

MANAGING PRESERVATION IN PRACTICE: TANZANIAN APPROACH TO PRESERVATION OF ARCHIVAL MATERIALS (THE CASE OF DISTRICT BOOKS AND GERMAN RECORDS).

1. INTRODUCTION

The Records and Archives Management Department was established through Government Notice Number 289 published on 1st October 1999 as a result of the merger between the National Archives of Tanzania from the Ministry of Education and culture and Records Management section in the President's Office Public Service Management. But the history of this department can be traced back from 1963, when the president issued a circular No. 7 of 1963¹ which emphasized on the proper care and disposal of public records. This circular established the archival services in Tanzania, and most of the contents of the circular were later included in the National Archives Act No. 33 of 1965.

Preservation of archival material was one of the first priorities that were given high weight by the 1st President, the Late Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere. In the same circular, it was emphasized that archival material has a broader cultural and historical value, without proper understanding of our past, we are at the mercy of impulse and prejudice, lacking in balance and continuity. Most of the records at that time were records of former German and British administrations. These records exemplify – sometimes, incidentally – much of the indigenous customs and traditions of the people of Tanzania.

Since these records were part of the cultural heritage of Tanzania, it was a moral duty of the government to preserve. It is from them that

¹ Archivum Volume XX, 1970 pg125 - 134

the history of Tanzania will continue to be written and taught in our schools and universities.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE GERMAN AND BRITISH COLONIAL RECORDS

2.1. German records

The history of recordkeeping in Tanzania (by then was known as Tanganyika) can be traced back to early days of the German invention in 1885. At these early days of German administration in Tanzania, very little is known of what happened to the records creation and handling. In 1901 a government circular from Berlin instructed for reorganization of records system by classifying records into units and sub units (referate and korreferate). The registry organization of the government during German colonial period in Tanzania was very similar to that of the Prussian administration in Berlin. Files were classified in order of the functions they dealt with. Letters were filed in hard brown paper covers which in the front bore in black thick title words "Akten des Kaiserlichen Government von Deutch Ost Africa" (Files of his Imperial Government of German East Africa).

The files of the colonial government and its departments were kept in a central registry. The whole filing system was divided into sixteen (16) main subject groups. The groups were as follows:

- I Organization and administration
- II Finance
- III Shipping and the Navy

- IV Army
- V District administration
- VI Medical
- VII Customs and Taxes
- VIII Post
- IX Personal
- X Justice
- XI Library
- XII Construction
- XIII Trade
- XIV Mining
- XV Mission and Schools
- XVI Scientific expedition

At the district level, the registry practice differed from one district to the other. Each district was free to have its own system. Some district used the same registry system as that of the central government.

In 1914 World War I erupted whereby the Germans were heavily involved in this war. When Germans realized that there were about to lose on the First World War, they decided to bury their records at their headquarters in Tabora and in different offices in the country. These records were hidden by the order of the Governor so that they do not fall under the enemies – the British. The Germans thought that at the end of the war these records would serve as evidence of the legal rights of German settlers. These records, mostly rat and rant eaten were discovered by the British in the

first early years in Tanganyika. The discovery led to negotiations with the German government to dig up other documents wherever there were hidden in the country. These records forms the nucleus of documents preserved at the National Archives of Tanzania.



King Rifle Army picture: Among of collection in our archives. (King Rifle Army there reading "KIONGOZI" Newspaper during the British Colonial rule)

2.2. Provincial and District books (Under British colonial administration)

The provincial and district books are some of the most valuable historical documents preserved by the National Archives of Tanzania. Soon after the establishment of the British administration, the officers incharge of Provincial Administration felt that there was an urgent need for a system whereby administrative officers posted to Provinces and Districts will be provided with background information on the historical, social, political and economic make up of their District to facilitate quick understanding of the problems and needs of their spheres jurisdiction. Therefore in 1922, the Acting Chief Secretary issued a special circular² to all District Political Officers informing them that in order to maintain continuity of administration they should furnish their successors handing over reports giving general information concerning the district or sub district. To get best results it was suggested that they should maintain "District books" containing full and up to date information which would be added from time to time and would form a continuous record of the district concerned.

Apparently there was no definite format for these books. Much was dependent on the initiative drive and discretion of the district officers. Later a concern was raised to have a definite format of compilation of information for the district books. Hence a new circular was issued in 1926³ requesting all provincial Commissioners to submit their views on the form which the books should take, with further suggestions as to details of subject headings. The views of the Provincial Commissioners came up with new format of district books and included the following standard headings:

- I Inspection, Handing Over
- II Tribal History and Legends

² Chief Secretary circular No. 20 of 1922

³ Secretariat circular letter No. 24 of 1926

- III Ethnology and Anthropology
- IV Language Notes
- V Laws, manners and customs
- VI Geographical Distribution
- VII Tribal Government
- VIII Native Administration
- IX Native Courts
- X Native Treasuries
- XI Chiefs Barazas
- XII Census Summary
- XIII Hat and Poll Tax Summary
- XIV Native Cattle Census
- XV Main District, Village, Roads
- XVI Road Reports, itineraries
- XVII General Topography
- XVIII Miscellaneous
- XIX Cemeteries
- XX Missions
- XXI Political Offenders
- XXII Wages

These books were kept up to date till late 1950s when Tanganyika was in its movement for independence from the British.

3. MICROFILMING PROJECTS

Since Tanzania attained its independence in 1961, two microfilming projects has taken place. The projects included microfilming of provincial and district books and the second project is microfilming of German Records.

3.1. Microfilming Project of Provincial and District Books

Soon after the establishment of National Archives Serves in 1963, it was proposed that all Provincial and District books be collected from Regional and District offices and deposited at the National Archives headquarters in Dar es Salaam for reference and research. Since the books were still in demand by their creators to acquaint their newly employees with their districts, it was difficult for the national Archives to acquire these records. It was therefore agreed that the books be collected and microfilmed at the national Archives.

The Microfilming project was started by Mr. Joseph Karugila in October 1965 who was an Assistant Archivist. He collected most of the books from the districts and prepared them for microfilming. The Scheme was financed by contributions from three academic institutions: Rhodes House Library, Syracuse University, and the Centre for Research Libraries in Indiana. These Institutions agreed to purchase positive copies at a price which covered the cost of producing the primary negatives. Costs for transport and administrative issues were covered by the national Archives of Tanzania.

The Technical Unit of the University Library, Dar es Salaam did the actual microfilming since the National Archives of Tanzania at that time did not have a camera of its own. The university library also prepared positives for its own use and for the use of the National Archives. Since National Archives staff at that time had limited skills, minor technical problems especially in microfilming did develop such as early exposures and duplication.

The District books are contained in twenty eight (28) reels numbered serially. The reels have accession numbers at the National Archives. These accession numbers are preceded by letters MF – (Microfilming). However, these accession numbers do not correspond to the reel number of the microfilm as sent to overseas institutions. The microfilms of provincial and District books are available at a number of universities who contributed to this project. Also a Guide to these records is available at the National Archives of Tanzania.

3.2. Microfilming of German Records

The microfilming project of the German records that are held in the National Archives started with an agreement between the Government of Tanzania and GTZ on behalf of the Germany government. The total cost for this project was around 500 Euros.

The project covered the following main area:

Provision of equipment

The project assessed the equipment needed for the exercise. So the project procured one microfilm camera, 2 microfilm printer, 2 microfilm cabinets, 1 microfilming table, 1 aluminum drying track.



Latest digital microfilm reader used by researchers in the search room at Tanzania National Archives

Duplication of microfilms held in German by Reich Colonial office

The Reich colonial office in Germany and the Germany National Archives holds a number of archival materials that are relating to Tanzania. The National Archives of Tanzania needed copies of these materials in order to have a complete history of the Germany activities in Tanzania. So duplication of these records was done and a total of 400 microfilm reels was handed to the National Archives of Tanzania.

Training of staff

The National Archives of Tanzania experienced a skill gap in care and conservation of books, manuscripts and old records. So in collaboration with the German Technical Corporation we managed to train 2 staff in care and conservation of books, manuscripts and archives for 12 weeks at the National Archives of India, School of Archival Studies in New Delhi. The decision to send our staff to India was largely based on the fact that the National Archives of India is one of the best in reprography and paper

conservation field that can satisfy the needs for restoration of German records. The National Archives of Tanzania also attached 2 staff at the National Archives of Kenya to learn more on microfilm and paper conservation.

Since the German colonial records are in Germany language, it was also required to train 2 staff in German language at Goethe Institute in Dar es Salaam for 3 month and later sent to Germany for further training in paleography.

Other staff of the technical section received on job training in conservation and microfilming processes.

Repair work

Since the German records are over 125 years old and were buried for over 5 years before being discovered by the British, they required major repair before embarking on the microfilming exercise. The repair work included/; removing all tags, pins or any other obstacles; pagination by making sure that each item in a file is given a new page number by stamping into the top right corner of each item; and repairing any item that is torn.

Microfilming

After making sure that all records have properly repaired, the microfilming process started. This exercise is still continuing as up to the moment.



Records officer examine films after processing - Tanzania National Archives

4. STRATEGIES FOR TRADITIONAL RECORD FORMATS.

Since the German records are too old and have been recognized as document of the World by UNESCO, It is the duty of the National Archives of Tanzania to preserve these records at any cost. The following strategies are being implemented by the National Archives.

- a) Access to the actual files has been suspended in order to avoid further damages. All researchers use the microfilms to access the information they want. The National Archives has two high tech microfilm reader machines that are used by researchers. The microfilm readers has also the ability to print a document , attach or e-mail documents.
- b) All archival boxes that are used to house the German records are acid free. In collaboration with the National Archives of German Tanzania has received enough acid free archival boxes to house all the German records.

- c) Rehabilitation of rooms that are used to house the German records within the National Archives building. The rooms have been equipped with dehumidifiers that control the humidity in the rooms.



5. CHALLENGES FACING THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF TANZANIA

Although there have been significant achievements in terms of preservation of archival material, The National Archives is being faced by some challenges that in one way or another impedes the achievements of intended objectives. These challenges are:

- a) There are still many old documents of the former German and British colonial administration that need microfilming. To continue to allow researchers to access the hard copy materials endangers them and will expose the materials at high risk of damage. These are unique documents that we need to preserve them by all means and at any cost. Due to budgetary constraints, the National Archives receives very little funds in this area.
- b) Another challenge facing the National Archives of Tanzania is labour turn over. Most of our trained staff in this area has left the service joining other institutions with higher pay. It is estimated that every year the National Archives loses over five staff.
- c) Unreliable electricity is another challenge facing the National Archives. There is no constant supply of power, which has led the archival material to be subjected to high humidity and extreme temperature. The National Archives managed to procure a generator, but the cost of running of this generator is becoming a burden.
- d) The National Archives repository is full and cannot accommodate more archival material. So there no more acquisitions of archival materials from government institutions. Collection of more archival material will resume after the completion of construction of the National Records Centre that is being build in Dodoma.

6. CONCLUSION

The national Archives of Tanzania will continue to preserve the records of the past administration especially the German and British colonial records. In them a vast amount of information relating to social, statistical, technical, legal and administrative is the upmost value of historians and as a written heritage to future generations of Tanzanians. These records will continue to part of the cultural heritage of Tanzania and it is the moral duty of the National Archives to continue to preserve and make safe keeping of all records with enduring value.

The National Archives will continue to stretch hands to all development partners who are working with us in the area of records and archives management. These partners has made us who we are in this area. The National Archives would like to thank the following institutions and individuals who has made a tireless contributions to us: DFID, World Bank, IMRT, CIDA Canada, GTZ, National Archives of India, National Archives of Kenya, Dr. Anne Thurston, and Dr. Trudy Huskamp Peterson just to mention a few.