

The need for specialised audiovisual archives in ESARBICA

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The need for specialized audiovisual (AV) archives in any country is justified by the fact that AV materials are unique, fragile and fugitive. AV materials differ from textual records in format and characteristics. The chemical nature of audiovisual carriers makes them susceptible to damage, destruction and loss. For instance, tapes can easily get entangled in machines, needles or styluses easily scratch discs and cylinders. Artefacts are susceptible to scratches, dust and surface noise. Sound recordings are dependent on complex technology, which deteriorates at a rapid rate. It is therefore important that AV materials are kept in storage rooms which meet the recommended storage conditions, to prolong their life span. It is equally important that AV materials are stored in specialised national archives or specialised AV units. This paper will give a picture of the way AV materials are kept in ESARBICA. The discussion is based on findings based on the author's study on the management and preservation of AV materials in the region. The findings revealed that AV materials in the region are depreciating due to inadequate storage conditions, lack of qualified staff, lack of policies that specifically address AV materials and most importantly, the absence of specialised AV archives (with the exception of South Africa). While some national archives such as The National Archives of Zimbabwe, the Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS), the Kenya National Archives and Documentation Services and the National Archives of Namibia have AV units housed under the same building, some national archives (such as National Archives of Tanzania and Swaziland National Archives) have relegated the management of AV archives to media organisations. This paper therefore argues that the management of AV archives should be the sole responsibility of national archives. This is best done through specialised AV archives (under the aegis of the national archive) or specialised AV units which meet recommended storage conditions for AV materials. They must therefore be kept under ideal environmental conditions for long preservation. Such conditions include recommended Relative Humidity, Temperature, and appropriate storage free of dust and biological agents. The storage should also be secure.