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Training and education of archivists in Africa

An Analysis of Current Conditions and Issues by Dr. Mpho Ngoepe of the University of South Africa

There is at present little clarity or consistency about the professional qualifications required to take up employment in records and archives positions in public- and private-sector organisations in Africa. This is confirmed through studies conducted in the continent since the early 2000s that identified gaps in addressing lack of capacity (Department of Arts and Culture [South Africa], 2010; Katuu, 2015; Katuu & Ngoepe, 2015; Wato, 2006). For example, a brief survey in South Africa shows that while a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree or an equivalent three-year diploma is generally listed as a requirement for entry-level archival posts, the fields of study acceptable for that BA degree vary across institutions, and few organisations expect applicants to have any form of archival training.

The situation is the same with other African countries such as Botswana, Kenya, Namibia, Tanzania, Uganda, and Swaziland (Nengomasha, 2013). There seems to be a lack of clarity about who should be employed in the field of archives and records management. For example, in Namibia some organisations advertise for librarians when the job's key responsibilities are better suited to an archives and records management professional (Nengomasha, 2006, p. 206). Based on surveys from 2002 and 2004, the records environment in Namibia is suffering mostly due to "a glaring absence of the use of classification schemes, retention schedules, and the systematic disposal of records resulting in heavy congestion of offices and poor retrieval of information" (Nengomasha, 2006, p. 207). There seems to be a poor understanding of the difference between information and evidence, and many employees across governments seem to be unaware that a records official even exists as a source of guidance on records management (Nengomasha, 2006, p. 207).

One of the root causes of the problem is lack of archives and records management training programmes at most institutions of higher learning in Africa. For example, as of 2017, the education and training available for archivists in South Africa consists of only a few programmes offered by three institutions of high learning out of 26 universities: the University of South Africa, the University of Fort Hare and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Omwoyo Bosire Onyancha, Ngoepe, & Maluleka, 2015). The numbers of students who receive formal qualifications from these programmes are very small and in the long run it may be very difficult for the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to sustain these programmes. Another important observation by Garaba (2015) is the fact that practical training and work experience are both very important in the training of archivists and records managers, not only in South Africa but also in Botswana, Swaziland Namibia, Zimbabwe and other countries in southern Africa.

Several factors are working against a thriving archives and records management field in Africa. For example, graduate level education – which many experts argue is the preferred form of archives and records management education – is difficult to execute in Africa given the "low numbers of qualified staff, virtually non-existent research, poor quality of educational materials and out-dated programmes, educational methodologies based on the model of rote memorization that does not encourage critical thinking, problem solving and creativity" (Katu, 2015, p. 107). The absence of this type of education environment makes it extremely difficult to prepare graduates for the challenges they will encounter in the field.

The problem of lack of education and training is compounded by the fact that "among the LIS schools in sub-Saharan Africa, few have laid emphasis on teaching Archives and Records Management (AMR), and more particularly at the undergraduate level" (O. B. Onyancha & Minishi-Majanja, 2009). This is true except perhaps some universities in Kenya and the University of Makerere in Uganda where ARM boasts of its own department within the School of Information Science. In the past, the education and training challenges of the continent were addressed through regional initiatives such as the two centres established in Ghana and Senegal in the early 1970s (Thurston, 1985, p. 119). However, these initiatives did not last more than a decade, suffering from limited finances and inadequate logistics, giving way to national programmes that continue to provide support for current professionals (Katu, 2015).

In 2002, it was acknowledged that there were many different types of archival education programmes in Africa, including pre-appointment education, on-the-job introductory education and training, as well as post-appointment continuing

education and training. As a result, there is a noticeable lack of standardization across the profession (Katu, 2015, p. 101).

Another effort in capacity building geared towards professionals in developing countries was by the International Records Management Trust, which developed a range of educational material focused mainly at the eastern and southern Africa region, including:

1. Route maps for moving from a paper-based to an electronic information environment including:
 - Designing a Records Management Improvement Programme (International Records Management Trust, 2009a)
 - Implementing Electronic Records Management (International Records Management Trust, 2009b)
 - Integrating Records Management in the Systems Development Life Cycle (International Records Management Trust, 2009d)
2. Good practice indicators to measure records management integration in ICT control systems (International Records Management Trust, 2009c).
3. Five training modules on the management of records in electronic form:
 - Module 1 - Understanding the Context of Electronic Records Management (Keakopa, Millar, O'Shea, Nordland, & Suderman, 2009)
 - Module 2 - Planning and Managing an Electronic Records Management Programme (Ardern, Miller, O'Shea, Nordland, & Smith, 2009)
 - Module 3 - Managing the Creation, Use and Disposal of Electronic Records (Goh, Katuu, Miller, Nordland, & Sebina, 2009)
 - Module 4 - Preserving Electronic Records (Brown, Katuu, Sebina, & Seles, 2009)
 - Module 5 - Managing Personnel Records in an Electronic Environment (Griffin & Hoyle, 2009)

According to Lowry (2013) most of “these training resources were developed in conjunction with African scholars with the aim of addressing local realities”. However, there is a need for systematic assessment of the extent of the positive contribution that such resources have made to research and professional development capacity in the African continent. Merely preparing and making training resources available, even freely, does not automatically translate into quality improvements in education and training (Katu, 2015). Such resources have to be developed with full cognisance of local needs and based on local or national initiatives in order for them to be relevant to the intended audience. Lowry (2013) views one desirable initiative as “a centre of excellence for digital records management that has been mooted for a number of years for the east African region”. This initiative has not yet been achieved.

As Lowry (2013) argues, international efforts to support archival education in Africa have increasingly tended to take a ‘hands-off’ approach, with the majority of funding and projects aimed at providing resources to aid African institutions to provide training, rather than at developing and delivering large-scale educational initiatives directly to students and trainees. In keeping with this ‘hands-off’ approach, the International Council on Archives (2015, p. 3) has developed its Africa strategy, which addresses issues of advocacy, training and education. This strategy resulted from a recognition of the need for support in redeveloping university curricula so that they reflect international good practice and recent developments in the field.

The terrain in Africa has changed drastically with the advent of mobile telephony and the possibilities of many citizens in different countries being connected to the Internet. This transformation in access to digital technologies has had an impact on the continuing dialogue within the continent on better governance, particularly relating to government accountability to its citizens. The citizenry’s expectations of their governments within this environment suggesting that records professionals graduating from educational institutions require an enhanced set of skills to serve modern record-keeping needs. . Africa’s archives and records professionals are expected to be adept at managing digital records, but existing educational offerings do not provide the necessary knowledge or skills.

A key component in addressing this capacity deficit would be through enhanced and improved education and training programmes across the African continent. The need for education and training in archives and records management cannot be over-emphasised, particularly in this era of technological developments. Education, training and research can help to empower archivists and records managers to tackle the challenges of governance in electronic environment, as well as to help formulating research agendas to address grand societal challenges such as lack of accountability, high levels of litigation, bad audit results, and lack of or poor service delivery emanating from breakdowns in records systems. Records management systems in the public sector in most African counties are in a state of disarray. Most of the time,

African countries rely on strategies from the global hub and these strategies are difficult to implement in the global periphery.

Two intertwined issues emerge from the foregoing. First, there has not been an in-depth analysis of the curriculum offered in the national programmes, with the exception of a few countries particularly in southern Africa (Department of Arts and Culture [South Africa], 2010; Nengomasha, 2006). Second, there has been a call to increase the visibility of African scholars within global professional research initiatives. While an argument may be made that African professionals have been exposed to international developments, it may be that their own informed contributions have been hampered by the lack of constant and continued exposure, which is ideally achieved through participation in global research activities. The question of whether African scholars should contribute to the overall research agenda within the profession around the world has been asked at different points in the past (Katu, 2009; Kemoni, 2009). Fundamentally, this input from African scholars should emanate from a determination by individual academic institutions within the continent to identify appropriate avenues for global collaboration.

For instance, since 2013 the Department of Information Science at the University of South Africa has been coordinating the contributions of Team Africa to the InterPARES Trust research project (InterPARES Trust - Team Africa, 2016). The InterPARES Trust project is exploring issues concerning digital records and data entrusted to the Internet, with the goal of developing theoretical and methodological frameworks and to generate a variety of instruments that ensure “public trust grounded on evidence of good governance, a strong digital economy, and a persistent digital memory.” (InterPARES Trust - Team Africa, 2016).

One of the case studies undertaken by Team Africa is entitled ‘Curriculum Alignments at Institutions of Higher Learning in Africa: Preparing Professionals to Manage Records Created in Networked Environments.’ This case study is a systematic analysis of the records and archives curricula in different educational institutions in Africa and the extent to which they address the changing environment in the digital era. The study has been carried out in four phases.

1. The first phase reviewed literature sources with a view to learning about what has taken place both within individual countries and at regional or continent-wide levels. This phase has been completed.
2. The second phase was the design of an inventory of institutions of higher learning offering archives and records management studies in Africa. So far only 34 countries have been inventoried.
3. The third phase, which can commence once the inventory is complete, will be a survey of identified institutions within the continent in order to identify all possible programmes that offer formal opportunities for archives and records professionals. This survey will also include the assessment of curricula of select institutions representing different regional or programmatic flavours. The assessment will look at the extent to which the curricula address modern challenges.
4. The fourth phase will be a tracer study of selected graduates from programmes in order to assess the extent to which their working environment reflects their educational and training background.

The objective of this Team Africa project is to identify gaps in archives and records training and education in African institutions and to suggest ways of filling those gaps. The team is aware, of course, of the fact that different nations require specific interventions: the usual one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate to designing effective education and training programmes.

This study is important for various reasons including the following:

- providing a benchmark resource for the profession in Africa and the rest of the world
- serving as the basis on which educational institutions assess the content of their courses and provide an impetus for curriculum review
- bridging the gap between theory and practice
- involving other disciplines
- empowering students
- addressing real problems
- helping to generate knowledge production.

Through the project, we have learned that there are several different information studies programs in Africa, and that the courses and topics offered in those programs vary significantly across countries. Programmes range from certificates and diplomas to bachelors- and masters- level degrees. Some programmes operate independently while others exist in history departments or library schools. As a result, there is very little standardization between programs, which seemed to cause difficulties for both students and employers.

In conclusion, I believe that there is a role for the ICA to play in supporting the development of young archival educators in the African continent. Amongst the activities that should be considered includes identifying and supporting Centres of Excellence in different regions on the continent where workshops and seminars are held on a systematic and consistent basis. For instance there could be one on audio-visual preservation held in Arusha, Tanzania considering the UN Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals (UN-MICT) has a very strong audio-visual programme there. Recently the ICA's Programme Commission conducted a workshop hosted at the UN-MICT for 70 Tanzanian civil servants (United Nations Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals, 2017). However, such a workshop should go beyond being an ad-hoc arrangement to being both regular and part of a larger set of similar activities conducted all over the continent. In addition, there is a role for the ICA and other professional associations to support experiential learning opportunities. While many educational institutions would like to support their students to take up internships during the course of the professional programme, there is usually no funding to cover a basic stipend for the students. Students could competitively be chosen and offered grants that are administered by host institutions such as UN-MICT that has boldly stated its support for ICA's Africa Programme (United Nations Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals, 2017). There are likely other international and regional organisations within the continent that could follow UN-MICT's example. Materials that have been developed for the African continent should be updated and new ones produced. Curriculum development falls outside of the scope of InterPARES project.

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