

Chapter 14

Management of Records and Archives in Uganda's Public Sector

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the role of the archives legislation, the national archives, and the records and archives management (RAM) training institutions in nurturing public records and archives management in Uganda's public sector (UPS). Specific areas addressed include the legal framework and regulations related to recordkeeping, the role of the Uganda National Archives (UNA) and RAM education and training institutions that train records and archives managers in the delivery of their services. It also reports findings of a study that investigated issues, controversies, and constraints bearing on the management of public sector records and archives in government of Uganda ministries.

INTRODUCTION

Records and archives in the public sector refer to the information sent or received in connection with the transactions made by government agencies or any other agency wholly or partially supported by public funds (Government of British Columbia, 2015). In this chapter, the public sector refers to the 23 ministries of the Government of Uganda (GoU) which form part of the Ugandan public sector. The increased importance of transparency and accountability in public administration has led to a focus on the need to manage records and archives so that information can easily be accessed by the creating agencies. Sound records and archives management delivers transparency within governments and enables the effective delivery of public services (Meijer, 2001). Government agencies, therefore, need to be able to efficiently manage their records and archives to ensure business continuity in their operations and sound decision-making (Meijer, 2003). Consequently, public records and archives must be accurate and complete, with appropriate access and effective maintenance measures (Okello-Obura, 2011). The legislation, national archives and RAM training institutions are, therefore, a cornerstone in nurturing proper public records and archives services.

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In an effort to improve the management of public records and archives, the GoU undertook a number of restructuring initiatives, such as recruiting records staff and re-equipping registries (Ministry of Public Service [MoPS], 1998). The GoU also recognised that records and archives management plays a vital role in the process of modernising a country (MoPS, 2005). This resulted in a series of records and archives management improvement projects to being carried out. The British Council engaged the International Records Management Trust (IRMT), under British Aid arrangements with the GoU, to provide assistance in the development of records and archives management capacity in support of the Public Service Reform Programme (Phase I (1988), Phase II (1992-1996) and Phase III (1998). Records and archives management was, therefore, viewed as a tool that had the potential to boost the delivery of quality services in the public sector.

Luyombya (2010), however, observes that the management of public sector records and archives had not progressed in Uganda and the RAM system remained in a sorry state. Okello-Obura (2011) and Magara (n.d.) point out that the management of public records and archives was weak, uncoordinated and inadequate owing to a weak legal framework, an inadequate curriculum and the failing role of the national archives. It is against this background that this chapter highlights the impact of the Ugandan records legislation, the national archives and the records and archives management (RAM) training institutions in the management of public records. Records management legislation, a national archive and RAM training institutions are, therefore, a cornerstone in nurturing proper public records and archives services.

The underlying principle for this chapter is that the key step in developing a sound basis for effective public records and archives management is to have records legislation, a national archive and RAM training institutions (The New South Wales Government, 2004; Ngulube & Tafor, 2006; Thurston, 2005). The goal is to determine how far the records legislation, the national archive and the RAM training institutions have gone in enhancing sound records and archives management practices in the Ugandan public sector, thereby improving public service delivery, accountability and good governance.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Inspectorate of Government (IGG), which is the country's ombudsman charged with the responsibility of investigating embezzlement, bribery, nepotism, influence peddling, theft of public funds or assets, fraud, forgery, causing financial or property loss and false accounting in public affairs, frequently cites the absence of records and archives or their inefficient maintenance as the main reasons for poor service delivery. While the work of the IGG relies entirely on having access to accurate and timely records and archives, the reports from the office of the IGG overtly highlighted the lack of the required records and archives as a situation that frustrates the fight against maladministration in the UPS (IGG, 2012, 2014). When the IGG seeks answers to an inquiry, they expect to receive the official records and archives, indicating evidence of the decisions and actions taken in fulfilment of the government duties. However, the IGG noted that more often than not records and archives could not be located or verified during the audit inspections. This chapter, therefore, set out to establish whether records legislation, the Uganda National Archives (UNA) and the RAM training institutions have satisfactorily carried out their mandate to support the management of the public sector records and archives.

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