

**Report on ESARBICA conference Held in
Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe from 8 – 12 June,
2015**

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Acknowledgements

I wish to start by acknowledging and thanking FIAF, Film Archives for Africa in partnership with the Goethe institute South Africa for sponsoring me with U\$1,899.00 to attend the ESARBICA conference in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. It has helped me to network and gain knowledge from other professional's experiences on how best we can preserve our sound and moving image collections and also to share our experiences.

I recognize the financial and moral support given by the National Archives of Malawi and the Principal Secretary in the ministry of Information, Tourism and Culture in making sure that I attend the training.

Special thanks should go to Eva Orbanz and Christophe Dupin for their tireless efforts in facilitating all logistical arrangements pertaining to the conference participation. I do not take what they did for granted.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the National Archives of Malawi (NAM) and the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAP) dates back to 2011 when two staff member from our institution were selected be part of the FIAP Summer School in Johannesburg, South Africa and, it further grew when an officer from NAM was selected to go through practical training in the preservation of Film at the Bundes-Archiv in Berlin, Germany. Attending the training proved to be very important because upon his return, the National Archives of Malawi became more aware on how to preserve its sound and moving images and, eventually adopted the use of international preservation standards for its audio-visual collections. Through awareness campaigns and Film surveys conducted by the officer, the Government is fast realizing the importance of preserving the film collection to the point that a room has been allocated for the preservation of the collection and possibilities of acquiring funds towards the cause are there.

ESARBICA BACKGROUND

The Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) was established in 1969 in Kenya to coordinate archival institutions and activities in countries of Eastern and Southern Africa region. ESARBICA brings together individuals and institutions concerned with the creation, use, preservation and management of recorded information in Eastern and Southern Africa. Its mission is the advancement of archives through regional co-operation.

Consistent with the objectives of the International Council on Archives (ICA), ESARBICA is concerned with:

- Providing a forum for the exchange of professional ideals and expertise in the administration and preservation of archives and records
- Promoting, organizing and co-coordinating activities in the management of records and archives at both regional and international levels
- Establishing, maintaining and strengthening relations between archivists in the ESARBICA region and other professionals and institutions concerned with the administration & preservation of records and archives
- Carrying out the aims and objectives of the International Council on Archives
- Facilitating continuing education through professional attachments, study visits, seminars and workshops
- Providing technical and financial assistance to members whenever possible
- Promoting the implementation of the professional code of conduct (code of ethics)

Membership of ESARBICA entitles one to a host of privileges and opportunities. Membership provides access to a network of people in eastern and southern Africa who are interested in archives, records and information management. It also invites you to regular regional conferences, training workshops and a subscription to ESARBICA's publications and publications letter. Membership is available to both organizations and individuals. Categories of members

are based upon those of the International Council on Archives (ICA) and are applicable to members residing in the eastern and southern Africa region only.

23RD ESARBICA GENERAL CONFERENCE

The 23rd Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) General Conference was held in the town of Victoria Falls from the 8th - 12th June 2015. The Conference was seeking to highlight the role of records and archives in a modern day society. The Conference began with a two day Pre-conference Workshop followed by the General Conference whose main theme was “Archives uses, abuses and underutilization”.

During the preconference, we were taught about management and preservation of electronic records where we learned more about the ICA Atom archiving software which has set standards already incorporated in it. Through the presentation, I noted that most archivists in Africa are not conversant with programming using ICTs especially in database software such as Oracle and Html which posed a major challenge in the customization of open source archiving software. Parallel sessions then followed where topics covering ISO15489; Archival Descriptive Standards; Records Appraisal Standards and Practices; were covered. To enhance my knowledge in cataloguing, I attended the session covering the Archival Descriptive Standards where we learned more about recently revised ICA standards.

On Wednesday 10th June, the main conference began with key notes on archive collections as a source of abuse through their use and thereafter a plenary session followed to discuss on how we being archivists can prevent this from happening. Presentations were the next item agenda on the program and 52 research papers on various topics were presented for the last two days. The only setback was that the presentations were done in three rooms as parallel sessions thus made it hard for one to attend all the desired sessions. The papers presented at the conference were prepared to address five sub-themes which were:

- Legal Framework and Legislation for Records and Archives
- Acquisition Policies/Practices and Access to Information
- Use of Records and Archives for Social, Economic and Political Development
- ICT in Records and Archives: Panacea or Headache!
- Abuse or Underutilization of Records and Archives

Each presenter was allocated a maximum of 15 minutes after which participants were asking questions and a brainstorming session would then follow. At the end of each day recommendations arising from the presentations were drafted for further discussions.

BENEFITS OF ATTENDING THE CONFERENCE

First and foremost I would like to thank FIAF again for providing me with financial support to participate in the ESARBICA 2015 general conference.

I benefited a lot from the conference as all the objectives which I had set were achieved. These personal objectives were:

- (a) To discuss and brainstorm on how challenges being faced in preserving film in Africa can jointly be tackled and how to prevent abuse of the latter:
Recommendation: Archival legislation in most institutions is outdated leading to abuse of the film collection and that there is lack of equipment and skills among records practitioners in the management of e- records.

- (b) To gain knowledge and insight on the current techniques being used to conserve and preserve the Memory of the world, intangible heritage and creative expression
Recommendation: Archival institutions are not engaging the users/communities as a technique for building their collections, ICA Atom software which is open source can be used to conserve and preserve Memory of the world

- (c) How to manage and sustain audiovisual materials within the broader context of rapid changing technology
Recommendation: It was discussed and noted that archival institutions are not utilizing ICTs to increase access, those holding high positions especially directors should engage the respective Governments to ensure that records practitioners are trained in the management of e- records/e-governance to ensure their sustainability.

I also had a chance to meet other professionals and network with them to the extent that we have created an e-mailing group and are planning to create our own blog where we can discuss various topics relating to our profession as archivists. And, I wish to inform you that I have been chosen to be Malawi's correspondent for the ESARBICA website and newsletter.

CONCLUSION

I wish to state that attending the ESARBICA conference has proven to be very vital, I gained a lot of knowledge in the various preservation strategies for sound and moving image collections. Being part of such a gathering has proved to be very important as burning issues affecting various archival institutions especially in Africa are tackled and probable solutions discussed. The ESARBICA Archivists network I am currently part of, is equipping me with new strategies that would help NAM to preserve its film collection using both manual and electronic strategies.