Chapter 8

Management of Public Sector Records and Archives in Botswana

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ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at the management of public sector records and archives in Botswana. The chapter starts with an overview of developments in the East and Southern African Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA), which provides a foundation for discussion of developments in Botswana. It looks at the extent to which the Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS) has fulfilled its role as the overseer of the creation, maintenance, use, disposition of public sector records, and preservation of the country's cultural heritage. It also looks at the impact of information and communication technologies and management of electronic records together with issues of staffing, training, and the challenges and prospects the country is faced with in managing records and archives as a symbol of cultural heritage. The chapter is based on an extensive review of the literature and the author's personal experience. It ends with recommendations on future directions.

INTRODUCTION

As organisations become increasingly dependent on records and archives to operate and make informed decisions, the pressure for their management is being greatly felt. The management of public records and archives, therefore, has been of major concern in developing countries. In fact, the International Records Management Trust (IRMT)[1] has for example, since its formation in 1989, taken the lead in guiding the management of public sector records and archives in developing nations. The IRMT working in collaboration with the World Bank (WB) has committed itself to ensuring good governance in the electronic age through strengthening information systems (IRMT, 2002, 2008). These institutions have

been working together in raising awareness, inspiring collaborative efforts, and improving tools, training and strategies to improve electronic-readiness (e-readiness) in developing countries. Specifically, this has helped in ensuring that public records and archives are efficiently managed to ensure accountability, good governance, transparency and preservation of corporate memory as cultural heritage.

In the East and Southern African Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ES-ARBICA)[2], the management of public sector records and archives has been driven by a number of strategies and development frameworks, including national public sector reforms and implementation of e-government strategies through adoption of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) as in case of Tanzania and South Africa. In Botswana, which is the focus of this chapter, the main drivers include the new long-term vision, Vision 2036[3], the National ICT Policy (Maitlamo), Electronic Government (e-government) strategy; the Electronic Records (evidence) Act, 2014 and the role of the Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS). Vision 2036, for example, focuses on a knowledge based economy and the need to improve the regulatory environment in ICTs and ensure digital access by all. Further, it recognises that culture is an ingredient for national building and that Botswana recognises institutions that promote its cultural heritage and as such aims to promote and preserve cultural heritage through research and documentation. This places BNARS in a strategic position to contribute to preservation of culture through management of records and preservation of archives. In addition, the National ICT policy (Maitlamo) and E-government strategy have accelerated technological advancement which in turn demands good recordkeeping in the electronic environment to ensure governance and accountability in the public sector. It also requires preservation of digital records. On the other hand, the Electronic Records Evidence Act of 2014 specifically provides for admissibility of electronic records as evidence in legal proceedings and authentication of electronic records (Electronic Records (evidence) Act, 2014). In the mist of all this, BNARS as the agency responsible for custody of public records and preservation of Botswana's cultural heritage has been pressurised to take the lead in advising and supervising records management activities in the whole of government and providing archival services. These developments will guide this chapter in discussion of management of public sector records and archives in Botswana.

METHODOLOGY

The compilation of this chapter depended on an extensive search of the literature in the ESARBICA region and in Botswana. Books, journal articles and electronic sources were used. Some professional experience over a 23 year period as a practitioner and academic also informed discussions and opinions in this chapter. Interactions and sharing of experiences with other professionals in the region and internationally at the recent ESARBICA conference in Lilongwe, Malawi held from 7-11 August 2017 also provided information that confirmed some information from the literature. The discussion in this chapter is guided by the life cycle model which looks at the management of records through the stages of creation, maintenance, use, and appraisal and disposition where some records become archives because of their continuing values.

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