

# PRESERVATION OF AUDIO-VISUAL RECORDS AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF NAMIBIA

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## **Abstract**

The study investigated the preservation strategies of audio-visual (AV) records at the National Archives of Namibia (NAN). Data for the study was collected through questionnaires, interviews, observation and a review of documentary sources. The study also found that the legal deposit for AV records has been ineffective because officials responsible for transferring AV records to the National Archives were not aware of the requirement of the Archives and the Namibia Film Commission Acts to transfer records immediately. The study found out that there is no awareness on depositing AV records from the accountable institution, the National Archives of Namibia NAN. The study also found out that the Namibia Film Commission Act, No. 6 of 2000 has not been implemented at all, as there are no audio-visual records from the National Film Commission deposited at the National Archives. The findings also established that there is no single trained AV archivist at NAN, which critically hinders the collection, preservation of records. The study found out that the current legislative arrangements are not relevant to the contemporary needs of audio-visual records preservation and it needs revision. The recommendations arising

from the study are that there is a need to amend the Archives Act, No. 12 of 1992, to accommodate the current trends and international standards; develop a national policy and guidelines on audio-visual records; The study recommends for the implementation of training for AV archivists in Namibia; recruitment of staff with expertise in preserving audio-visual archives held at the National Archives.

**Keywords:** audio-visual records, preservation, National Archives of Namibia

## 1. Introduction

The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (2016) defines audio-visual records as collections that include “motion picture film, still photographs, filmstrips, sound and video recordings, posters and other graphic works, and multimedia productions with related finding aids and production files”. On the other hand Edmondson’s (2004:21) definition of audio-visual heritage includes recorded sound, radio, film, television, video or other productions comprising moving images and/or recorded sounds. Zinyengere (2008:37) avers that “audio-visual records are vital elements of our collective memory, determining our achievements over the years, documenting our past, present and determining our future.” The value of audio-visual records in society and particularly in Africa where illiteracy levels are considerably high cannot be overstated. Perhaps, the importance of audio-visual collections in society is best stated by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA 2004:5) by saying “AV records are cultural heritage, carrying a huge amount of information that needs to be preserved for future use.” They went further to state that “Audio-visual materials can reach different audiences where print materials would not have otherwise reached”.

The greatest barrier in the use of audio-visual materials stems from the fact that many of them are machine dependent, which becomes a major barrier to their use among rural communities where the equipment and power supply might not be readily available.

The National Archives of America (2016) posited that audio-visual records are part of official programs because they record many kinds of information beyond the written word and they serve as direct and powerful communications tools that can reach and inform. They went further to state that “Audio-visual information possesses a unique dimension that the written word cannot replace. According to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in 2016, transcripts of speeches or meetings hardly substitute for recordings that show gestures and personality traits or tone of voice of persons who participated in the important events that have shaped our Nation's history.”

The International Council on Archives (2016) asserted that “effective records management is an essential precondition for good preservation of mankind's collective memory, and access to information by citizens.” Experience gained in managing audio-visual records suggests that any discussion on their organisation and structure should include all types of AV records and contribute significantly to uniform principles of preservation (Kofler 1991). With the growing number of materials, preservation issues have become a major concern for many institutions. Institutions preserve their materials with the intention of ensuring that they are accessible permanently. “Harmful storage conditions and mishandling of AV records hasten their deterioration” (NARA 1996). Therefore, certain strategies should be used and implemented to slow down the deterioration process.

## **2. Background to the National Archives of Namibia**

The National Archives of Namibia was established in 1939 and is responsible for the collection, preservation and access of records from all Government Offices, Ministries and Agencies O/M/As and State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in Namibia. The National Archives also collects records from private individuals to form part of the private collections for permanent preservation. After Namibia gained independence in March 1990, the National Archives continued to operate, on the legal mandate of the old Archives Act, No 4 of 1987,

as a component of the Ministry of Education and Culture; and as a subdivision of the culture department. Its tasks were and still are to manage and preserve master films and non-current records, as well as other records of national significance, and to make such records accessible to the public (National Archives of Namibia Annual Report 1992/93).

The Archives Act, No. 12 of 1992, mandates the National Archives to manage and preserve all records including AV. The Archives Act requires the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), the Namibia Film Commission (NFC), and Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT) as well as other organizations that produce film master material to deposit them with the National Archives immediately. The National Archives and the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation entered into a written agreement to make provision for the transfer of master film material to the National Archives on a regular basis.

The National Archives serves as the custodian of collections of photographs, maps, motion picture films, microfilms, audiocassettes and videos which are acquired through individual donations, the Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and the Liberation Struggle (AACRLS) Project, deposits by the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT) and the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) as well as the preceding institution, South West Africa Broadcasting Corporation (SWABC).

The National Archives consists of four sections, namely: Records Management, Research, Publications & Information, and Preservation & Restoration. The Records Management section is responsible for the control and care of all records management activities in all Government Offices Ministries and Agencies O/M/As including conducting records surveys, approving filing plans, providing advice on disposal requests and transfer of records to the National Archives and providing training on issues pertaining to basic records management.

The Research, Publications & Information Section is responsible for research, making records accessible to the public, responding to queries from all users including academic researchers, government offices and teachers. The publications unit is responsible for acquisition and registration of theses on Namibia as well as a series of source publications namely the Archeia which is no longer active.

The Preservation and Restoration Section is responsible for all preservation activities and responsibilities of the National Archives. This includes the preservation and restoration of archives and manuscripts in the custody of the National Archives. The Section currently does not operate fully, due to the fact that there is no senior preservation specialist to manage it. The section is being managed by an archivist and one technical assistant, who provide minimal preservation services to the entire National Archives. The Archives in its new building which was purpose build and occupied in 2000, made space available for a preservation laboratory. However, provisions were not made for water supply and water drainage, which are some of the requirements for a preservation laboratory.

The National Archives also maintains a reference library, specializing in Namibian archival and information science publications, as well as unpublished government resources.

### **3. Problem statement**

Matangira (2010:224) asserted that “audio-visual materials are much more difficult to preserve than paper records.” The last published Annual Report of the National Archives 1996/1997 indicated that audio-visual records were inadequately managed because of the absence of proper preservation strategies. The report also indicated that existing finding aids had not been updated for some time while audio-visual collections had continued to grow. This has resulted in collections not being migrated to new formats and as a result there is a risk of loss of information. The loss of information is brought on about the fact that AV records require hardware and software to be accessible. The absence of hardware, software, standards, policies, guidelines and trained staff affected long-term preservation.

#### **4. Purpose and objectives of the study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the preservation of audio-visual records at National Archives of Namibia. The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Establish the extent to which the legislative and regulatory framework for the preservation of audio-visual records at National Archives of Namibia is applied;
2. Establish the extent of preservation strategies in place at National Archives of Namibia
3. To make recommendation on strategies needed for the effective preservation of audio-visual records at National Archives of Namibia.

#### **5. Methodology**

This was a case study that was carried out at National Archives of Namibia located in Windhoek, Namibia. The population of the study consisted of the Director in the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture; Directorate: Namibia Library and Archives Services (NLAS) the Head of Archives (HoA): NAN, the AACRLS Project Archivist, two Archives Assistants at NAN, the Head of Directorate of Audio-visual Section at the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT), formerly the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the Archivist at the Directorate of Audio-visual Section of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT), the Head of Archives at the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation Archives (NBC Archives), the Archivist at the NBC Archives and ten users of AV records at NAN. A questionnaire was the main instrument that was used for data collection. Questionnaires were distributed by the researchers to the respondents two weeks prior to their collection. Arrangements were made between the researchers and respondents when to collect the questionnaires. After two weeks, the researchers collected the questionnaires from the respondents. Data collected from the questionnaires was supplemented with interviews and personal

observations. The interviews were carried out from a sample drawn from staff members of NAN, NBC and MICT.

## **6. Literature review**

Taylor (2008:1) posited that “as a piece of writing, the literature review must be defined by a guiding concept (e.g., your research objective, the problem or issue you are discussing or your argumentative thesis”. Reviews of literature is important as it justifies proposed studies, it uncovers certain findings in the field, and discovers gaps in knowledge that lead to future research questions.

It is important that archival institutions make it mandatory to establish policy priorities with regard to the audio-visual records. Strategies must be clearly set out as discussed by Harvey (1993:13) and recognised by the IFLA Principles for the Preservation and Conservation of Library Materials, that “strategies must be clearly related to the objectives of the institutions”. Legislation need to be emphasised and enforced. In general governments have developed and put in place legislation. The challenge has been implementation of these legislations. The implementation process should translate to deriving or developing policies that are in line with legislation and should bind institutions to doing the right thing. The National Archives of Namibia has legislation in place which provides guidance on the preservation of audio-visual records. The Archives Act, No. 12 of 1992, Section 6. 4: states that “all Master Film Material shall be transferred to an archives depot immediately after completion of the production thereof”. While this spells out what process need to take place to ensure that film material is indeed preserved at the National Archives, it leaves out all other audio-visual records. However somewhere else in the Archives Act it is mentioned that records referred to is not limited to paper records only, but is inclusive of all formats.

The National Film Commission Act, No. 6 of 2000 provides a mandate for film copies to be furnished to National Archives as stipulated in the Archives Act, No 12 of 1992. Section 26, subsection

1 states that: “Every film producer shall furnish the National Archives established by section 3 of the National Archives Act, 1992 (Act No.12 of 1992) with two copies of any film produced in Namibia”; and subsection 2 states that: “The National Archives shall deal with such copies in accordance with the laws governing legal deposits of documents to libraries in Namibia”. The two Acts of Parliament did not mention or provide for the restoration and preservation of all audio-visual records, which could form a critical component either in policies and guidelines to be developed.

Kofler (1991) argued that most problems in operations of audio-visual records relate to the lack of comprehensive legislation concerning creation, operation and financing as well as copyright and access to these collections. Kofler (1991) further went on to argue that even the UNESCO 1980 Recommendation for the Safeguarding and Preservation of Moving Images has not been strongly implemented in many countries as it should. This is similar to national laws, which do not necessarily put a strong emphasis on audio-visual records preservation, as it is vaguely indicated. Maseko (2010) argued that most institutions lack preservation policies. This in turn hinders proper preservation processes.

## **7. Research findings**

The findings of the study are presented in line with the objective in this section.

### **7.1 Legislative, regulatory and policy framework for the preservation of audio-visual records at the National Archives of Namibia**

The first objective of the study sought to what extend is the legislative, regulatory and policy framework implemented for the preservation of audio-visual records at the National Archives of Namibia. To do this, the researcher interrogated the following issues, and they are discussed below



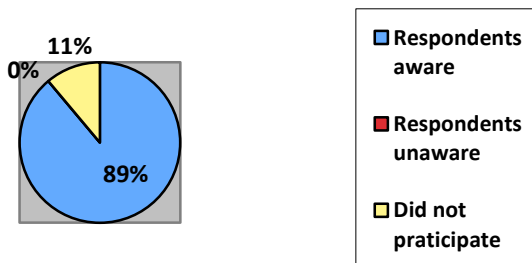
1. Laws that governs the preservation of audio-visual records at the National Archives of Namibia;
2. Policies that governs the preservation of audio-visual records at the National Archives of Namibia.

Respondents were asked through questionnaire, interviews and documentary sources to identify the laws that impact upon the management of audio-visual records in Namibia. The findings revealed that the preservation of audio-visual records is subject to the Archives Act No. 12 of 1992, which stipulates that all records regardless of the format should be collected and preserved at NAN.

When respondents were asked through questionnaires and interviews to indicate their awareness of the above legal instruments, the findings revealed that 89% (8) of the respondents are aware of the Archives Act, No. 12 of 1992, while 11% (1) did not participate. The findings further revealed that only 25% (2) respondents are aware of the National Film Commission Act, No. 6 of 2000, while 75% (6) are not aware of the Act. These findings are summarized in Figure 1 and Figure 2 below

Figure 1: Respondents Awareness of the existence and mandate of the Archives Act No. 12 of 1992

### The Archives Act, no 12 of 1992

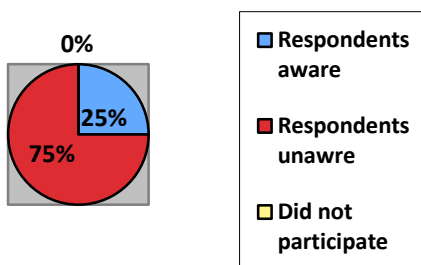


Source: Field data from questionnaires and interviews, 2013

Figure 2: Respondents Awareness of the existence and mandate of the National Film Commission Act No. 6 of 2001

Source: Field data from questionnaires and interviews, 2013

**National Film Commission Act,  
no 6 of 2000**



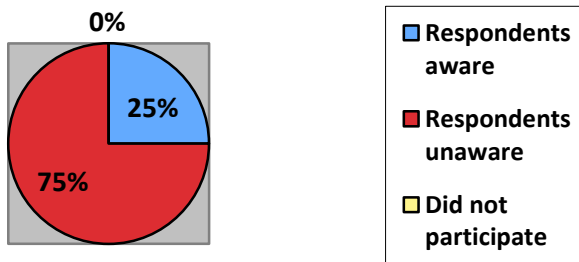
Based on the above finding, it can be argued that most of the respondents were unaware of the provisions of the legal instruments regarding the preservation of audio-visual materials. This is a serious problem to note that some of the officials tasked with implementing these regulations are unaware of their existence

When respondents were asked through questionnaires and interviews to indicate their level of awareness to the above legal instruments, the study revealed that 25% (2) of the respondents were aware of the Namibia Library and Information Service Act, No. 4 of 2000 requirement to deposit materials including audio-visual collections to the National Archives of Namibia, 75% (6) of the respondents were unaware of the legal deposit requirement, 13% (1) of the respondents revealed that there is an informal agreement between the National Archives of Namibia and the National Library of Namibia (NLN) whereby any audio-visual records received by NLN are transferred to the National Archives. The study found that on the issue of legal deposit, 13% (1) of the respondents indicated that some original collections of oral history were transferred to the National

Archives from the National Museum of Namibia (NMN). An additional number of digital copies of oral history have been transferred to the National Archives for permanent preservation. The findings of the study also revealed that films and tapes from NMN could be transferred to the National Archives for proper storage. These findings are illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Respondents Awareness of existence and mandate of the Namibia Library and Information Service Act No. 4 of 2000

### **Namibia Library and Information Service Act, no 4 of 2000**



Source: Field data from questionnaires and interviews, 2013

As can be seen from the above figures, these findings suggest that the laws are not being adhered to in terms of ensuring the care and management of audio-visual records.

The study also sought to determine the availability of policies regarding audio-visual records at the National Archives. The findings indicate that 100% (8) of the respondents confirmed that there was no specific policy relating to the collection and management of audio-visual archives in place at the National Archives.

The study further revealed that the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation and the National Archives of Namibia has a formal agreement that makes provision for the NBC to deposit their collections at the National Archives. Through this arrangement, the National Archives is operating as a Records Centre for the NBC. The study findings indicated that legal deposit for all government records to the National Archives has been ineffective.

## **7.2 The state of audio-visual records at the National Archives of Namibia**

Another aspect this study sought to establish is the state of audio-visual records at the National Archives. The findings to this aspect are presented under the types of audio-visual collections held at the Namibia National archives.

Respondents were asked through interviews to indicate the types of audio-visual records that are held by the National Archives. A summary of audio-visual materials held by the National Archives is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Summary of Audio-visual Records held at National Archives of Namibia**

<b>Name of Collection</b>	<b>Date</b>
Large collection of photographs of which 16000 are catalogued	1860s-current
5800 maps	19 <sup>th</sup> Century
330 catalogued films and videos	1984-
800 posters (including the Liberation Struggle posters collected from global anti-apartheid campaigners committees)	1970s-
1300 microfilms	-
800 oral history sound cassettes	1984-
Audio-visual records from the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (Namibia broadcasting Corporation)	1981-
AACRLS Project collection	2001-

Source: Field data through interviews, observations and documentary sources, 2013

The study through interviews, observations and documentary sources further revealed that the National Archives holds records of original footage and finished productions of VHS, Betacam and DVDs originated from the MICT. There are also records from the NBC, such as the Namibian music on tape, 1 inch tape, U-Matic TV, DVC-PRO and DV- Cam. The findings also revealed that other audio-visual records held by the National Archives include videotapes, audiocassettes, gramophone, NBC news tapes, projector films, CDs, photographs, microfiche, and microfilms.

The 13% (1) of the respondents revealed that the NBC records are traced through a records list, which had corresponding numbers on the records at the National Archives for easy identification. The study also revealed that there was a system used to catalogue films and videos, which had been borrowed from South Africa. Physical inspection of how the system operates showed that there is need to

improve the present system so as to ensure that it complies with library cataloguing rules, as the database is based on catalogue cards which are in line with the library cataloguing system. All the 50% (4) of the respondents from the National Archives were aware of the UNI-MARKS system in place at the National Archives. This is an indication that the Archives need to be on par with international standards of audio-visual management standards

### **7.3 Preservation measures in place at the National Archives of Namibia**

This objective of the study sought to determine the preservation measures in the National Archives of Namibia, which aim at minimizing the rate of deterioration of audio-visual records.

The long term preservation and accessibility of audio-visual records to a large extent depends on the kind of building in which they are housed. The findings revealed that the National Archives building was “purpose built” for an archival institution. Observations revealed that the building has four floors. The second floor of the building accommodates part of the NBC audio-visual records. The third floor accommodates the dark room, audiocassettes, a portion of videocassettes, the cold room, dubbing room and digitization room. The findings however showed that the cold room located on the third floor has not been working for some time. Photographs, maps and posters cabinets were situated on the fourth floor. The Television, video machine, and microfilm and microfiche machine are also situated on the same floor as the reading room.

Another issue the study sought to determine relates to the storage facilities available for the storage of audio-visual records at the National Archives. The study findings established that there are cabinets on the second floor where the strong rooms or repositories are situated. In one of the rooms, shelves have been erected to accommodate some of the NBC records, which have been kept in boxes for some time. The third floor is also used for keeping photographs, negatives, videocassettes, U-Matic tapes, audiocassette

and CDs. These collections are stored on open shelves. The collection is in a fairly clean condition. Videos are also stored on open shelves. Photographs previously open for viewing by clients have been removed from fourth floor and placed in the stack room and only digital copies are used. All photographs that are available for the public have been digitized for preservation. The maps are placed in vertical cabinets, and they are vulnerable to falling as they are held in the cabinet by tapes which when exposed to heat, become loose and fall off. Kotelnikova (1996) et al recommends special equipment for these type of materials including but not limited to: universal shelves which are suitable for large maps and posters; large shelves on rollers and tubes.

This study sought to assess the availability of retrieval tools, which would assist users to gain access to the materials. The study findings revealed that although processing had not been done for a long time, there is order in the reading room in the way that records are arranged and retrieved. The results also showed that there were manual finding aids and an electronic database that was available for use by researchers and staff members.

#### **7.4 The challenges of preserving audio-visual records**

Finally, the study sought to determine the challenges facing the preservation to audio-visual materials in Namibia. The constant change in technology was seen as a major challenge to the preservation and preservation of audio-visual records. The findings also revealed that records from NBC were stored separately under the original file number of NBC resulting to differences in organizing the collections intellectually.

The archivist at the National Archives revealed that AACRLS records were first registered as accessions, and then separately catalogued into different series. The change in bibliographic details causes confusion in locating the materials. Moreover, the study discovered that some of the records were fragile and needed to be handled less and with care. The fact that video machines do not function, materials had to be sent to NLN for viewing.

The study also discovered that there was lack of experience in dealing with microfilms and that there was insufficient equipment at the National Archives, especially those required to access information contained in videocassettes. Inadequate training in the preservation of audio-visual materials was also reported as being challenges in the National Archives.

The respondents were aware that the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) formerly Polytechnic of Namibia offered certain courses, it was not evident if these courses were for audio-visual training. The University of Namibia (UNAM) offers the Diploma and Degree in Records and Archives Management, but with specialization in preservation of audio-visual materials. The College of Arts offered courses in Film Making, and there was a Norwegian sponsored project that was aimed at recording oral stories, digitizing recordings of endangered objects, through which some hands-on experience could be gained.

## **8. Discussions of the findings**

The findings of the study have shown that Namibia has legal framework for the preservation of audio-visual archives, but not adequate. For instance, the legal deposit system has been put in place that requires the deposit of audio-visual materials with the National Archives. The challenges however lie with the enforcement of the legislative, regulatory and policy framework. This finding is not unique to Namibia alone. Mnjama (2010) revealed that “A survey of the legal deposit system in Botswana revealed there is no specific requirement that makes it mandatory for producers of audio-visual materials to deposit copies of their productions with any of the information centres”. For instance, a study by Kalayakgosi (2012:77) conducted on the Management of Television Archives in Botswana revealed that “DVD’s are stored on wooden shelving which is easily combustible and when fire strikes out, archives may easily be wiped out”.



The findings of the study have shown that Namibia National Archives is faced with major problems regarding preservation of its audio-visual heritage, because of technological obsolescence. But Namibia is not alone in this, for as observed by Matangira (2010:227) “audio-visual media are exposed to the effects of format progression since they are recorded and reproduced through technological devices. Namibia is not the only country in the East and Southern Africa that is experiencing these challenges.

Therefore, many institutions in the ESARBICA region are faced with a crisis in the preservation of audio-visual materials due to the rapid development of digital data”. Zinyengere (2008) came to the conclusion that “audio-visual recordings in many African countries are endangered because of various factors including but not limited to political and economic factors, legal statutes towards audio-visual materials, staffing, lack of training and funding, perception of society towards archives, climatic issues, technological awareness and the preservation and access of recordings.”

## **9. Conclusion and recommendations**

The study has demonstrated that the challenges facing the National Archives of Namibia are not unique to that country, but are common to other countries in the East and Southern African region. Since these problems are common to the region, it is suggested that a common approach to dealing with them should be explored. Training of archivists in the specialist field of audio-visual archiving is costly and it is a well-known fact that the region lacks expertise in preservation of film and sound archives. Audio-visual equipment is also costly and requires regular upgrading. Perhaps it is time for the national archival institutions in the East and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) to collaborate and pull their resources together to save the rich endangered audio-visual heritage that is currently not adequately preserved. This may be achieved through collaborative efforts such the creation of a centre of excellence in the preservation of audio-visual archives or in cooperative projects.

Various recommendations were put forward arising from the research carried out that will hopefully assist in ensuring that the National Archives can reach a goal of proper preservation of audio-visual records and ensure their accessibility.

- The study recommends that the Archives Act, No. 12 of 1992, be amended to accommodate current archival trends and international standards especially audio-visual collections. Policies and procedures need to be put in place as a matter of urgency at institutional level to facilitate proper preservation of audio-visual records. The mandate in the Namibia Film Commission Act, No. 6 of 2000 should be taken up as a matter of urgency. The Archives Act, No. 12 of 1992 should be strengthened and re-enforced to ensure that national heritage is not lost, and not accounted for, by being held somewhere else and not with the National Archives.
- Based on the study findings, the study recommends that a complete gradual change of system, making reference to available standards developed by audio-visual archivists, and is in line with the audio-visual records needs. The study further recommends the development of tools that assist with audio-visual records description. The study also recommends the development of basic guidelines for audio-visual records and collections. A standard such as PB Core is recommended to ensure processing of audio-visual collections. PB Core is a metadata standard for audio-visual media developed by the international public broadcasting community to cater for audio-visual metadata needs and requirements.
- The study recommends that the National Archives explores the possibility of digitizing its audio-visual collections. Studies conducted by Schuller (2008:3) indicate that this could be one way forward “by adopting a new paradigm of preservation”. Morrison (2009:3) reported that digitization

projects are resource intensive exercises that require a high level of focus, dedication and know-how as well a significant investment in technology. Adequate planning, preparation and training is necessary prior to the commencement of the actual digitization can commence. Without adequate planning, the project may not yield the desired results.

- The study also recommends the recruitment of young graduate from the Information Department of the University of Namibia who has interest in archives and who are eager to make a career in audio-visual archiving. The study also recommends that staff from the National Archives should visit well established archival institutions with operational audio-visual sections for them to gain hands-on experience on preserving audio-visual material. The study further recommends the training of staff members through attendance in conferences and workshops that are organised by professional associations such as the International Association of Sound and Audio-visual Archives (IASA).

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