next to a railway station, a busy road and industries, for example, Dairibord, National Foods, and the Zimbabwe Electricity Transmission and Distribution Company.

The general condition and environment of the buildings of Gweru's adapted records centre are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of conditions and environment of adapted buildings

Component/ Aspect	Repository		
	Rural Police Complex	Old Prison Complex	Ministry of Lands
Roofs	Iron sheets	Iron sheets	Iron sheets
Ceilings	Wooden ceiling	No ceiling	No ceiling
Gutters	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged
Floors	Suspended wooden floor	Cement floor	Cement floor
Windows	Very large	Very small	Average size
Doors	Wooden with steel screen	Wooden, no steel screen	Wooden, no steel screen
Environment	City centre	Outskirts of city, industrial area	Outskirts of city, industrial area

Records Management Challenges Emanating from Conditions and Environment of Adapted Buildings

The study firstly examined how the roofs, ceilings, gutters, walls, floors, windows and doors of adapted buildings had an impact on the professional management of semi-current records and then how the environment of the three buildings also affected the same. Five participants (71%) indicated that both the conditions of adapted buildings and their environment had adverse effects on how semi-current records were managed at the Gweru Records Centre.

The Provincial Archivist indicated that corrugated iron roofs are strong and rather durable. Nevertheless, they absorbed a lot of heat which in turn “burnt” both records boxes and the records contained therein. The Records Management Assistant concurred with the Archivist and added that all boxes on the top shelves had faded due to exposure to excessive heat.

Observation revealed that boxes which were shelved in the 1990s had faded storage box labels which were affixed to records boxes. The repositories of the Old Prison and Ministry of Lands had very low roofs. As a result, high shelves were too close to artificial lighting, a situation that also contributed to the “burning” of records. Affected records faded and assumed a whitish, brownish or yellowish colour. This spoiled records and thus affected their authenticity.

The Provincial Archivist added that some corrugated iron sheets were very old and were now leaking. All four NAZ officers held that water or floods is an enemy of records which should be kept at bay at all costs. Observation showed that there were water marks on both the ceiling and on some boxes on top shelves, an indication that

there were roof leaks. Some records in affected boxes had blurred print as water washed away print. In some cases, the print was completely washed off. In addition, some paper records were damp, which further accelerated the deterioration of the records. The Records Management Assistant bemoaned such a state of affairs especially given that some records in the Records Centre were destined to remain on the same shelves for the next 25 years.

Threats of water and floods were exacerbated by malfunctioning gutters. Some gutters spilt rainwater onto the main wall and sometimes misdirected water onto windows, doors and doorways. According to the Archivist, moisture on walls was a good breeding ground for mould which in turn badly affected records as they became damp and soft to the extent of wiping off or spreading ink on the face of paper. When damp paper is suddenly exposed to high temperatures, it becomes hard and brittle, and therefore liable to breaking. Although researchers could not establish the volume of records affected in this manner, it was highly likely that some affected records would break up due to brittleness before they were 25 years old. According to the Records Management Assistant, 25 years was the longest period records of value could be stored in a records centre before they could be transferred to an archival centre. Records that fall in this category include personnel files, patients' notes, and court records.

Ceilings serve a number of functions. Among them are beautifying the inside of a building, screening dust from roofs and cooling the inside against roof temperatures. However, as indicated by three NAZ officers, ceilings are not suitable for records repositories mainly because they are a fire risk. A building with a wooden ceiling is more likely to catch fire and it is more difficult to put out a fire in a building with a wooden ceiling. Damaged ceilings also provide hibernating ground for rodents, which spoil and eat into records. In addition, such ceilings made it difficult to effectively fumigate premises since rodents and pests could easily hide beyond the reach of conservation efforts. Thus, the repositories of the Rural Police and Ministry of Lands which had wooden ceilings were rather unfit for the professional storage of paper records.

Thick prison walls at the repositories of the Old Prison were seen as a security measure by three officers of the Gweru Records Centre. However, all four NAZ officers saw the thick walls as a retrogressive factor since they made the repositories unbearably hot. According to the Records Management Assistant, the ideal temperature for paper records is 22 °C while the ideal relative humidity is 55 per cent. She pointed out that the two ideals are difficult to maintain when repositories have unbearable and uncontrollable temperatures. As pointed out earlier, roof leaks and rain-soaked walls also interfered with the relative humidity within a building and thus affected the management of paper records. The other two adapted buildings had normal house walls. Unfortunately, it was observed that due to old age, the plaster on some of the walls was peeling off. In the process, dust spread onto paper records and adversely affected the visibility of the print as well as accelerated the deterioration of the paper. The Archivist added that dust was a

health risk to staff manning the records centre as well as to users of semi-current records who are the creating departments who request such records from time to time.

Cement floors are generally strong. However, as the Archivist indicated, the floors at the Old Prison and Ministry of Lands buildings were not built to withstand the load and pressure of boxes laden with paper records. As a result, there were cracks on the floors and at times stands of steel shelves dug into the floors, thus damaging them. Cracks are good hibernating places for pests, such as cockroaches and rats. These biological agents eat paper and spoil print by their droppings and saliva. The suspended wooden floors at the repository of the Rural Police did not help matters either. Three officers of the NAZ indicated that wood aids combustion and thus wooden floors are not ideal in buildings used for paper records storage. The Archivist indicated that the fact that the wooden floors were suspended meant there was space underneath, a hibernating and breeding ground for pests, such as rats and cockroaches. One participant who worked as an office orderly at the Gweru Records Centre indicated that fumigation was carried out more frequently at the repository of the Rural Police than at the other two buildings owing to the nature of the floor.

Large windows found at the repository of the Rural Police were good for ventilation and aeration. However, in a records centre, big windows bring in more air, sunlight, dust, carbon monoxide and sulphur dioxide, which are harmful to paper. Very small windows found at the repository of the Old Prison were a better option, although the Provincial Archivist advised that the repositories of the records centres should be windowless as aeration, temperature and humidity are controlled by humidifiers or air conditioners. All three buildings which were turned into repositories of the records centres did not have air conditioners.

The main door at the repository of the Rural Police had a steel screen. This ensured the security of the records. However, the other two buildings did not have steel screens and had ordinary wooden doors. Five out of seven participants expressed that wooden doors posed human security threats. Observation also showed that some wooden doors were old and some were deteriorating due to exposure to rain and moisture, problems which were mainly caused by the lack of verandas and/or door caps above doors as well as malfunctioning gutters. Once moisture attacked doors, it also affected the inside resulting in high relative humidity which softened paper and rubbed off ink in extreme cases. Table 2 shows how the conditions of buildings affect the management of records.

Table 2: Summary of how conditions of adapted buildings affected management of records

Aspect of building	Condition	Records management challenges that crop up
Roof	Iron sheets	Too much and unregulated heat. "Burns" records.
	Roof leaks	Growth of mould. Paper rots. Blurred print. Print wiped off.
Ceilings	Wooden ceiling	A fire risk. Damaged ceiling provides hibernating and breeding ground for pests, such as cockroaches and rats.
Gutters	Damaged	Misdirects rainwater onto walls, windows and doors. Too much moisture results in high humidity a danger to paper.
Walls	Thick walls	High temperatures which speeds up deterioration of paper. Makes paper hard and brittle and therefore liable to breaking.
	Plaster peeling off	Dust. Speeds paper deterioration. Affects print. A health risk to staff and users of records.
Floors	Ordinary cement floor	Not suitable for heavy loads like boxes of records. Holes and cracks provide hibernating and breeding ground for rodents.
	Suspended wooden floor	Not strong enough to carry heavy loads. Liable to collapsing downwards. A fire risk.
Windows	Large windows	Allows in more air, dust, sunlight, carbon monoxide and sulphur dioxide, all of which speed up paper deterioration.
	Small windows	When temperature and humidity are not artificially controlled, they encourage low humidity and high temperatures which speed up paper deterioration. Room becomes dark, an ideal condition for mould and termites.
Doors	Steel screen	A security measure against human threats. Unfortunately, it is just installed on one of the three records repositories.
	Wooden doors	Not strong and durable as doors for important security documents. Liable to depreciation since they are exposed to rainwater and moisture.

The study wound up findings by outlining advantages and disadvantages that came about as a result of the environment of the adapted buildings. These data were captured in Table 3.

Table 3: Impact of environment of buildings on management of semi-current records

Name of adapted building	Location	Advantages	Disadvantages
Repository of the Rural Police	City centre	Closer to clients, that is, public departments. Secure since it is at a police station.	Noisy as it is close to a flea market.
Repository of the Old Prison	Outskirts of town or industrial area	Closer to clients, that is, public departments. Main road and rail link, which enhance depositing and request for records.	Dust, noise, industrial pollutants. Human security threats since it shares complex with seven other public departments.
Repository of the Ministry of Lands	Outskirts of town or industrial area	Closer to clients, that is, public departments. Main road and rail link, which enhance depositing and request for records.	Dust, noise, industrial pollutants. Human security threats since it shares complex with seven other public departments.

The Gweru Records Centre houses semi-current records deposited by public departments. According to the Records Management Assistant, public departments include government ministries and departments, statutory bodies and local authorities. It is advantageous for a records centre to be closer to its clients as this cultivates better and improved working relations between the records centre and its clients. The building of the Rural Police is in the city centre and thus closest to most public departments than the repositories of the Old Prison and Ministry of Lands. There are good roads linking the repository of the Rural Police while the other two buildings can be accessed by both road and rail link.

The fact that the repository of the Rural Police shares the same complex with the Department of Police assures the centre of security, which is rather lacking at the other two adapted buildings. There are threats to security at the repositories of the Old Prison and the Ministry of Lands due to the large number of clients who visit other departments, one of which is the Department of Labour. High clientele also implies increased littering of dirt and food leftovers, a situation which attracts pests, such as cockroaches and rats to the records centre.

Noise pollution is a threat to the operations of the records centres. While the repository of the Rural Police is affected by noise from a nearby flea market, the other two repositories are negatively affected by noise from passing vehicles, trains and

industrial machinery. In addition, smoke and industrial pollutants taint paper records and speed up chemical deterioration of paper, which by nature is acidic.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The use of adapted buildings as records or archival centres in Zimbabwe has numerous advantages. This study has cited low set-up costs, marketing and enhanced access to clients as some of the advantages. Some scholars have also backed the decentralisation or provincialisation programme despite the use of adapted buildings. One of them is Mutsagondo (2014) who holds that the provincialisation of archival centres by using adapted buildings is a forerunner of the establishment of full-fledged archival centres, a strategy to reduce pressure on the centre, that is, Harare, as well as a marketing gimmick which has brought archives to the people. Bhebhe (2011) also holds that decentralised records centres and adapted buildings help the NAZ to bring about efficiency and effectiveness in archival operations as they are brought closer to the market and as tailor-made services can be offered in a better and more customised manner. In similar vein, Kamba (1987, 3–4) who in 1987 welcomed the establishment of provincial archival branches with adapted buildings claimed the move was “... better suited to meeting the needs of government’s own decentralised administrative network and ensuring that records generating offices will be served within their own localities and not by distant Harare.”

Preservation is an integral part of archival administration. According to the NAZ Mission Statement, preservation is one of three mandates of the NAZ, alongside acquisition and provision of access. The goal of preservation is to assure that records in archival custody survive as long as possible (Jones and Ritzenthaler 1988). A number of scholars prioritise preservation. Among them are Jones and Ritzenthaler (1988) who hold that preservation is one of the defining concepts of archives administration for without it, archives would only exist by accident. In similar vein, Piggott (1987) holds that the environment in which records are stored is critical to their preservation. He cites relative humidity, temperature, lighting and air purity and circulation as the principal determinants. These variables are directly affected by the conditions of the buildings as well as the environment of the records centres.

According to Piggott (1987), the ideal temperature for paper records is 20 °C. This means temperature in records centres should be regulated by humidifiers. However, the Gweru Records Centre does not have such a facility, thus making it prudent for the records centre to have self-regulating structural facilities that enhance ideal temperatures. Thick walls and small windows at the Old Prison Complex, as well as corrugated iron sheets roofs at all three repositories do contribute to high room temperatures. Jones and Ritzenthaler (1988) hold that temperatures above 24 °C are harmful to paper records because they cause photographs to soften or stick to other surfaces and accelerates the rate of chemical reactions. Piggott (1987) adds that high temperatures also encourage

the growth of mould. As Jones and Ritzenthaler (1988) argue, mould spores which are always present in the air grow and flourish under warm and humid conditions, for example, temperatures above 30 °C and relative humidity above 60 per cent. The Gweru Records Centre has a variety of records, mostly, ordinary paper records, photographs, plans and drawings, all of which are subject to rapid deterioration when exposed to high temperatures.

Closely related to the issue of temperature is relative humidity. When temperatures increase, there is very little moisture in the air, thus relative humidity decreases. When temperatures fall, the air has a lot of moisture, thus relative humidity increases. Jones and Ritzenthaler (1988) define relative humidity as the amount of water vapour in a volume of air. They argue that in a paper records environment, relative humidity should not be too high or too low. Piggott (1987) holds that the ideal relative humidity for paper records is 55 per cent. This implies that paper records live longer in environments where the air is neither too dry nor too moist. Such conditions should be artificially controlled by air conditioners. However, some of the adapted buildings have thick walls, small windows and corrugated iron sheet roofs which promote temperature rises on the one hand, while leaking roofs, large windows (on one of the repositories) and damaged gutters, on the other, bring in water and/or moisture into the building and subsequently onto records. Jones and Ritzenthaler (1988) hold that high humidity makes paper soft, off-sets moisture sensitive inks, makes photographic emulsions to become tacky, makes coated papers stick together and encourages the growth of mould and mildew. At the same time, low humidity can cause cellulosic materials to dry out, become brittle and fracture or crumble during use or handling. The degradation process of paper records is accelerated when both the temperature and humidity rise.

The conditions of buildings also affect the management of semi-current records when one looks at the issue of lights and lighting. Both natural light (from the sun) and artificial light (from bulbs and florescent tubes) are harmful to paper records. Jones and Ritzenthaler (1988) hold that ultra-violet rays of both natural and artificial light damage archival materials as damage from light is cumulative and dependent upon the wavelength and the duration and intensity of exposure. The records at the Gweru Records Centre are close to artificial lights because the records repositories are not very high, while steel shelves are high. It is not surprising as indicated earlier on that boxes and some records on top shelves had turned brownish, while some were yellowish, a sign of bleaching effect. Natural light is brought into repositories through windows. The larger the windows, the more exposed records are and the faster the rate of the deterioration of the records. Piggott (1987) warns that the most ideal condition is that archival buildings should not have windows, as issues like aeration, temperature and relative humidity should be artificially controlled. Artificial and natural light also generate heat, which also plays a part in the bleaching of paper records. As Piggott (1987) argues, heat like light makes paper fade, discolour and embrittle, showing how the records at the Gweru Records Centre are under threat.

One of the repositories of the Gweru Records Centre has very small windows which were ideal for prison cells. In circumstances where there are no air conditioners, this makes records repositories stuffy. As Piggott (1987) argues, pockets of stagnant air encourage the growth of mould. In addition, the work environment is not conducive to records centre staff that clean repositories and that shelf, retrieve and re-file records. Windows, more so, large windows like the ones at the repository of the Old Prison Complex bring in a lot of dirt, dust and oil soot, a situation exacerbated by the environment of the two adapted buildings which are in the industrial zone of the city. According to Jones and Ritzenthaler (1988), dirt, dust and soot abrades and corrodes paper surfaces, disfigures paper by stains that obscure information as these elements carry with them sulphur dioxide, nitrogen, hydrogen sulphide, carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide. Thus, many information science authorities argue that a records centre should be established away from the city centre and industrial zones, but at locations accessible to the public and clients. Mazikana (1990) holds that records centres should be built on well-drained environments, away from known risks (for example floods, and fuel depots), on an area with minimal atmospheric pollution, away from the city centre but still accessible to users and depositors. Dewah (2008) holds that an ideal archival centre should be constructed with non-combustible material and firewalls, and with a pitched roof to ensure that rainwater runs off. The Gweru Records Centre's location and condition of the buildings fail to meet these minimal and necessary conditions.

Repositories with high temperatures, small windows, leaky roofs, damaged ceilings and floors encourage hibernation and multiplication of cockroaches, mice, rats, squirrels, silverfish and carpet beetles. According to Jones and Ritzenthaler (1988), rodents shred paper to make nests, while pests and cockroaches eat edges and surfaces of paper, causing structural damage as well as loss of information. All three adapted records centre buildings at the Gweru Records Centre are exposed to rodents and insects, thus threatening the future of the country's documentary heritage. Dewah (2008) holds that the Old Prison Complex of the Gweru Records Centre is ageing and has cracks on floors and roof leaks in addition to the smoke and gases from the nearby road and railway line and adjacent industries.

Compromised structural facilities also pose security challenges as regards the management of semi-current records. It has been established that the doors, windows and roofs of the adapted records centre buildings are in bad shape and this poses security challenges on record-keeping. Murambiwa et al. (2012) cited by Bhebhe (2011) hold that buildings are the first line of defence against severe climatic and various other disasters. Stielow (1988) comments that attention should be paid to the structural assessments of the building itself, specifically the doors, locks, roofs and windows. These structures within the building can provide the leeway for thieves, which, according to Mutsagondo (2012), can lead to theft, vandalism, sabotage, terrorism and arson menace to records. To make matters worse, the adapted buildings of the Gweru Records Centre do not have camera circuit televisions, alarm systems, fire detectors and smoke detectors, thereby

exposing records to a variety of disasters and challenges. Commenting on the issue of security in archival centres, Stielow (1988) argues that if archivists accept the reality of the dangers and the imperative to preserve documentary heritage, then security emerges as a necessary professional responsibility.

CONCLUSION

The use of adapted buildings makes it possible for developing countries like Zimbabwe to establish many records centres with relative ease and at minimal cost. It also helps to market the national archival institution as well as bringing archival services to clients' doorsteps. However, due to the compromised condition of buildings and the environment of the adapted buildings, a number of challenges crop up with regard to the professional management of semi-current records. Among them are uncontrolled temperatures, relative humidity, light, heat, smoke, soot and industrial emissions which cause paper deterioration and/or accelerates the rate of paper deterioration. In addition, unfavourable conditions promote growth of mould and the proliferation of pests, rodents, termites and rats, which are a menace to records. Security of records is also at risk when the doors, roofs and windows are in bad shape, as theft and vandalism of archival material are common in archival history.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study proposes the following short-term and long-term measures to enhance better management of semi-current records:

- A number of fixtures and fittings are needed in adapted records centre buildings. Among them are intruder alarms, fire and smoke detectors, air conditioners and steel burglar bars on the doors and windows.
- Archival institutions should seriously consider the conditions and environment of adapted buildings first before converting any building into a records centre.
- Deteriorated adapted records centre buildings should either be renovated or abandoned completely for other buildings with better conditions and in more favourable environments.
- The NAZ should seriously consider establishing purpose-built archival structures to ensure the professional management of semi-current records as the use of adapted buildings was fast outliving its usefulness.

REFERENCES

- Bhebhe, S. 2011. “Decentralisation at the National Archives of Zimbabwe: Implications for Effectiveness and Efficiency in Service Provision.” MSc dissertation, National University of Science and Technology, Bulawayo.
- Bhebhe, S., M. Masuku, and P. Ngulube. 2013. “Infrastructural Challenges on Archives and Recordkeeping at the National Archives of Zimbabwe.” *Journal of the South African Society of Archivists* 46:47–62.
- Crowe, S., K. Creswell, A. Robertson, G. Huby, A. Avery, and A. Sheikh. 2011. “The Case Study Approach.” *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 11: 100. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-11-10>.
- Dewah, P. 2008. “An Evaluation of Documentary Heritage Preservation Practices at Gweru Records Centre.” MSc dissertation, National University of Science and Technology, Bulawayo.
- Jones, N. M. M., and M. L. Ritzenthaler. 1988. “Implementing an Archival Preservation Programme. In *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions*, edited by G. B. Bradsher, 185–206. London: Mansell.
- Kamba, A. S. 1987. *Report of the Director of National Archives for the Year 1987*. Harare: NAZ.
- Mazikana, P. C. 1990. *Archives and Records Management for Decision Makers: A Ramp Study for General Information Programme and UNISIST*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Murambiwa, I. M., P. Ngulube, M. Masuku, and D. T. Sigauke. 2012. “Archival Development in Zimbabwe 1935–2010: Setting the Scene.” In *National Archives 75@30: 75 Years of Archiving Excellence at the National Archives of Zimbabwe*, edited by P. Ngulube, 1–20. Harare: NAZ.
- Mutsagondo, S. 2012. “The Vital Records Programme and the Fallacy of Cost: Lessons for the Zimbabwe’s Public Sector.” Paper presented at the Gweru Records Centre, Gweru, Zimbabwe, 22 May.
- Mutsagondo, S. 2013. “Origins and Development of Gweru Records Centre 1988–2013.” Paper presented at the Gweru Records Centre’s Silver Jubilee at Fairmile Hotel, Gweru, Zimbabwe, 6 September.
- Mutsagondo, S. 2014. “Provincialisation of Archival Services: A Step in the Right Direction.” *NAZ Newsletter* 2 (1): 1.
- Nyoni, C. T. 2009. “B.A. Honours Work-Related Report.” Gweru: Gweru Records Centre.
- Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*. 2010. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Piggott, M. 1987. “Conservation.” In *Keeping Archives*, edited by A. Pederson, 219–252. Sydney: Australian Society of Archivists.
- Ramokate, K. 2006. “Preserving the African Memory: Critical Challenges for ESARBICA Archival Organizations.” *ESARBICA Journal* 25:84–94.
- Roper, M., and L. Millar. 1999. *Preserving Records*. London: International Records Management Trust.
- Stielow, F. J. 1988. “Archival Security.” In *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions*, edited by G. B. Bradsher, 207–217. London: Mansell.