The role of records and archives in resolving chiefdom wrangles: Case study of the National Archives of Zambia

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to investigate the role of records and archives in resolving chiefdom wrangles at the National Archives of Zambia. The study employed qualitative methods. Data was collected through document study and interviews of staff at the institution. The findings are reported and include the kinds of records and archives available on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance, consultation of these records and archives, the extent to which they resolve
chiefdom boundary wrangles, security of these records and archives and the challenges faced in accessing these records and archives. The paper concludes by recommending for increased publicity of existing records and archives on chiefdom boundaries. Additionally, there is need for documentation and preservation of information on chiefdom boundaries where there is none to avoid information sink.

Keywords: Records, Archives, Conflict Management, Conflict Resolution, Development, Land Wrangles, National Archives of Zambia.

1. INTRODUCTION

In societies marred by conflict, development can hardly take place. Where there is conflict, some people lose their lives, others get displaced. Even those that remain are reluctant to invest due to the fact that they can be displaced anytime. Thus, sustainable socio-economic development can only take place where there is peace and stability. The importance of records and archives in resolving such conflicts in any nation cannot be over emphasised. Where records exist, it is easy to prove the boundaries and inheritance making it easy to resolve conflicts. In the absence of records, it is very difficult to resolve conflicts. Records and archives can be used as tools to bring unity and development in chiefdoms where there are wrangles.

Records and archives are very significant tools for resolving social conflicts. Conflicts in society or between and among different societies are based on deficiency of information. Social conflicts are largely due to misinformation, wrong information or simply missing information (Nyamboga, and Kiplang’at, 2008) and breach of communication between the parties involved (Okoye and Igbo, 2011). A history characterized by violence could also be recorded as a history of disinformation and prejudices (Nyamboga, and Kiplang’at, 2008). In Zambia, chiefdom wrangles have been widespread. Though it is often said that wrangles are desirable in shaping human ideologies and relationships, they undermine development efforts to a large extent. They result in some people losing their lives, others getting displaced, reluctance to invest, poverty, hunger, diseases and destruction of property. Government resources meant for developmental projects are channelled towards procurement of arms.
Access to right information is a panacea for resolving wrangles. Records and archives help individuals to look back in history on what was done including, where, why, when and how it was done. It is only by looking at what was done in the past that we can understand the present and be able to plan for the future. It is against this background that records and archival information is considered crucial in preventing and resolving wrangles in any given society as they provide evidence of the past. It is possible to resolve chiefdom wrangles only on the basis of existing and available records and archives. Records and archives serve any nation with a collective memory vital in promoting, peace, reconciliation, justice and social stability. According to Hamooya (2009), the value of records and archives can only be seen if they are used by not only the creator of records and archives but also by other individuals and the society at large for a variety of current social and organisational purposes. Additionally, the desirable impact can only be made if records and archives are made available and accessible to the public. If this is not the case, then the nation risks structural and latent violence becoming open violence. Such a society then blindly unleashes its force on elements of the society that do not always have something to do with the real problems (Nyamboga, and Kiplang’at, 2008). Past records are also an important source of information upon which an authoritative history of various sectors of national life can be based. Throughout the ages, knowledge and experiences have been passed on from generation to generation through records and archives. Therefore, preservation of records and archives ensures the success and survival of future generations because they provide the foundation upon which to build on (Mulauzi, Wamundila and Hamooya, 2013).

There should be an institution mandated to safeguard and make not only available but also accessible this kind of information. In the Zambian case, the National Archives of Zambia is in charge of management of public records and archives (Hamooya, 2009). There has been no study especially in the Zambian context that has investigated the role of records and archives in resolving chiefdom wrangles. Consequently, this research, intended to bridge this gap.

**BACKGROUND**

In Zambia, the department of National Archives of Zambia under the Ministry of Home Affairs has been given the mandate of control and custody of the public archives and records of the Government, state corporations, missions and individuals. The mandate is derived from the National Archives Act Chapter 175 of the Laws of Zambia. This Act is meant to provide
for the preservation, custody control and disposal of public records and archives in Zambia. In the Act, according to Hamooya (2009), public archives are those public records that are specified by the Director of National Archives as being of permanent value and have been transferred to the department. Public records in the Act imply any records of the government that in the first place, are in the custody of government and secondly have been transferred to the National Archives of Zambia. The Act further states that public records also involve any records of a corporation, society, association, institution or organisation that are prescribed by the Minister by statutory instrument and which are in the custody of such corporation, society, association, institution or organisation.

The origins of the National Archives of Zambia can be traced back to 1935 when the Southern Rhodesia Archives was opened. Northern Rhodesia had no organised archives until 1947. In 1946, the Northern Rhodesian Government negotiated with the Southern Rhodesian Government for extension of archival services to its territory (Simabwachi, 2013). In the same year, the Central African Council authorised the Southern Rhodesia Archives to extend archival services to Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The authorisation of the merging of archival services was based on the political campaign after the second war for unification of various technical services of the three Central African countries for economic and security reasons. This was followed by Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland passing the Archives Ordinances of 1946. The ordinances legally established the Southern Rhodesia Archives as the archives headquarters office for Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Thereafter, the name of the Southern Rhodesian Archives was changed to the Central African Archives. H. E. Hillet became the first archivist of the Central African Archives. In 1947, an archival depot was opened at Livingstone by A. J. Saich, and it served as a transit centre for semi-current records pending their transfer to the Central African Archives which was headquartered in Salisbury. The depot was in operation up to 1950 when it was temporarily closed owing to a staff crisis (Simabwachi, 2013).

However, in 1956 the archival depot was re-opened and relocated to Lusaka. With the formation of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1953, the administration of archives was taken over by the Federal Government. In 1958, the National Archives Act was passed which stated that each Federal Government of Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland was the owner and disposer of its own property. The Central African Archives was then renamed as the National Archives of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Later in 1963 the
Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was dissolved. This was followed by Zambia’s attainment of independence in October 1964. The Zambian archives ceased to be a branch of the National Archives of Rhodesia and Nyasaland but became a fully fledged archival institution. The archival institution was now renamed as the National Archives of Zambia. In 1969, the National Archives Act was passed which stated that the legal and sole mandate for the care and preservation of Zambian records was entrusted with the National Archives of Zambia (Simabwachi, 2013).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In the Southern African region, Zambia is known to be a haven of peace. According to Lumba (2013), Zambians, however, should not take the peace prevailing in the country for granted. There is need for all peace loving Zambians to guard jealously the peace that has been prevailing in this great nation since independence. This can be made possible by enhancing and promoting the core values that have held this nation together. Lumba emphasises that the word ‘peace’ in as much as it can be a five worded letter has a grave impact on many social and economic aspects of any given country. In the absence of peace, people are not able to exercise their full potential as misery takes its toll. Peace simply entails order, discipline and prosperity which are recorded when it is put at the centre stage of any given society (Lumba, 2013). However, the prevalence of wrangles in various chiefdoms in Zambia has been a major source of concern to individuals, families and the nation at large. Many of the chiefdom wrangles involve land and succession disputes. Land is becoming scarce daily. This has resulted into wrangles as each chief would want to have a big share of land to own. In terms of inheritance, wrangles have become such that everybody would want to be a chief even if they are not in the royal family. Chiefdom wrangles and disputes that have rocked several chiefdoms in Zambia, no doubt present a serious threat to Zambia’s development. More time and money is spent on resolving conflicts instead of development issues. They also result in loss of lives, displacement of people, increased violence, human abuse and mutilation to mention but a few. In statistical terms, the number of disputes may be small, but in terms of financial loss and anguish for those involved these disputes can be extremely painful (Powell, 2005).

The rise in chiefdom wrangles could be attributed to lack of documentation on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance or lack of knowledge on the existence of such records. Records
and archives document essential administrative decisions and are often missing links in most chiefdom wrangles. This study therefore, investigated the role of records and archives in resolving chiefdom wrangles.

1.2 Objectives of the Study
The objectives of the study included the following:

1. To investigate the kinds of records and archives available on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance
2. To find out if records and archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance are consulted
3. To find out the challenges faced in accessing records and archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance
4. To ascertain the extent to which records and archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance resolve chiefdom boundary wrangles
5. To investigate the security of records and archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance

1.3 Research Questions
The following research questions guided the study:

1. What kinds of records and archives are available on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance?
2. Are records and archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance consulted?
3. What challenges are faced in accessing records and archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance?
4. To what extent do records and archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance resolve chiefdom boundary wrangles?
5. Are records and archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance safe?

2. METHODOLOGY
The research was carried out at National Archive of Zambia headquarters. This study was a survey in nature. The research design was centred on qualitative methods. Primary data was collected through interviews and document study. Document study involved consulting researchers log book, Government Gazette, District Note Books and Maps. Ten (10)
members of staff purposively selected participated in the study. Content analysis was used to analyse data obtained qualitatively.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Kinds of records and archives available on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance

Findings from the field revealed that the National Archives of Zambia has three types of records or archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance. These include the District Notebooks (DNBs), maps and Government Gazettes. This is what one of the respondents had to say on kinds of records and archives they have on chiefdom boundaries:

*We have three types of records or archives that help answer issues to do with chiefdom wrangles. These are District Notebooks, maps and Government Gazettes.*

Further investigation included scrutinising the information contained in each of the three types of records. The first type of records that researchers studied extensively were DNBs. The institution has more than eighty (80) DNBs covering all the provinces in Zambia. The DNBs cover the period from the 1890s to 1964. Entries were made in these notebooks by district officials on a wide range of administrative and historical subjects. Gann in Simabwachi (2013) noted that the district officials lived in close contact with the indigenous people hence they recorded their observations and what was orally told to them. District notebooks in which district information was entered formed useful sources of ethnic histories in writing tribal and cultural history. Gann stressed that the observations of the early administrative officials in Northern Rhodesia were of tremendous value in piecing together details concerning native societies. The DNBs in many cases contain the only written sources of ethnic histories. As well as recording tribal and cultural history, the DNBs are sources of the history of the administration. The findings revealed that information contained in DNBs on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance include descriptions of boundaries of districts, names of chiefs and headmen, chiefdom and headmen boundaries, inheritance, land settlement and customs and law. This is why they are the most valued and most consulted collection.
Further, the district notebooks, according to Simabwachi (2013) were valuable resources in the publication of calendars of the DNBs. The calendars contained summaries of all entries that were made in the DNBs in chronological order. The calendars of DNBs were useful in verifying the correct names which were corrupted by the Colonial Administrators.

The findings further revealed that National Archives of Zambia holds maps of various kinds including those that show provincial, district and chiefdom boundaries. The institution has among others maps for Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Native Affairs. It is to noteworthy that chiefdoms in Zambia were last demarcated in 1958 and the maps showing chiefs’ boundaries were drawn in the same year. These maps were drawn by colonial masters. It was found that the 1958 maps are also widely consulted for any boundary dispute. This is evident from the following response:

> When chiefs or subjects come here, they look at all the three kinds of records including maps. The chiefdom boundary descriptions contained in the DNBs are often confirmed by consulting maps for actual demarcations. Information on chiefs gazetted is also sort in government gazettes.

Researchers observed that the maps are accurate, intact and detailed. Thus, these maps are crucial for research into boundary wrangles in the country because they provide spatial grounding and evidence. Simabwachi (2013) submits that a map collection provides a valuable resource for research and provision of information necessary for state, business and private activities. They give visual evidence to support claims which can be manipulated in the write-up. In fact, these maps give very quick view of descriptions of boundaries presented in the District Notebooks.

The third kind of record on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance include government gazettes. As already alluded to in the above response, appointed chiefs from various chiefdoms in the country are gazetted in government gazettes. It is therefore, important that chiefs and their subjects consult these kinds of records to resolve or avoid wrangles.

### 3.2 Consultation of records and archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance and the extent to which they resolve chiefdom wrangles
In the investigation of the accessibility and use of records and archives, the findings revealed that these records are consulted by chiefs and their subjects more than six times in a year. Thus, in the past five years, the study revealed that 13 chiefs and 34 subjects visited the National Archives of Zambia to consult records on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance. This confirms the conclusion reached by Simabwachi (2013) in his study, that traditional rulers were frequent users of the National Archives in search of information that related to genealogy, boundary and succession disputes. Traditional rulers found them useful as they contained the only written records of their own succession. Individuals and chiefs who faced succession disputes used the archives to trace the procedures and lines of succession. Mumba in Simabwachi (2013) confirmed that a chief from Bene Ngumbo clan used the calendar of the district notebook of Northern Province from the National Archives to trace his genealogy. The following response also confirms that chiefs consult the records and archives to confirm boundaries and inheritance or resolve wrangles:

_Recently, more than ten (10) subjects including Chief Choongo, Chief Chilyabufu, Chief Mukuni, Chief Kanongesha, Chief Chipepo and many others have been to this institution to consult records and archives._

In view of the above, it is imperative to consult records and archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance. As observed by Nyamboga, and Kiplang’at (2008) conflicts are based on deficiency of information. Records and archives can enrich chiefs and their subjects with relevant information on boundary and inheritance issues. According to the International Council on Archives (2011), the fundamental purpose of archives is use. Records and archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance can be used as a medium of peace building. In case of disputes, records are able to reveal the true story because you may find that those who may be fighting were not there yesterday.

Findings further revealed that to a great extent, the records and archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance do resolve chiefdom wrangles. This is evident from the following response:

_Although chiefs or subjects do not come back to report whether wrangles were resolved or not, some cases end up in court and the courts rely on this information to_
make a verdict to end such wrangles and these are usually reported in the press, including cases that get resolved without going to court.

It can thus be seen that the key to resolving a dispute speedily and successfully is to seek information as soon as possible. The cost for a dispute that goes to court is usually high. Accurately resolving the boundary and inheritance wrangles among people requires records or archives. The National Archives of Zambia can always be a place to reckon with in as far as chiefdom wrangles are concerned. Affected parties can consult records and archives to learn the truth which would prevent the need to go to court.

3.3 Challenges faced in accessing records and archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance

The study investigated the challenges faced to access records and archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance. The findings revealed three major challenges as in the following response:

*Individuals who come to consult records have complained that the only records they could consult are maps because the rest of the other information is in English, which they cannot read or can be accessed on the computer when they have no knowledge of computers.*

As indicated above, accessing this information in English proves to be a challenge for those who do not know English. In addition to the above challenge, the study findings revealed that some pages of the DNBs are worn out or torn. In such circumstances, it is difficult for people to have complete information on an issue of interest.

The study further revealed that much of the information in the DNBs were written using reeds and the handwriting in which the information is recorded proves to be difficult in some cases to read. However, the challenge is partially overcome by use of digitised information which can be magnified. In the absence of that, it is hard to read these paper records.

3.4 Security of records and archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance
An important factor in protecting records and archives is the provision of adequate security measures, to protect the people working in the records office, records centre or archival institution and to protect the valuable records and archives housed in storage areas or repositories (International Records Management Trust, 1999). This study investigated the security of records and archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance. Findings of the study revealed that all the records and archives are safe as they are kept in purpose built repositories. The maps are kept in flat wide cabinets specifically designed for maps while the DNBs and government gazettes are kept on movable steel shelves. The repositories are well ventilated, clean, and locked with sophisticated gargets. The institution has in place general rules as highlighted in the following response:

_Researchers are required to pay subscription fees after which they are given what are known as readers cards as a form of identity. Before they are issued with any records or archives, verification of their membership is done to ensure that they are valid members. In addition, we have a researcher’s book in which researchers indicate their details and research topics. No one is allowed to go with food or bags in the search room. Researchers are not allowed to photocopy records or archives on their own. We do not allow anyone to photocopy materials at risk of damage....._

The findings further revealed that entrance to records storage areas is restricted to only four authorised members of staff. These are the people who provide reference services. According to ICA (2011), Archivists have the responsibility to prevent unauthorized access and at the same time provide the widest possible use of archives by monitoring restrictions and promptly removing those no longer warranted. Researchers are not allowed to write on or mark any record or archive. In fact it was observed that the institution only allows use of pencils and not ink in the search room. This is because a pencil can be easily erased unlike ink when accidentally scribbled on a record of archive.

Findings of the study also revealed that National Archives of Zambia fumigates these records once in a year to ensure their longevity. The fumigation exercise according to Simabwachi (2013) involves applying a chemical called meth bromide on paper documents as a protection against insects. Other preservation measures include assessment of the scope and nature of deterioration within the collections, physical repair of damaged archival materials, reformatting of archival materials through microfilming and reprographing, ensuring
appropriate storage equipment and environment that meet the standards of particular forms and formats of archives and facilitating training of members of staff in preservation of archival resources (Simabwachi, 2013).

In terms of the formats in which records and archives are stored, findings revealed that there are in two formats: digitised and paper form. According to Hamooya (2010), these records have been digitised to safeguard and ensure the preservation of the most valuable and perishable components of the archival materials; increase their accessibility; reduce the handling of fragile materials; and facilitate their future use by a broader number of researchers and interested parties. The digitized District Notebooks (one Province per DVD) can be bought at a price. One other advantage is that digitised records can be magnified.

When asked whether they have a back up for records and archives on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance, the following was a response:

_We have a back-up for digitised records and archives only. We do not have a back-up for those in paper form. All digitized and indexed documents are recorded on digital repositories, on CDs and DVDs to be specific._

The researcher can read the documents in pdf format. It is not possible for the researcher to make additions or changes to the image or the database. A back-up system is in place in which the original scanned image is preserved. If the researcher insists on checking the original document, the District Notebooks are always accessible (Hamooya, 2010).

The importance of having a back-up in an electronic environment for records and archives cannot be over-emphasised. When there is machine failure or the file itself becomes corrupted one should be able to access the information. If records or archives are lost or cannot be accessed, it may be costly to the organisation. The back-up should be kept on the external hard drive rather than on the same computer. In terms of paper records, there is need to make extra copies for valuable records or archives such as maps and DNBs.

The findings also revealed that retrieval of records and archives is not a problem at National Archives of Zambia. The institution has finding aids including accession lists, catalogues, descriptive lists and inventories as retrieval tools. Confirming the usefulness of finding aids at
NAZ, Mkunsha in Simabwachi (2013) acknowledged that finding aids at the National Archives of Zambia were helpful in retrieving information on the Chieftainship in the Chibombo District of Central Province.

4. OBSERVATIONS

i) In as much as the value and importance of records and archives to individuals and society at large have been stressed, they are in most instances under-utilized due to low awareness.

ii) There is no documentation or information on some chiefdom concerning boundaries and inheritance

iii) Most of the available records and archives are in English.

iv) It has also been observed that there have been calls to re-demarcate the chiefdom boundaries.

v) Most chiefs do not have copies of information on their boundaries and inheritance at their palaces

vi) Most members of staff have little knowledge about computers making it difficult for them to be fully aware of the technical aspects of the digitized materials

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

i) National Archives of Zambia should embark on awareness programmes through exhibitions, televisions, radio and newspapers on their functions and services.

ii) Information on chiefdom boundaries and inheritance where there is none should be documented and preserved to avoid information sinks.

iii) Valuable documentary evidence should be translated in local languages.

iv) Government should not entertain calls to re-demarcate chiefdom boundaries because this will tamper with the integrity of the available records and archives.

v) In view of the wrangles that keep coming up from time-to-time, it is imperative for government to consider printing out the 1958 maps and distributing them to all chiefdoms in the country so that chiefs as well as their subjects are well informed on their chiefdom boundaries and inheritance.
6. CONCLUSION

Records and archives are fundamental in resolving chiefdom wrangles. They can contribute to peace building at all levels of time and space; be it individual, institutional, organisational, national and global levels. Information based on records and archives has the potential to empower chiefs and their subjects to make informed actions whenever there are wrangles. It is practically impossible for any chief or subject to resolve wrangles in the absence of archives and records. In fact, the absence of evidential records in most cases permeates corruption and threatens rights. Archival institutions therefore, play a significant role by providing access to archives and records irrespective of time, location and remembrance of contemporary witnesses. In an effort to maintain peace and tranquillity, chiefs and their subjects should be guided by important information based in records and archives to resolve wrangles.
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