### 5.6 Handling

It is now recognised that poor handling of books and records by staff and users in archives is one of the greatest threats to their well-being. Every time a book or document is taken out of storage, manipulated by hand, exposed to light or to a different environment, some damage occurs to it. On the other hand, archive collections are preserved in order to be used. A proper policy on handling, by both staff and users, is necessary (MacKenzie, 1996).

In western librarianship rare and valuable books are treated with special care. These rare books and manuscripts are often housed in Special Collections and different standards for ethical conduct are even developed for such books (American Library Association, 1993), (see also Datta, 1969). This is not so in most non-western countries. In many libraries every book is rare and valuable. It has been purchased with financial resources that are scarce and diminishing in value and amount. Usually it has been imported from abroad, taking a number of months to arrive. If it wears out, there are no funds to replace it. There are no funds to buy materials to repair it. There is little to repair it with. There is little expertise to repair it. Each book is being used more, as the rate of acquisition slows down, because of the lack of money. Users have not grown up with books and their living conditions do not make it easy for them to care for the books they borrow. The librarian’s chief concern is to keep every book in circulation for as long as possible and at no extra cost to the library. Conservation spending must not be put before money spent on staff. In such a situation, the care and attention paid to the handling of books brings dividends in slowing down the inevitable damage caused by wear and tear. It was this experience at the University of Juba that gave Diana Rosenberg the conviction that everyday care of library books should be given special emphasis in any preservation measure taken by an African library (Rosenberg, 1995).

This realistic account certainly brings conservation in developing countries into perspective and justly stresses the importance of proper handling of library and archival materials. Every day care, Diana Rosenberg continues, is one aspect of preservation and encompasses all measures that are taken to improve the physical handling that takes place each and every day as books circulate amongst the library users. It involves both actors (library staff and users) and activities (cleaning, shelving, use, photocopying and minor repairs). Diana Rosenberg ends her interesting lecture with some guidelines and checklists that might provide a base for any library deciding to review its every day book care measures. Proper handling techniques do not demand a high-tech approach, nor do they pose a threat to people or the environment. Every day care does require discipline on a continuing basis (Bellardo, 1995; Dartnall, 1988).

Next to handling, proper display is highly important for safeguarding artefacts. Again, the fluctuations in temperature and relative humidity are crucial. High altitude Quito, Ecuador has a near perfect climate; dry and cool, with a low atmospheric pressure. Such conditions are wonderful for preserving books and manuscripts. Here, apart from some problems with insects, masses of documents collected by religious orders and the Spanish colonial administration remained in good condition for centuries. In recent times, however, inappropriate display in modern gallery and library buildings elsewhere has caused rapid disintegration of some of these collections (Giese, 1995).

For general information on handling see Agebunde, 1984; Forde, 1991; Tlalanyane, 1989.