

# **CONFRONTING CHALLENGES AND SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES** **DURING MY TENURE AS A DIRECTOR OF A NATIONAL ARCHIVES:** **APRIL 1975 TO JUNE 2004**

## **1. CHALLENGES AND OPPRTUNITIES BEFORE I WAS APPOINTED ACTING CHIEF ARCHIVIST: APRIL 1975 TO MAY 1981.**

On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1975 when I joined the Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service (hereafter National Archives), it was a very tiny Department in terms of resources at its disposal despite its existence for about ten (10) years. For example, the total number of staff in 1974 was only twenty two (22). But by June 1982, the total number had increased to 141, out of which 26 were university graduates. Equally significant, the total annual budget was very small in relation to the specific legal mandate of the National Archives. With this very limited resources, and the enormous responsibilities placed on the relatively young Department by the Public Archives and Documentation Service Act Chapter19, it was obviously impossible for it to efficiently deliver its mandate. At this time, as was also the case when I took over the Department in May 1981, ministries, departments, parastatals and courts were seriously overburdened with huge accumulation of non-current records----some valuable and very many valueless records. The personnel and financial resources necessary to carry out records surveys and appraisal began to drastically improve after Dr. Maina D. Kagombe was appointed the Chief Archivist at the end of 1974. Unfortunately, professional records and archives management programmes and activities did not significantly improve mainly because of two reasons. First, a lot of the resources were directed to non-archival functions. Secondly, the first few years of Dr. Kagombe's leadership was characterised by intense but quiet mistrust in the Department among the senior staff. Let me elaborate this second reason.

In 1974 when Dr. Kagombe joined the National Archives, all the top five or so senior staff except one were from Western and Nyanza regions. The expectations among them had been that the then Acting Chief Archivist, a lawyer, was going to take over. This did not happen. When their dream was dashed, the new boss did not, from my personal observations, get the needed support. Furthermore, since none of the senior staff, including the new boss had received training in records and archives management, they could not be expected to do much. Even more significant, Dr. Kagombe came to find out that significant copies of Kenya Government archives had been supplied to the University of Syracuse although the money paid by this University for the microfilm copies was alleged to have been received into a personal bank account. Obviously, the new Chief Archivist had a responsibility to pursue the matter and an audit investigation was initiated. This seems to have deepened the mistrust in the Department.

The new Chief Archivist had to find a way of improving the work environment otherwise it would have been very difficult for him to implement his short and long-term plans. One way of achieving this objective was to deal with the disgruntled officers in the

Department. Without going into details, I can confirm that by the time I took over the leadership of the National Archives in May 1981, the entire team which had been unhappy with Dr, Kagombe had been scattered---some of them left the Department on their own accord, while others were transferred. Two of them, Mr. Festus Khayundi and Mr. Robert Kukubo were very highly qualified and competent Archivists by the time they left the Department. I had intentionally chosen not to join any of the “warring” groups. From day one, I just focused on my official duties. That is how I survived this apparent unhealthy environment. Paradoxically, my predecessor had, to some extent, created a similar scenario by the time his services were terminated. His staff recruitment and training policy was to some extent skewed. Let me highlight one specific example in which this skewed policy was clearly demonstrated.

When I began my career as Archivist III at the National Archives, I was immediately appointed as Head of Microfilming Section. As I have already indicated, there was already an investigation going on concerning the sale of microfilms which had been going on before Dr. Kagombe joined the Department. However, this activity had been brought to an end before I joined the Department. The new Chief Archivist was aware of the importance of long term preservation of official Kenya Government records through microfilming. He was determined to improve the capability of the Microfilming Section. In this connection, he was able to secure consultancy services of Mr. Albert Leisinger, an internationally acknowledged expert and author on reprographic (microfilm) technology. It is noted that Leisinger was a recognised authority within the International Council on Archives. I worked very closely with him as he reviewed the Department’s reprographic services. Among his key recommendations was that the National Archives should establish a Reprographic and Conservation Workshop to serve not just Kenya, but the region in general. It is noted that in 1970s and even in 1980s, reprography was a preferred method of long term preservation of archives and library materials. In the last paragraph of his report dated 9<sup>th</sup> July 1977, he specifically stated that:

*“It is also strongly recommended that the National Archives of Kenya before the commencement of reprographic and conservation workshop that Musila Musembi spend at least four months training in a developed country where good reprographic and conservation facilities exist. An excellent place would be the Public Archives Canada at Ottawa. I suggest that Dr. Kagombe writes to the Dominion Archivist, Dr. Wilfred Smith, and enquire whether this would be feasible and under what conditions”.<sup>1</sup>*

The above recommendation by Leisinger was, in my view, a clear indication that I had already acquired some basic knowledge and capability in microfilm technology, as well as the need for me to improve that capability to international level. But instead of recommending me, another person who was not working in the Microfilming Section was sent for attachment in the National Archives of Canada. As a matter of fact, he had joined the Department only recently. However, he may not have been aware of the unfair game which was going on, or even read Mr. Leisinger’s report. I accepted this big and painful challenge. I did not go round the Department whining and challenging the Chief Archivist. This is a big lesson to employees working in

organizations, both small and big. There will be situations when you have to accept what has happened without fighting back, even if you are the victim. In this connection, I continued to work hard as if nothing had happened until May 1981 when I was, VERY UNEXPETDLY, called upon to act as the Chief Archivist. If I began fighting back, I do not think I would ever have become the head of Department many years later. In life's journey, there are times when withholding your blow is more beneficial than striking back to the enemy. But of course this strategy should never be applied blindly and in all cases,

## **2. CONFRONTING NO HAND-OVER CHALLENGES AND SUBSEQUENT INCIDENTS.**

In late 1970's, the Auditor General carried out a comprehensive audit investigation in the National Archives. According to the audit report, the situation was quite unsatisfactory. As a result, the services of Dr. Kagombe were terminated and a Mr. David Lyle, who by then was acting as his Deputy was appointed as Acting Chief Archivist. Mr. Lyle was as an expatriate from United Kingdom. Events were moving fairly fast and on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1981, Mr. Lyle's acting appointment was also terminated and he was instructed to complete his handing-over by 13<sup>th</sup> May 1981---this was a period of about one week. However, he was instructed to continue working in the Department until his contract came to an end. 7<sup>th</sup> May 1981 was also the date in which I was instructed to take over the management of the Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service in an acting capacity. Mr. Michael Gachie was at the same time appointed as acting Deputy Chief Archivist and was therefore to assist me to manage the Department. Technically, Mr. Lyle was made redundant and his presence in the Department was really not adding value. It is noted that both myself and Mr. Gachie were quite young in age when we took over the new challenging assignment. This was not helped by our very noticeable small body frames!!

The hand-over did not go on as we had all expected. When I enquired from Mr. Lyle when we should start the exercise of handing-over and taking-over, he categorically told me that there will not be any such exercise. He explained to me that nobody had handed-over to him. In my view, this was just an excuse. He had served as a Deputy Chief Archivist for quite some time, and also as Acting Chief Archivist after Dr. Kagombe's services were terminated. For sure, he had gained a lot of information on the programmes and activities of the Department since he had been second in command. Worse still, the Former Chief Archivist was certainly not in any mood to provide any advice to me after the termination of his services; and also after the humiliating eviction from the house he was occupying. The general situation was quite tense. This was certainly the second major challenge I faced as the acting head of the Department. I accepted the challenge. I did not go round among other senior staff shouting my frustrations about what was happening. I knew that there were two strong points I could count on. First and foremost, I had already worked in the Department for about six (6) years. Consequently, I had good knowledge of its programmes and activities. Secondly, I was already a professionally qualified Archivist having trained in Ghana with my colleague Festus Khayundi. It is also noted that during our post-

graduate training in the University of Ghana, Accra, we had taken a management course together with MBA students. However, it was very clear that our parent Ministry was not sure whether I could immediately handle the heavy and serious challenges the Department was facing. In this connection, the letter appointing me as the Acting Chief Archivist also stated that:

*“Until the question of the Director/Chief Archivist has been decided the general supervision of the Department will be done by the undersigned”. The undersigned was a Mr. Duncan N. Kaniaru, an Undersecretary in the Ministry. This position was third in line from that of present day Principal Secretary.*

Mr. Kaniaru was a very experienced civil servant. He mentored me on regular basis and with empathy. He would come to the Department and quietly find out how I was doing, and also enquire if there were difficult issues for which I needed advice or actual assistance. But as time went on, and as I increasingly and firmly put things in my control, he gradually withdrew from the scene.

As I have already mentioned, the situation in the Department was tense by May 1981 when I took over. This explained why Mr. Duncan Kaniaru was detailed to provide general supervision of the Department. However, while he was to provide general administrative support, the parent Ministry strongly felt that we also needed additional professional support to put the National Archives in the right path. This explains why during the early years of my leadership, it was decided to bring in additional local support. The parent Ministry got in touch with the University of Nairobi and Mr. Festus Khayundi, a professionally qualified Archivist was brought in to provide the necessary additional support. It is noted that by this time, and as I have already indicated, a number of professionally qualified and experienced specialists had been “forced” by circumstances to look elsewhere for greener pastures. Their leaving the Department must have left a gaping gap which took time to fill.

I had also to deal with a number of incidents which were not helpful during the period of taking over the management of the Department. The former Chief Archivist used to come into the Archives Building and go straight to his former Office. This was adding anxiety to an already tensed environment. What is even more disturbing is that he would not inform me or even pass through the Office of the Acting Chief Archivist. Hakunitambua kabisa. Clearly, this was mischievous and was not helpful to the new team in the Department. Many members of staff were not sure whether the former Chief Archivist was going to come back or not. His actions were certainly not helpful in calming anxiety among the staff. I was personally very uncomfortable with that behaviour. It was humiliating. One day when he had just got into his former Office, I went there and openly told him that while he was free to visit us at the National Archives, he must stop forthwith the practice of entering and occupy the Office of the Chief Archivist. That was his last time to enter into that Office. Yes, it was difficult to forget this planned and unprovoked “humiliation” many years after it happened.

There was yet another incident, call it a challenge. The former Chief Archivist, Dr. Kagombe, had been given notice to vacate a Government house located in a plot which had been acquired for the National Archives. Nobody can deny him the credit for working very hard to get that plot. All the same he had been given notice to vacate this house within a certain deadline. He did not. Arrangements were therefore made to forcefully evict him. Dr. Kagombe's attempt to stop the eviction on the material day were not accepted since the deadline had long passed. And so the eviction was actually effected. Of course this humiliating incident came to be known by many members of staff in the Department. Obviously, this did not help in calming down the tense environment in the National Archives.

Once more, I had to face yet another unfortunately and nasty challenge during this period when I was trying to settle down in the Chief Archivist's Office. When the contract of Mr. David Lyle finally came to an end, he made arrangements to go back to United Kingdom. Together with some other senior staff, we went to see him off at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. There, I met the former Chief Archivist. As we were talking while waiting for Mr. Lyle to travel to Britain, my predecessor, Dr. Kagombe directly told me that I should not think that I was going to be appointed the next Chief Archivist. He went on to tell me that I will be used as a toilet paper, and once that has been achieved, I will be discarded. My response was this: until that happens, I will do my best. God is great. That is indeed what I did with great success which surpasses all understanding. On reflection, I am convinced that those words may have been said in the heat of the moment. But they were obviously very hurting. A few years later, we met in a Café, exchanged some pleasantries, and he offered to pay for my coffee and snacks. Very many years later, in January 2022, I was in a group of former employees who went to visit Dir. Kagombe in his Nairobi residence. During that occasion, I, together with other former employees highlighted a number of achievements he had achieved for the Department. This time, he was very kind to me, just as he was equally appreciative to other former employees in the group. Yes, all is well that ends well.

As I have already detailed above, I did not benefit from the usual handing-over notes. However, I did not allow this challenge to put me down. I decided to transform this serious challenge to an opportunity. The way I achieved this objective was to very quickly go through all relevant closed files of the National Archives starting from 1965 to May 1981. Every working day, I would remain in the Office between 5.00 to about 6.30 pm or after to go through the closed files. At other times, I used to come to the Office on Saturdays and even on Sundays after church service. I took very detailed notes. In this connection, I got much more knowledge through my research than I would ever have received from the hand-over notes. Furthermore, I had already worked in the Department for about six (6) years and gained some practical experience on the Archives programmes and activities. In this way, I was able to transform challenges into landmark opportunities. Very significantly, I used information gained from the above research to publish my small book titled "**Archives Management: The Kenyan Experience**" in 1985, about five years after being appointed Acting Chief Archivist. I remember some colleagues asking me where I got

time to collect information for the book. My answer was TOTAL DETERMINATION TO SUCCEED particularly in view of the difficult environment I was in at the time I took over the Department.

### **3. CONSULTANTS' REVIEWS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS.**

I have already stated that a detailed audit report in late 1970's exposed serious irregularities. This led to the termination of Dr. Kagombe's services. At the same time, the Government felt, of course with good reasons that the National Archives was failing to effectively execute its mandate as specifically outlined in the Public Archives and Documentation Service Act Chapter 19. This is because the Department had increasingly got involved in non-archival activities, thereby misdirecting very scarce resources. These non-archival functions included collection of oral traditions/history, national art gallery, private archives, and some interests on sites and monuments. And yet not much was being done to expand professional boundaries of records and archives management. It is noted that way back in 1978, an internationally celebrated records management consultant, Mr. Ian Maclean was actually astonished at this apparent contradiction of pursuing non-archival functions with passion while the core functions were being implemented at an extremely low level. In this connection, he observed stated that:

*"On arrival, the consultant was frankly astonished at the number and range of objectives and programmes postulated by the Chief Archivist for the Kenya National Archives,---" 2*

In view of the findings of the audit investigation, and the stark realization that the National Archives was now deeply involved in non-archival functions, the Government decided to have a thorough review of the ongoing programmes and activities of the National Archives. In this connection, it was decided to bring in two consultants, one from France and the other one from United Kingdom. The recommendations of the two consultants were expected to enable the Department to start focusing its attention to the core programmes and activities in line with the specific requirements of the Public Archives and Documentation Service Act Cap.19.

#### **3.1 Consultant's Observations and Recommendations**

The first consultant to arrive was Mr. Xavier de Boisrouvray. At the request of the Kenya Government, Mr. Boisrouvray's mission was funded by the French Government. He worked at the National Archives during the period 27<sup>th</sup> October to 15<sup>th</sup> November. He thoroughly reviewed our functions in relation to the law. Just as Mr. Ian Maclean had earlier observed way back in his 1978 report, Mr. Boisrouvray noted that:

*“The consultant insists on this point: in no country in the world, the same organization has so many functions. The National Archives must not dissipate if they want to achieve a success”.*<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the little language problem, the above statement is very clear. The Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service was being warned not to scatter (waste) its efforts in pursuing non-core programmes and activities detailed earlier. Consequently, his key recommendation was that there was a need for the Department to stop engaging in the non-archival activities. This meant that there was need to re-organise the Department.

The second specialist to arrive was Mr. John Walford, a UNESCO funded consultant from United Kingdom. As was the case with Boisrouvray, he had been given adequate time to carry out his evaluation. Walford observed that from the mid-1970s, the National Archives had lost focus on its core functions as indicated below:

*“---its responsibilities came to include wider and wider range of functions usually considered the preserve of other types of specialist institutions”,* 4

Out of the two reports, Walford’s was more detailed and much more clearer. This was of course expected because he was writing in his own mother tongue. His report evaluated in detail the expectations of various Divisions/ Sections of the Department as well as staff deployment. His report was also much clearer on its recommendations on how the Department should be re-organised. After it was received by the Ministry, I was requested to commend on its recommendations. I carefully examined them and they were acceptable except one which to me appeared not quite acceptable. This unacceptable recommendation was on the appointment of the Chief Archivist.

Mr. John Walford passionately argued that **NONE** of the present professional Archivists had the necessary professional and administrative capacity to quickly improve the management of the Department. On this matter, he was really categorical. He made the following obviously strange observation:

*“There is no time, nor are unique records a suitable subject, for the system to be developed by trial and error. Equally, it is unreasonable to expect any of the present professional staff who, however well-qualified, are totally without the experience of working in a well-run archive, to be able to transform their theoretical knowledge into the sort of working practices that are required. Such practices are the product of evolution and working experience, not theoretical blue prints, but it is precisely the time necessary for such evolution to take place and for working experience to be gained that is short supply”.* 5

From the foregoing, Mr. Walford had a very low opinion on the professional and administrative capability of the Kenyan senior archivists, although he tried to camouflage it in diplomatic language elsewhere in his report. In this connection, I was aware that he had discussed his views with key person(s) in our parent Ministry Headquarters and that what he was recommending may have been agreed upon by an interested party. Years later, I was wondering whether this consultant may have been looking for a job for himself or for somebody else.

I did not agree with Mr. Walford's recommendation. I took a bold step and I advised the Ministry against accepting this specific recommendation. Instead, I advised that any of the senior professional Archivists with the necessary support from the Ministry could turn-around the unsatisfactory situation in the Department. There was myself. And then there was my deputy Mr. Michael Gachie. We had also a few other professionally qualified staff in the Department. After all, we had successfully been managing the Department with the support of Mr. Kaniaru as detailed above for about a year. Alternatively I advised that a senior administrator could be appointed and rely on our professional support to put the Department in the right path. I strongly felt that Mr. Walford was wrong in his particular recommendation. I was therefore very pleased when my advice were accepted. I am even more pleased to note that it did not take long before Kenyan professional Archivists transformed the institution into one of the most successful National Archives in English-speaking African countries by June 2004 when I left the Department. Yes, we were able to transform challenges into opportunities. Let me justify this statement for the benefit of any doubting Thomases.

In early 1990s, the International Council on Archives with the support of UNESCO commissioned a **“Survey of the Archival Situation in Africa”**. The survey was carried out by Mr. Peter Claver Mazikana from Zimbabwe, a professionally qualified and experienced archivist. As would be expected, the survey examined critical parameters for a National Archives which included evaluation of buildings, legislation, training, planning and management, records centre services, archives services and so on. In Mazikana's report dated March 1992, the National Archives was placed second after the National Archives of Zimbabwe. It is noted that the National Archives of Zimbabwe beat us by just one (1) point mainly because it had a much better archives building. The National Archives of Botswana was third in ranking, and it is noted that it had benefitted for several years from the services of a professional archivist from Kenya, Mr. Robert Kukubo. In this report, older National Archives of countries such as Ghana and Nigeria were nowhere near the Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service in terms of ranking. This is just one of the many testaments that contrary to what John Walford was trying to tell the world, we had the capacity to re-engineer and transform the National Archives to a satisfactory level. 6

### **3.2 Implementation of Consultants' Recommendations: Walford and**

#### **Boisrouvray**

The most important recommendation of both Boisrouvray and Walford was that non-archival (non-core) functions had seriously undermined efficiency and effectiveness of the National Archives. Resources had been diverted to these non-core activities contrary to the specific requirements of the Public Archives and Documentation Service Act Cap. 19. This needed to be corrected immediately. Therefore, this was my first major assignment after getting greenlight to implement their recommendations. We had to re-organise and re-engineer the Department. A number of staff had had to be re-deployed to the hitherto starved core functions. Resources utilization had to be directed to the core functions as indicated in the archives legislation. This was not a walk in the park.

Not everybody supported the idea of immediate abolition of some of the non-core Divisions/Sections. It is noted that some of the senior staff had been recruited specifically to work in those non-core functions, particularly collection of oral history/traditions, and also in the embryonic national gallery. And so I knew that they would not easily support deployment to records and archives functions. In this connection, I secretly planned the re-organization. I did not share the plans with my Deputy or any other staff member. Once I was satisfied with my plans, I called a meeting in the Conference Room and dropped the small “bomb”. The re-organization was with immediate effect; and so was the deployment. Two of the senior staff with very good academic qualifications announced in this meeting that they will consider leaving the Department. My answer was that it was fine with me. In a strange twist of events, the two officers were later to shine as records and archives management experts both locally in Kenya and outside the Country. Apart from these two brave officers who openly stated their feelings on the re-organization, there must have been a few others who were not convinced on the wisdom of what had happened. In any case, the parent Ministry and I had determined that the re-organization had to be carried out immediately.

Before I leave this topic of re-organization of the Department, let me categorically state that if it were not for the very firm decision and support from the parent Ministry, the National Archives would probably have continued to pursue non-core and non-archival programmes and activities. It was the parent Ministry which invited the external consultants soon after the audit report exposed serious irregularities. The Department was not involved in getting the consultants or the financial issues relating to their missions. This was of course very much in order. Furthermore, the parent Ministry had determined that the re-organization had to be carried out in order to enable the National Archives to focus its resources and energy to the core functions for which it was established through an Act of Parliament way back in 1965. And it is also the parent Ministry which ensured that the re-organization took place as soon as possible. This is very significant. It means that it was very difficult for any member of staff to frustrate the intended re-organization. But of course an officer could transfer to other ministries/departments or just resign.

### **3.2.1 The Implementation Strategy.**

Re-organising the Department alone was of course not enough to give us satisfactory results. Certain strategies had to be put in place to ensure that efficiency and effectiveness hitherto not experienced in the Department were achieved at the earliest time possible. These strategies included the following:

- i. A management team was established consisting of the heads of General Administration, Archives Administration, Records Management, and National Documentation Service among a few others. Search Room Services Section was regarded as quite important and was always assigned a senior staff who formed part of the management team.
- ii. Heads of Division were expected to ensure that, whenever possible, measurable outputs were planned for and achieved. Even where output measurements were not very possible, Heads of Divisions were expected

- to make sure that officers satisfactorily performed work for which they were being paid for. I made it clear to Heads of Divisions/Sections that they were the ones to initiate appropriate necessary disciplinary action in case of poor output or indiscipline. If they failed to do so, then the Chief Archivist would take action on them. This was not an empty threat. This strategy improved the performance in the various units in the Department in a fairly short time.
- iii. We began to have regular Heads of Division meetings, often monthly in order to review work progress. Significantly, this was not a regular activity before I took over. In these meeting, we openly discussed issues and helped each other to search for solutions for difficult problems. Throughout my stay in the Department, this was an immensely important management tool.
  - iv. Once in a while, I would meet some junior staff, the Archives Assistants so that I could personally hear their views on programmes and activities being carried out by the Department; and also receive any grievances. **Through these meetings, I confirmed my firm conviction that wisdom is never confined to senior staff only.** I would then take up any issues received at this level to the monthly departmental meetings. This was also a rewarding exercise during my tenure at the Archives.
  - v. For the first time since the National Archives was established in 1965, we began to organise Biennial Seminars to review our records and archives management programmes and activities; and at the same time generally agree on the directions we should take in the next two years. To make these Biennial Seminars more fruitful, some senior staff would be requested to prepare well researched papers on certain professional topics. I have no doubt that the professional growth of some of the staff can be traced to these seminars. These Biennial Seminars were normally officially opened by the Principal Secretary. Of course I would take that opportunity to inform the Principal Secretary about some of the major challenges we were facing.
  - vi. We used to invite University Lectures to come and present papers on certain subject. These included the late Prof. Justus Wamukoya, Prof. Nathan Mnjama and Beatrice Githaka. They were best placed to deal with certain specialised topics and relate their presentations to what we were doing. They were able to easily do this because they had served in the National Archives before joining the academic world. The strategy here was to tap external expertise with minimal or at no costs. I personally benefitted a lot from their insights and this enhanced my professional capacity to continue driving the Department in the right direction.
  - vii. The National Archives started organising short tailor-made records management seminars for specific institutions. Again this was a new innovation. This became a common practice when our officers carried out records surveys and appraisal in the then districts and provinces. These tailor-made seminars were normally opened by senior officers from the District Commissioner's or Provincial Commissioner's Offices to reflect the importance of the circulars. We used the circulars from the Office of the President as our authority. Paragraph 3.2.2.2 below refers. The seminars

proceeded the practical work of appraisal. It is also noted that similar seminars were also organised in Nairobi for other institutions, including the Judiciary and the Department of Defence.

### 3.2.2 Results of the Re-Organization.

#### 3.2.2. 1 Improvements in Records Management.

Available evidence clearly indicates that very limited records surveys and appraisal were carried before the re-organization in May 1982. It is appreciated that during the tenure of Mr. Nathan Fedha as Chief Archivist, very limited finance and personnel resources must have made such exercises almost impossible. Unfortunately, evidence still indicates that such professional activities were extremely at low levels during the tenure of my predecessor despite very significant increase of finance and personnel resources. Very significantly, there is no evidence of authorised destruction of valueless records involving the responsible Minister despite a clear provision in the Archives Act. After 1974, the main reason for this obviously poor performance was that most of the resources were being misdirected to non-core programmes and activities---the non-archival activities highlighted by both Boisrouvray and Walford. In this connection, Mr. Ian Maclean, the UNESCO consultant had earlier in 1978 noted that:

*“It became very apparent as the preliminary survey progressed that, in most if not all ministries, the destruction of even routine and time-expired records had ceased, if indeed it had already started in independent Kenya”. 7*

To deal with this most unsatisfactory situation, Maclean had recommended that a Task Force to carry out a comprehensive records survey and appraisal accompanied by a full-scale disposal campaign be established under the aegis of the National Archives. However, he warned that *“If a serious campaign is not launched the present backlog would recur despite emergency Records Centre activity”* 8. Unfortunately, no serious action with regard to implementing the above recommendation was taken until after the re-organization in 1982. This was about four (4) years after Maclean’s report, and despite relative abundance of resources!! Evidence clearly indicates that it was only after the re-organization and the consequent re-engineering of the functions and activities of the National Archives that a comprehensive records surveys and appraisal programme was firmly put in place. As would be expected, this led to very significant improvements in a relatively short period. Let me give some few examples of these improvements:

- i. More resources were directed to the Records Management Division, and especially personnel. It was actually the biggest beneficiary of the re-organization. This resulted into greater efficiency and effectiveness particularly in the critical area of records surveys and appraisal.
- ii. For the **first time** since the Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service was established way back in 1965, organised and systematic disposal of valueless records of the Kenya Government was put in place.

Minister's approvals for destruction of valueless records became a regular activity in line with the requirements of Section 7 of the Archives Act Cap.19, while records with long value were received in the National Archives or in the Records Centres. At this point, I must point out that a Dr. Sareen and Mr. Michael Gachie had, in 1981, developed a ground breaking **Manual of Instructions for Management and Disposal of Records in the Ministries/Departments and Other Offices of the Republic of Kenya**. Dr Sareen was a consultant from the National Archives from India. This manual must have been very useful to our records management officers when we at last started carrying out systematic records surveys and appraisal. In other words, we had some useful guidelines on which to base some of our decisions during the appraisal activities.

- iii. In order to promote professional standards in carrying out records surveys and appraisal, I spearheaded the development and publication of a **Manual of Records Administration**. This publication provided very useful guidelines and helped to prevent officers from making decisions which were not in line with our Archives Act, or the agreed principles and practices.
- iv. To mitigate the severe shortage of storage space, strong efforts were made to open new Records Centres. The near non-functional Mombasa Records Centre was strengthened, while we acquired facilities to open new Records Centres in Nairobi, Nakuru, Kakamega and Kisumu. It is through these Records Centres that our records management programme has been sustained up to date. I have no doubt in my mind that this important initiative would have been very difficult, if not impossible, if the re-organization of the Department did not take place.
- v. In order to strengthen the state of records management in the entire public service, we developed a detailed proposal on the creation of a new cadre of Records Management Officers. The proposal was positively received in the parent Ministry. I later held detailed discussions with Madam Njoki Kahiga who was in-charge of Human Resource Development in the Ministry. Any necessary adjustments were made. The Principal Secretary then submitted the proposals to the Directorate of Personnel Management. Further discussions were held at the Directorate of Personnel Management and I remember attending at least some of the meetings. The proposals were accepted in principle because the need to implement my recommendations were obvious. **This then is how the idea to have Records Management Officers was REVIVED.** Evidence indicates that the idea was first proposed way back in 1956 through Archives Circular No.1 which was issued by the Office of the Chief Secretary. About ten (10) years later, the then Vice-President, Mr. A. Oginga Odinga issued Archives Circular No.2 titled Archives Regulations. It was dated 12<sup>th</sup> January 1965. In this very comprehensive circular, Mr. Odinga noted, among other things, that: *"To ensure efficient liaison between the Archives and Ministries and*

*Departments, and, in particular to facilitate the drawing up of Standing Instructions, Ministries and Departments are requested to appoint an officer of standing to be their Departmental Records Officer”.*

There is no evidence to show that the first and second Chief Archivists made any efforts to have the positions of Departmental Records Officers (currently called Records Management Officers) formally established in the civil service. They did not seize the excellent opportunity to follow up this matter even after the support from the very top, that is, the Chief Secretary during the colonial period, and the Vice-President soon after independence. The consequences of this omission continued to be felt for many years. I now feel privileged that I achieved yet another milestone which ultimately resulted into the creation of the present cadre of Records Management Officers. I only regret that it has taken a bit long to strengthen professional relationships between the administration of this cadre and the National Archives. I am afraid without this, Kenya may not get the full benefits of records management officers.

In order to continue improving the records management programme, I continued searching for opportunities to train our graduates on records and archives management, as well as in information science. It is noted that my predecessor had laid a strong foundation in this area, and all I needed to do was to continue the process. But I went beyond that. Through a UNESCO programme on archival networking, two external consultants Messrs. A. Droguet from France and K. Hall from United Kingdom were brought in to give further insights in this area. Significantly, they were funded by UNESCO through my lobbying. Their reports should, together with those of Maclean, Boisrouvray and Walford be available for those who wish to increase their knowledge on our National Archives. In addition, I organised a benchmarking trips for Mr. Michael Gachie and Mr. Ichagichu Mwangi to the National Archives of France; and Mr. Koo Ombati to the National Archives of South Africa. Earlier, I had also gone through a German Government funded one week study tour in the Federal Archives of German and a few State Archives. Later in early 1990s, I had the privilege of participating in a very fruitful benchmarking study tour organised by the International Records Management Trust in Malaysia; courtesy of Dr Anne Thurston. Obviously, these benchmarking tours brought in new knowledge into the National Archives, some of which were incorporated into our programmes. It is therefore clear that were managing the National Archives from a point of deep knowledge. This is the heritage I passed on to my successor when I retired.

### **3.2.2.2 Sought Top Level Government Support for Records Management.**

In most developing countries, a Director of National Archives has, of necessity, to consistently seek top level Government support, particularly from his/her immediate boss, the Principal Secretary in the Kenyan case. Woe unto him/her if this support is not forth coming. This is mainly so because the Director's programmes and activities involves dealing with more senior and powerful offices---the Principal Secretaries in ministries and Chief Executives of Parastatal Organizations. In some cases, a Director cannot have his/her way unless he/she has this support. My experience as Director of

a National Archives demonstrated again and again that provisions in the archives legislation is not enough especially in developing countries. Although the law may contain a provision whereby the Director can initiate court proceedings for institutions failing to obey his/her advice as provided in law, it is normally almost impossible to do so on his/her own. In practice, there are many professional issues in which a Director is forced to seek assistance from his/her Principal Secretary. In other words, a Director has to do his/her best to maintain good working relationship with the Principal Secretary. In most cases, I got the necessary support in my efforts to expand the frontiers of our professional capabilities. This is amply illustrated by the number of circulars issued by the Office of the President-----the centre of power in the entire public service. As soon as any of these circulars were issued, I used to try my very best to follow their implementation. The main circulars issued during my tenure are as follows:

- i. Circular Letter Ref. No. OP.1/48A/66 dated 28<sup>th</sup> November 1985 from the then Chief Secretary, Office of the President on “DESTRUCTION OF NON-CURRENT GOVERNMENT RECORDS”. It was addressed to the Attorney General, all Permanent Secretaries with sufficient copies to Heads of Department, and to all Chief Executives of Parastatals. In brief, the letter reminded public offices to ensure efficient disposal of non-current valueless records since their further retention resulted into wastage of public funds through uneconomical usage of office space and equipment. It is noted that no other major communication on the management of official Government records had been issued since the enactment of the Public Archives and Documentation Act 1965, a very long time of about twenty (20) years. It is further noted that I initiated the search for solution for this very important matter just five (5) years after I took over. Interestingly, most of this time I was serving in an acting capacity. In my view, the fact that my two predecessors did not have professional qualification in records and archives management may explain why they had not identified this critical problem. As explained elsewhere, consultant Ian Maclean was actually shocked by huge accumulation of non-current records when he arrived in Kenya in 1978.
- ii. Circular Letter Ref. No. 1/48A/11/10 dated 7<sup>th</sup> July 1989 from the Permanent Secretary/Secretary to the Cabinet and Head of Public Service. It was addressed to the Attorney General, all Permanent Secretaries with sufficient copies to Heads of Department, and all Chief Executives of Parastatal and Local Authorities. The topic of this letter was “DEPOSTING OF REPORTS AND OTHER GENERALLY CIRCULATED DOCUMENTS IN THE KENYA NATIONAL ARCHIVES”. The Office of the President played a critical role in initiating the issuance of this important communication after realising that some important documents and reports could not be easily traced just a few years after they had been issued (published). Some may have been completely lost. The importance attached to this matter is confirmed by the fact that almost immediately after the circular was issued, the Archives Act was amended to include the content of the circular letter in the legislation. On reflection, I am now convinced that the National Archives could have done much better to

publicise both its content and implementation. We tried our best on our own. But this was not enough. Many reports and documents in the Public Service have, of necessity, limited circulation while others may be classified. Without greater support from higher authorities, it was difficult to acquire some of these reports. There is no doubt that a higher authority was needed to force ministries, departments and agencies to fully comply with the requirement. I do not think we lobbied enough. I did not go back to the authority which had issued the circular letter and share the challenges we were facing. On reflection, I am sure we would have been listened. Yes, to some extent, I lost some opportunity to achieve better results.

- iii. Personnel General Letter No. 7 dated 29<sup>th</sup> August 1991 from the Directorate of Personnel Management, Office of the President on “DESTRUCTION OF PERSONNEL RECORDS”. It is noted that it is the National Archives who **first** initiated the idea and shared the proposal with the Directorate of Personnel Management (DPM) after which the circular letter was issued. It is further noted that the DPM later revised the circular letter in light of the experience gained. The most important thing I am trying to put across is that the Director of the National Archives should, day and night, be investigating ways and means of improving records and archives management in the public service. He should be sharing innovative ideas with the necessary authorities. This is how the National Archives can increase its visibility. But I am also aware that without real support from the parent Ministry, it can be frustrating.
- iv. Circular Letter Ref. No, OP. 39/2A dated 14<sup>th</sup> April 1999 from the Permanent Secretary/Secretary to the Cabinet and Head of the Public Service, Office of the President on “CASES OF MISSING AND LOST FILES AND DOCUMENTS IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE”. The Letter was addressed to All Permanent Secretaries, the Private Secretary/Controller of State House, the Solicitor General, the Clerk to the National Assembly, the Registrar of the High Court of Kenya, and the Secretary of the Public Service Commission. Note the enlarged list of addressees in view of the importance of the subject. Very regular media reports of missing and lost files in Government offices prompted me to take up this matter with my Principal Secretary out of my own initiative. I was given greenlight to develop a draft letter for the Principal Secretary’s signature. **By that time, as it is today, this Circular Letter noted that the above unsatisfactory situation was caused by laxity and poor records management, as well as corruption in public offices.** The addresses we requested to take the necessary action. Unfortunately, evidence after only a few months clearly indicated that not much was being done to implement the circular. As a result, I again personally lobbied for further necessary action by the Office of the President.
- v. Circular Letter Ref. No. OP. 39/2A dated 14<sup>th</sup> November 1999 from the Permanent Secretary/Secretary to the Cabinet and Head of the Public Service, Office of the President on “CASES OF MISSING AND LOST FILES AND DOCUMENTS IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE”. The Circular Letter was again addressed to all Permanent Secretaries, the Private Secretary/Controller of State House, the Solicitor General, the Clerk to the National Assembly, the

Registrar of the High Court of Kenya, and the Secretary of the Public Service Commission. As you will notice, this Letter was issued just about seven (7) months after the above one, and it was **yet again on the same subject**. Why? During those seven months, it appeared to me, probably because I was too eager to see the results that the earlier letter was not receiving necessary attention. Cases of missing and lost files were still regularly reported in the print media. In a strange twist of events, I got an extremely rare opportunity to personally meet the then Head of Public Service, Dr. R.E. Leakey. I shared with him the slow progress I had witnessed in implementing the earlier circular letter. Fortunately, he agreed to issue a follow up communication. In summary, the public were encouraged through the media to submit in writing formal complaints of missing or lost files and documents to the Director of the National Archives. I was then required to directly write to the head of the concerned institution and request them to explain what was being done with regard to the reported missing or lost file or document. This initiative worked quite well. In turn, the Director of the National Archives was required to submit to the Head of Public Service quarterly reports on this matter. The results were both fruitful and encouraging.

- vi. Letter Ref. No. OP. 40/1/1A dated 6<sup>th</sup> June 2003 from the Permanent Secretary/Secretary to the Cabinet and Head of the Public Service, Office of the President on “IMPROVEMENT OF RECORDS MANAGEMENT FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE”. It was addressed to the Attorney General, all Permanent Secretaries, the Controller and Auditor General, the Private Secretary/Controller of State House, the Secretary of Public Service Commission, the Clerk of the National Assembly, the Chairman of Electoral Commission, the Registrar of the High Court of Kenya, the Director General of the National Security Intelligence Service, and the Secretary of the Teacher Service Commission. As you will notice, the number of recipients was significantly expanded, probably because of the critical importance of the subject. I had personally seized the opportunity to have this communication issued after reading the Directorate of Personnel Management’s report on “A Strategy for Performance Improvement in the Public Service”. On reflection, I am happy that I dared to try to get this done at the highest level. Yes, this is an excellent example on seizing the opportunity as soon as you see it.
- vii. For some time, the National Archives had wanted to conduct records survey and appraisal at the Kenya Railways records. However, this had proved very difficult because we were not getting the necessary support from the Office of the Managing Director. First, the appraisal could not proceed because the non-current records were very dusty. Furthermore, it was suspected that they had some chemical residue after having being sprayed with some chemicals. In this connection, these non-current records had to be dusted and the environment prepared to enable the National Archives staff to carry out the appraisal. The Kenya Railways was not ready to carry out this preliminary tasks. I got a very rare opportunity to share this challenge with my former teacher at the University of Nairobi, the late Prof. William Ochieng. By that time, he was based at the State House. Prof. Ochieng immediately came to the assistance of his former

student and he got in touch with the Head of Public Service, by then Dr. R.E. Leakey. In turn, the Head of Public Service got in touch with the then Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Transport who in turn immediately got in touch with the Managing Director of Kenya Railways. From that point onward, things moved on fairly smoothly and the appraisal work was successfully executed.

Just before I retired, another Circular Later on “STREAMLINING THE PERFORMANCE OF REGISTRIES IN GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES, DEPARTMENTS, LOCAL AUTHORITIES, PROVINCES AND DISTRICTS” was initiated and issued by the Permanent Secretary/Director of Personnel Management, Office of the President. The National Archives was consulted on its content and we gave our input.

Most of us are aware of the biblical encouragement that “seek and ye shall find” and “knock and the door shall be opened for you”. Of course you do not always find what you want instantly. It may take some time, sometimes a long time. Similarly, the door may not be opened immediately. Again it may take some time, or a long time. The critical message here is that I was determined to **keep on seeking and knocking** in places of authority in my desire to expand the frontiers of professional capability of the National Archives. Yes, I was committed to keep on seeking and knocking until I retired on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004.

### **3.2.2.2.3 Improvements in Archives Administration.**

One of the most important achievements of my predecessor, Dr. Maina Kagombe, was the acquisition and renovation of the building which is today the headquarters of the National Archives. It was formerly the headquarters of the Kenya Commercial Bank. This gave me an opportunity to put into practice some of my professional ideas which I had accumulated over time. It is noted that before this time, the archival documents were kept in the basement of Jogoo House “A”. The basement did not have adequate ventilation and lighting. Our new home was therefore a very major improvement.

I had been the head of the Archives Administration Division by the time I was appointed to act as head of the National Archives. This was probably the most important Division in the Department which was in-charge of the custody of our archival holdings as well as search-room services. I was very regularly in touch with the Chief Archivist. In this regard, I was already very familiar with the challenges and opportunities in general in the National Archives, and in the Archives Administration Division in particular. It was not therefore difficulty for me to significantly improve professional activities in this Division. Let me highlight a few examples of the improvements I had made by the time I retired in June 2004:

- i. If I were to be asked to indicate just one of my most enduring contribution I made in the National Archives, I would quickly mention the liberalization of access to the archives. By the time I joined the Department in April 1975, researcher wishing to inspect our archives had FIRST to get approval from the Office of the President. I together with other 3.1.1 History students from the University of Nairobi went

through this route in very early 1970's. The Head of the History Department had to apply on our behalf. After getting the necessary approval, we then proceeded to the National Archives where we also got clearance but this time it was just as a formality because we had already obtained the necessary authority from the Office of the President. As a Head of Department, I had noticed that Section 6 of the Public Archives and Documentation Service Act Cap. 19 clearly places that authority on the Director. In line with the law, I revised Search Room Rules in which I made it clear that nobody needed to pass through any other office to inspect public records which had attained the access requirements. Very significantly, I did not consult anyone. However, we made sure that the law was strictly applied. This was very helpful to both Kenyan and external researchers. **The big question is: why did my two predecessor not just follow the law?** Did researchers have to wait for about fifteen (15) year to enjoy what the law already provided? This is yet another example of the many dangers of having a non-professional heading a professional department.

- ii. The National Archives operates a closed access policy, a best practice worldwide. This means that researchers identify files, documents or publications they wish to read from the finding aids (indexes), after which they make a request. This is also a normal procedure in other national archives. The problem was that researchers very often used to experience delays from the time they make the requests/orders and the time they actually got what they had requested. After conducting several simulation exercises, we determined that whether the requested files, documents or publications were kept in the basement, ground floor, or first floor, it should not take more than fifteen (15) minutes before the researcher got them. The exact time a request was made and the exact time the request was fully executed were recorded. In addition to this, researchers were expected to make the next request immediately after receiving the materials they had requested. A weekly review was carried out to assess implementation of this new policy. The results were very impressive. It is noted that there were serious consequences for any officer who failed to deliver materials in line with the new policy.
- iii. Quick access to archival holdings depends mainly on the quality of the finding aids, which should normally include a General Guide. This tool gives an overview of what a National Archives contains. The General Guide may be in soft copy, and it should be revised from time to time to include new acquisitions. For the first time since the National Archives was established by an Act of Parliament in 1965, a Guide to the Contents of the National Archives was published not long after I took over the management of the Department. In addition, a few other subject-based finding aids were also made. These initiatives greatly improved access to the archives and publications in our custody even before computerization. It is noted that only very simple lists of records

had been available. The above general guide and other subject based guides facilitated greater access to the holdings of the National Archives.

- iv. In early 1990's, the National Archives started to computerise the finding aids in order to facilitate quick access to our holdings. In order to promote fast data entry, most of the staff were taken through short training course on typing at the National Youth Service. At that time, we were among the few Government departments to computerise their services. The Department even secured internet connectivity so that potential external researchers could get familiar on what materials the National Archives was having. By that time, this was a bold step. I was particularly pleased when my Principal Secretary gave the initiative the necessary support. **Just to demonstrate where the Country was at that time, the National Archives had to obtain Cabinet approval to install internet connection!!** Today, a Mama Bonga in Busia can enjoy internet connectivity any time she desires.
- v. Not everything went smoothly concerning providing access to archival materials. At one time, we had to face a special challenge with regard to a request of some files which were well over thirty (30) years. In very late 1980s, Mr. Andrew Morton was doing research for the book "MOI THE MAKING OF AN AFRICAN STATEMAN". Naturally, he wished to have access to files on the former President which were in our custody. And so he visited the National Archives accompanied by Mr. Lee Njiru from State House. After reviewing the matter carefully, I came to the conclusion that it was not proper at the time to make the personal files of the former Kenyan President accessible to Mr. Morton. Of course this was a challenge to me, taking into account where the request was coming from. I advised my Principal Secretary against this request and I was quite pleased that my advice was accepted. Mr. Njiru was informed accordingly. He was actually very surprised that a request from State House could be turned down. He later send his assistant, Mr. Andrew Limo to come and plead for a change in our decision. It is noted that Mr. Limo was known to me at a personal level. Again I declined and explained to Mr. Limo in detail the reasons from professional point of view. Limo was satisfied. However, we supplied Mr. Morton with some very relevant and useful extracts from one of the files. Those interested on the content of extracts may wish to see page 66 of the above book.
- vi. For the FIRST time, a Scheme of Service for Archivists in the Civil Service of Kenya was developed and formally issued by the Directorate of Personnel Management. Before the issuance of this important document, Archivists did not have a clear career path. The requirements for appointments and promotions were blurred and could easily be manipulated to suit a particular candidate. As a result, Archivists were tempted to move to greener pastures where career paths were much clearer and chances for promotions better. We were

therefore losing critically important professional capacity. It was my determination to deal with this challenge that pushed me to initiate the process of developing a Scheme of Service for the Archivists.

There were a number of challenges faced by the Archives Administration Division for which no solution was in sight by the time I retired. Financial allocations were generally very inadequate throughout my tenure at the National Archives. As a result, procurement of essential equipment and maintenance suffered a lot. However, I must add that this was not peculiar to Kenya alone. National Archives in most developing countries in Africa were facing similar situations mainly due to low value attached to these institutions. The pain of this inadequacy was slightly reduced by strict financial management. During my time, there was hardly any serious audit queries.

The National Archives was basically full as early as 1980's. This was a really serious challenge for a National Archives throughout my tenure in the Department. Some limited relief was achieved when I successfully dealt with disposal of some court records which, in my view, had just been dumped in the Department in 1960's and early 1970's. In addition to this, the opening of Records Centres as explained elsewhere also provided some relief. However, none of these initiatives provided good solution to the problem. I had no choice but to hand-over the same challenge to my successor, Mr. Ichagichu Mwangi.

#### **4. INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS UPTO JUNE 2004.**

As I continued to work at the National Archives, I got opportunities to serve the international community in the areas of records and archives management, and to a lesser extent library and information science. Below I highlight the main international assignments in which I played key roles or was actively involved:

- **Treasurer** of the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) 1980 to 1984. The National Archives had hosted a very successful conference of this organization here in Nairobi in 1980. I had played a key role in organising the event. This most likely explains why I was identified. My boss, Dr. Kagombe is the one who recommended me for this position. It is noted that I had been in the service for about five (5) years only when I got this international assignment. Without appearing to praise myself, I executed this assignment with great distinction.
- **Secretary General**, ESARBICA, 1986 to 1991; and 1999 to 2001. During my service as the Secretary General of this organization, I was exposed to the state of records and archives management in the entire region, and also developed very useful linkages with directors of the archival institutions.
- **Chairman** of Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers (ACARM) 1993 to 1996.
- **Secretary**, Joint Committee on Preservation and Conservation of Library and Archival Materials in Africa, 1993 to early 2000's. As the name indicates, this was a joint committee of the powerful International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the less powerful International Council

on Archives (ICA). I was appointed to serve in this position after successfully hosting a major conference on preservation of library and archival materials in Africa in Nairobi. See also paragraph 7.2 (iii) below. As a key person in this IFLA/ICA Committee, I participated in many professional conferences and seminars in Africa, Asia, China, Europe, and South America. All this provided me with additional knowledge.

- **Member**, International Advisory Committee of UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme during the period 1999 to 2002. Members to this Committee were appointed on the basis of personal capacity, not just because they are directors or head of institutions.
- **Member**, Committee for the then International Microfilming Programme for Developing Countries, 1989 to 1992. This was a specialist Committee of the International Council on Archives (ICA) whose mandate was help former colonies to get back their records which had been transferred to the former colonial powers such as United Kingdom and France before their respective independence. The retrieval was to be in form of microfilm/ microform. I had been identified by ICA as a person who was quite knowledgeable in this area. It were as if fate was ultimately paying me for having been badly short-changed way back in July 1977.
- **Member**. In November 1992, I was appointed to serve in a four (4) member specialist Committee whose mandate was to evaluate the impact and usefulness of detailed studies (publications) developed with the support of UNESCO's Records and Archives Management Programme (RAMP). UNESCO was at this time supporting availability and access to relevant literature on records and archives management. There was serious scarcity of these materials in most developing countries, including Kenya. A good number of these detailed studies (publications) had been published and distributed to developing countries and there was need to evaluate their usefulness. I was therefore very privileged to be part of this small evaluation team.

In the course of executing my international responsibilities, I travelled to very many countries. As would be expected, I also visited national archives in the countries I visited. This greatly increased my knowledge and competence in records and archives management. There is no doubt that this knowledge influenced my vision and mission in the National Archives, and therefore positively contributed to my achievements and those of the National Archives.

## 5. THE MURUMBI COLLECTION

Without getting into details, let me just start by acknowledging that the National Archives had the privilege of acquiring the collection formerly owned by Mr. Joseph Murumbi, the former Vice-President of Kenya. The National Museums and some other institutions outside Kenya had also shown active interest in getting this collection of records, books and material culture. Initially, the collection was to be maintained in the same premise in Muthaiga. A study Centre for African History and Culture was to be

developed there. However, by the time I took over, it had been noticed that the building was already leaking. The collection was therefore at risk of being damaged. As a result, a decision was made that it should be transferred to the National Archives immediately where it occupied the space which had been specifically preserved for a National Art Gallery. The development and operationalization of a National Art Gallery was one of the non-archival activities which had attracted extra-ordinary attention from my predecessor. Artists were therefore up in arms as soon as they realised that the space originally reserved for the Gallery was now to be used for the preservation of the Murumbi Collection. This caused a big outcry by art enthusiasts who waged an aggressive press war with me. This was quite stressful and painful to the youthful Head of the Department. Yet worse was to happen. As I have indicated elsewhere, I later came to learn that the plot in which the Murumbi Collection had been housed was grabbed by powerful persons.

Mr. Joseph Murumbi did not sell everything to the National Archives. He retained some items which probably he and his wife felt attached to them. This is quite normal. It was later found out that these materials which had been retained by the Murumbi's were acquired by the National Museums. What this means is that the custody of the Murumbi Collection has been split between the National Archives and the National Museums. I do not think that this was the best arrangement. It is noted that the main collection is with the Archives.

Some years later, I got a surprise letter from the parent Ministry informing me that the Minister had directed that the Murumbi Collection should be handed over immediately to the National Museums. It is then I realised that the Museums had never stopped wanting to get this collection. Ideally, what the National Museums should have done, or anyone else for that matter, is to share any ideas on how they thought the management of the collection could be improved if they were not satisfied with the situation. And after all, both Mr. Murumbi and his wife were both members of the Archives Advisory Council and I can confirm that they had not raised any concerns on this matter in any of the Council meetings. Furthermore, in his clearly senior position in the society, Mr. Murumbi could have raised the issue directly with the Minister if he felt the collection was being poorly managed. It is also noted that the National Museums and National Archives are sister departments which are often located in the same Ministry; and that both of them are engaged in the preservation of, and access to the national heritage of Kenya. Fortunately, a full Archives Council Meeting was to be held that same week. I placed the matter before the Council and it was decided to advise the Minister against his directive. It is noted that the Chairman of the Council at that time was the late Joseph Murumbi. That same day we drafted a letter for the Chairman's signature and the letter was immediately hand delivered. The Minister receded his directive and the Murumbi Collection is today at the Archives.

## 6. GENERAL ADMINISTRATION.

### 6.1 General Administrative Issues.

Way back in 1950's in the United States of America, as was indeed in many other countries, the value of national archival institutions was not well appreciated. In this regard, T.R. Schellenberg has informed us that if the average man in the U.S.A was, at that time, explained the purposes of archival institutions, he **“would probably dismiss the matter with the comment that the whole thing is just another example of governmental extravagance”** 8. Schellenberg went on to inform us that if the same average man was then explained the reasons why money was spent in preserving archives, his question was likely to have been: **“Why not burn the stuff?”** 9 This clearly negative perception gradually improved in developed as well as in many developing countries. Unfortunately, the same negative perception would appear to have persisted for many years in Kenya even among senior Government officials. By the middle of 1960s, the then expatriate Chief Archivist, Mr. Derek Charman, requested for very modest funding for the embryonic National Archives. This was very much justified because the National Archives was hardly functional as a result of extreme shortage of finance and personnel resources. Despite that unsatisfactory situation, the Treasury was categorical that Mr. Charman was not in order to expect additional funding for archival programmes. In this connection, the Treasury felt that Charman:

*“---appears to be under a slight misapprehension as was to be the purpose of his secondment to this Country. There was no intention on the part of the Kenya Government to set up a more sophisticated archives organization than already existed”* 10.

The above statement from the Treasury is clear and unequivocal. And yet the National Archives was barely functional. The statement confirmed the relatively low priority given to the National Archives at that particular time. Equally significant, the statement explains, to a large extent, the severe under-funding of the Department by that time, and also many years after. Any person in doubt with regard to this observation may wish to compare resources and facilities provided to the Kenya National Library Services and those given to the National Archives over the years. I may be mistaken, but I fail to understand the relatively higher priority given to the construction of Stadia, already constructed or planned. Compare this with the failure to provide plot and funds for the construction of just one purpose designed archives building. Let me look at this issue from another angle. For many years, Kenya was very rightly concerned about our records which were transferred to the United Kingdom before independence while at the same time not giving adequate attention to the preservation of archival records of independent Kenya. This has been a great contradiction. A purpose-designed archives building was actually urgently needed by late 1970's if Kenya was to satisfactorily preserve its national memory. We will have nowhere else to go for replacement if part of the national memory created after independence is lost or destroyed through poor storage facilities.

When I took over the management of the National Archives in May 1981, one of the really major challenge I had to deal with was the very limited financial allocations in relation to our very wide mandate as specifically outlined in the Public Archives and Documentation Service Act Chapter 19. At the same time, I was aware of the high expectations particularly after the recommendations of the two consultants detailed above. In this connection, **I personally ensured that the limited funding we got from the Treasury was well spend in promoting records and archives programmes.** I still recall several cases in which I was personally ridiculed for being a very poor Director while I was sitting on money!!. Yes, they said I was an excellent example of “MAZILA LALA”. It was for this reason that I was really excited when Madam Bernadette W. Musundi, the Principal Secretary in my parent Ministry made the following observation in my Annual Appraisal Report for 2001:

*“Mr. Musembi is an extremely hardworking and reliable Head of Department who is committed to his duties and responsibilities. He runs the Department professionally and is very supportive to other departments and public offices. -  
-----He upholds virtues of transparency, accountability & he is a good resource manager”*

Still on general administration, I was determined to put to an end poor attention to duty, as well as malingering. Everybody was expected to be punctual for duty and to satisfactorily perform his/her duties. I paid personal attention to this matter. Those who failed to perform their duties to the required standard or were not disciplined were dealt with. A few had their services terminated. However, this was not a walk in the park. There was a price for me to pay as I pursued this approach. Let me give just two examples. The first price I had to pay was an anonymous letter addressed to the Principal Secretary and copied to me. It contained a number of allegations. While the letter acknowledged my professionalism, it accused me of being a poor manager. The authors of the letter were of course protesting the stringent measures I had introduced when I took over the management of the Department. Nobody in the Ministry asked me to respond to the accusations. Of course the letter stressed me but I was determined to continue with my mission.

The second price I had to pay was yet another anonymous letter which was addressed to the Principal Secretary but not copied to me. The complaint was that I was biased in selectively recommending some officers for training on records management at the then Kenya Polytechnic. The authors were clearly malicious and they knew they were accusing the wrong person. This is because the person who had handled the issue was my Deputy Director, Mr. L.I. Mwangi. It is also noted that I was away in Senegal on official duty when the Kenya Polytechnic invited interested persons to apply for this particular course. One day when I went to consult with the Principal Secretary, he gave me the letter to read and ask me to respond. I explained the matter to his satisfaction. This is a confirmation that it would be unusual to miss one or two malicious characters in an organization. All along, I was convinced that if I was firm and fair, I would survive any accusations.

## 6.2 Improvements Noted by Outside Countries and Institutions.

As we continued to expand and demonstrate our professional capabilities, this was noted by our colleagues in the region and beyond. The Biennial Conferences of the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) provided an excellent platform in which to share the outcomes of our efforts. We also regularly shared our experiences with Directors of National Archives during the Executive Board Meetings of ESARBICA. There were things some of the other National Archives in the region could learn on the steps we had taken to improve our services. The following are some of the examples in which the National Archives was helpful to the international community:

- i. The Director of the National Archives of Tanzania carried out a one week benchmarking tour in our National Archives to study how we had managed to upgrade our records and archives services in a relatively short time; and significantly, with the same finance and personnel resources.
- ii. Two senior Records Management Officers/Archivists from Uganda were similarly sent to our National Archives to gain knowledge on how we were implementing our programmes and activities. The benchmarking exercise took almost a week.
- iii. In June 1993, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the International Council on Archives (ICA) held a land mark Conference on Preservation of Library and Archival Materials in Africa. It brought together Directors of National Libraries as well as Directors of National Archives from the whole of Africa, mainly from English and French-speaking countries. The National Archives was selected to host the Conference and I was selected as the Chairperson of the Organising Committee. We had been identified as the most suitable host mainly because of my confirmed transparency and accountability. AND I DID NOT LET DOWN THE TWO INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS. I personally managed about two (2) million shillings which had been placed under my charge to meet the cost of air tickets and accommodation etc. This was a lot of money at that time. I had been trusted to be the only signatory to the account. Look at that trust!! At the end of the Conference, I fully accounted for every cent given to me. This is the transparency and accountability noted by the Principal Secretary, Madam Musundi, in paragraph 6.1 above.
- iv. When in March 1996, the Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers (ACARM) wanted to organise a top level Seminar on records management for Principal Secretaries from English-speaking Commonwealth African Countries, it chose Kenya (National Archives) to host the event. ACARM) could have chosen any of the other African Commonwealth country. It is noted that by this time, we had achieved a certain level of competence which made us the most suitable host. Let me also add that the transparency and accountability noted by Principal

Secretary Bernandette Musundi on my part was certainly an important consideration in choosing the venue/host.

### **6.3 The Management Team.**

Immediately after the reorganization of the programmes and activities of the National Archives, I constituted a management team. They were mainly Heads of Divisions. What is perhaps more significant for me to point out is that most of them had already obtained post graduate training in records and archives management, or library and information science. And they were young and energetic. Just to indicate their latent potential at that time, three (3) of them were later to become professors in records and archives management in universities in Kenya and Botswana. Another two were seconded to the National Archives of Botswana as experts in records and archives management; while three others became lecturers on records and archives management in Kenyan universities. Equally significant, the Eastern and Southern Africa Management Institute (ESAMI) used to secure consultants from the National Archives whenever they organised their regular courses on records management for civil servants from the entire region, including South Africa and Namibia. I can also state without fear of contradiction that most of the other team members had similar professional capability. As some of the team members left National Archives for greener pastures elsewhere, other equally competent officers joined the mighty team.

My achievements as Director is directly linked to the support provided by this team, and particularly the Senior Deputy Director, Mr. Ichangichu Mwangi. He served the Department with great distinction. This enabled me to normally take my thirty (30) days leave for rest and recuperation at the end of every year and clear from the Office for close to two months. Very significantly, we have remained very close to date. I seized the opportunity provided by that relationship to fully expose Mr. Mwangi to ESARBICA and ICA affairs. He became visible in these international institutions in his own right. Mr. Mwangi and the management team can rightly claim part of my successes, and even part of the achievement awards bestowed on me. However, we are all familiar with the saying: that SOLDIERS FIGHT AND WIN THE BATTLE, BUT THE GENERAL GETS THE HOUR. Yes, the management team worked very hard, but I got the honours. This is exactly what happened. But I must accept responsibility for any failures up to June 2004.

Human resources have to be managed to achieve the desired goals. An institution can have the necessary human resources but miserably fail to deliver its mandate. That is why I have to insist that the management team had to be effectively managed to achieve the successes outlined above. Yes, the boss must provide the correct direction. Without proper direction by a professionally competent director, there may be little to show. To emphasise this point, it is noted that most members of the management team during my tenure were there from middle 1970s to 1982 and yet very limited professional programmes and activities on records and archives management had been successfully executed. This also explains why I **TOTALLY** do not agree with one of the recommendations of the Building Bridges Initiative Report

(BBI) when it recommended that specialists in other disciplines be considered for appointment to manage the National Archives. Paragraph 32.B of the Report partly recommends that *“The institution should be led by an established and highly regarded scholar of African history or a world-class expert on library science or curating-----”*. Either the authors of the Report were not aware of the now well-developed profession of records and management or they just had a very dim view of archivists and records managers. But we can also ask: Where were the records managers, archivists and the academics in our profession when citizens were asked to comment on the Draft Report? Tuchangamke jameni!! Otherwise I have no quarrel with the other recommendations concerning the expansion of the National Archives mission which are generally aimed at increasing access and utility of Kenya’s archival heritage.

I wish to single out one member of staff for special mention and appreciation, and that is Dr. Anne Thurston. During my early years as Head of Department, Anne was working with us and provided extremely useful support to me. She honestly used to share her vision of a well organised and efficient National Archives which is also capable of offering first class Search Room services. She actually continued to provide this very useful support throughout my stay at the Archives even when she relocated from Kenya to United Kingdom. This also explains how I got involved in a number of IRMT’s programmes and activities; as well as those of Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers (ACARM). It was a very rewarding relationship. She was later to become the Executive Director of the International Records Management Trust (IRMT).

As the National Archives became more and more visible professionally, its Director was given a number of recognitions. I donate part of my recognitions to the entire staff of the National Archives who were in Office during my tenure. Let me highlight just a few of these recognitions:

- ✓ The first significant recognition came from the Kenya Government. On 12th December 1994, I was awarded the Head of State Commendation [HSC] by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Kenya for my outstanding contribution in the development of records and archives management in Kenya. Of course the recommendations must have come from the Principal Secretary in the parent Ministry who must have noted the improvements despite the inadequate resources allocated to the institution.
- ✓ On 25<sup>th</sup> July 2003, I was given a Certificate of Grateful Appreciation by the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives for my *“years of dedicated services to the development of Archives in Africa”* and for my *“years of unstinting service”* to the organization.
- ✓ In August 2004, I was made an Honorary Member of the International Council on Archives (ICA) for my distinguished service to the records and archives management profession; not just in Kenya but also internationally. This was the first time such

a recognition and honour was given to a Records Management Specialist/Archivist in East and Central Africa since the organization was founded in 1948.

- ✓ On 26<sup>th</sup> November 2015, I was given a Certificate of Recognition by the Kenya Library Association for my “*contribution to the Library and Information profession in Kenya*”. The achievement was indicated as “*First Professional to receive Presidential Honour—Silver Star*” This recognition was awarded long after my retirement, and luckily, when I could still enjoy the recognition!!.
- ✓ In November 2019, the Kenya Association of Records Managers and Archivists presented me with “***Lifetime Achievement Award with Great Recognition and Appreciation for Your Many Years of Dedicated and Invaluable Service to the Records and Archives Management in Kenya***”.
- ✓ In 2020, I was awarded a **National Hero** medal during the Mashujaa Day. I am very grateful to Mr. Francis Mwangi, the Director of the National Archives for forwarding my name for consideration for this worthy award.

## 7. AREAS I DID NOT SUCCEED.

I was the Head of the National Archives for a long time. It is obvious that I must have experienced some failures during that period. Some of these failures were instigated by very powerful persons, while others were certainly beyond the authority and influence of the Director of the National Archives. Let me list a few of these failures:

- i. **Loss of Plot.** My predecessor, Dr. Kagombe had successfully acquired a very suitable and adequate plot for the construction of a purpose- designed National Archives Building in late 1970s. It was next to the Kenya National Library Services. The two institutions provide complementary services. Very unfortunately, this plot was grabbed by powerful persons. Any efforts on my part to prevent the grabbing fell on deaf ears. Similarly, efforts by the Principal Secretary in the parent Ministry did not succeed. I still remember one day in which both of us went to see the Commissioner of Lands. We did not get anywhere. This will for ever remain one of the greatest losses to the National Archives, more so because the Treasury cannot start allocating money for the construction of a purpose-designed building unless the site has already been secured.
- ii. **Loss of funding for an Archives Building.** After Dr. Kagombe acquired the plot above, he also successfully lobbied for funding for construction of a purpose-designed archives building. A small preliminary budget was reflected in the Department’s budget. At the same time, the Ministry of Works was detailed to start preparing detailed design drawings for the building. In order to ensure that Kenya got a suitable building with appropriate storage and preservation conditions, a small team of Architects and Engineers was sent to some European countries to study the standards of archival buildings. A detailed report was compiled and a copy sent to the National Archives.

Unfortunately, allocations for this project was stopped, probably after knowing that the plot allocated for this purpose had been grabbed. All efforts to lobby for continued financial support for the project did not succeed. National Archives will for ever remember this loss. And with this loss, efforts by the National Archives to effectively preserve the National Memory was very seriously undermined. In fact, throughout my tenure at the National Archives, inadequate storage space and other facilities constituted my biggest challenge. Kenya could have easily rivalled Malaysia if I had what I saw in that Country when I, together with others, underwent a study tour there in early 1990s.

- iii. **Murumbi Property.** For details see the Murumbi Collection paragraph 5. This property was alleged to have been grabbed by powerful persons.

There must have been other less significant failures both at professional and administrative levels. There must also be some other areas in which I could have done much better, for example, publicising the functions and activities of the National Archives. I take full responsibility. But these cases clearly fade away when compared to successes outlined above. Hama najipigia kifua?

## **8. PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENTS AFTER RETIREMENT: JUNE 2004 TO 2018.**

I successfully executed consultancy services in Kenya, Tanzania, South Sudan, Federal Government of Somalia and Somaliland after I retired. The assignment in South Sudan was relatively long, starting from late 2008 to 2016 but with a break of about one year and a half. If I get time, I might share my challenges and opportunities as I executed the assignments in these countries.

## **9. CONCLUSION.**

In the well-known publication titled “Things Fall Apart” by Chinua Achebe, a story is told of a lizard (or is it a gecko) which jumped down from a tall tree. But there was a problem. Nobody seemed to have noticed its achievement. It is at that moment that this small creature decided to appreciate itself. It then announced that even if nobody had noticed (appreciated) its achievement, it had really done a great thing, that is, successfully jumping from a very tall tree. Unlike this small creature, I appreciate the fact that my achievements have been noted nationally and internationally, not once, not twice but more. But the achievements were not without challenges and opportunities. Yes, and there were also failures. I am pleased to have got time to share my experiences on how I confronted the challenges while at the same time seizing opportunities to expand professional frontiers of the National Archives up to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004 when I retired.

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1. Albert H. Leisinger, Report of the Feasibility of Establishing a Reprographic, Conservation and Demonstration Centre in Nairobi, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1977, p 8.

2. Ian Maclean, Kenya: Development of Information Infrastructure, Records Management, Records Management, UNESCO, Paris, 1978, p 4.

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3. Xavier de Boisrouvray, Development of the Kenya National Archives, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1981, p 15.
  4. John Walford, Kenya: Participation in the Activities of Member States in the Field of Information, Review of the Kenya National Archives, UNESCO, Paris, 1882, p 1.
  5. Ibid, p 21.
  6. For more information, see report by Peter C. Mazikana titled "UNESCO/ICA Survey of the Archival Situation in Africa, March 1992.