



BROADCAST MEDIA AFRICA

Expert Panel Webinar | 9 June 2026

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Identifying, Safeguarding And Managing Risks To Sound And Audio-Visual Archives And Collections

Africa is not simply losing media — it is losing pieces of its collective memory and cultural identity.

CRITICAL RISKS FACING AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVES



PHYSICAL RISKS

- Media degradation on aging carriers
- 2-inch & 1-inch B formats: near zero playback equipment
- Visual record of African independence at risk

DIGITAL RISKS

- File corruption & weak backup strategies
- Poor metadata leaves collections invisible
- Digital format obsolescence post-digitization

INSTITUTIONAL RISKS

- Limited funding & skills shortage
- Absence of preservation policies
- Single-site storage (Sudan case study)

Key Insight: Up to 10% of African broadcast archives may be permanently unrecoverable — a direct result of format obsolescence and delayed action.

CLIMATE, ENVIRONMENT & PRESERVATION



Africa's environmental diversity demands location-specific strategies — there is no single answer.

Sudan

Rel. Humidity

0–25%

Baking Needed

Not needed

*Dust & flood mud
are key risks*

Kuwait (GCC)

Rel. Humidity

0–10%

Baking Needed

Not needed

*Dust only;
huge project underway*

Abu Dhabi

Rel. Humidity

~60–80%

Baking Needed

40% of tapes

*Humidity requires
baking treatment*

Guinea-Bissau

Rel. Humidity

High

Baking Needed

Near total

*Archives found in
near-total hydrolysis*

Critical Point: Current climate conditions are only part of the picture. The historical exposure of tapes over 50–70 years often poses a greater risk than today's marginal environmental changes.



Principle: "Start with the good apples" — prioritize formats that can still be digitized today, before equipment disappears entirely.

● Low-Cost Tape Baking

Fruit-drying ovens (~€300) replace €6,000–10,000 specialist equipment. Treats hydrolysis at 50–56°C, up to 20 tapes at once.

● On-Site Tape Cleaning

Simple adaptor kits for existing Studer/studio machines clean dust-contaminated tapes without expensive dedicated cleaners.

● Modular Digitization Workbench

Rack-mounted, palletised, operational in 1 day. Viable for 5,000+ carriers. Ships anywhere globally with software and guidance included.

FORMAT RISK LEVELS

2-inch open-reel video

CRITICAL

1-inch Type B video

CRITICAL

Sony Betacam / U-matic

HIGH

1-inch Type C video

MODERATE

Quarter-inch audio

MODERATE

Audio cassette / CD

LOW

Film (16mm / 35mm)

LOW

COLLABORATION & THE PATH FORWARD



Collaboration is not a luxury — it is a prerequisite for affordable, effective preservation at scale.

New Zealand Model

National Collections Together

Three national institutions pooled collections for joint digitization — increasing volume, reducing unit cost, and sharing technical knowledge. Applicable across Africa.

Malawi Model

Multi-Partner Capacity Building

National Archives of Malawi: assessment from SA expert, training from partners, equipment & funding from Ray Foundation (NZ). Agile, networked collaboration from a standing start.

South-South

Africa-to-Africa Partnerships

Share equipment, expertise and infrastructure between African institutions. Includes repatriation of materials held across borders. Engage Fiat IFTA and IASA for international networks.

THREE ACTIONS TO START NOW

- 1 Begin a collection assessment — today, with a spreadsheet.
- 2 Implement 3-2-1 backup — including an out-of-country copy.
- 3 Connect with Fiat IFTA, IASA, and regional peer institutions.