

E-RECORDS MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE IN EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA.

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the status of e-records management in East and Southern Africa. The region faces major challenges with regards to the management of records and archives due to historical, political, cultural, managerial and technological factors. This paper examines the e-records readiness in institutions with statutory responsibility for records and the implications of e-records management for governance. The paper also suggests ways to rectify the e-records management problems in the East and Southern Africa member countries.

Keywords: E-records; E-records management; Transparency; E-government; East Africa, Southern Africa; Accountability

INTRODUCTION

E-records are the recorded information, documents or data that provide evidence of policies, transactions and activities carried out in e-government and e-commerce environments (IRMT, 2004). E-records may be categorized as text files (files produced by word processing programmes or by other software); data files (computer processable files that store numeric and sometimes textual information as quantitative values so that numbers can be manipulated using arithmetic processes); analogue audio and visual records (sound documents and images to be played back); disaggregated data (information collected through remote sensing systems); databases (structured collection of interrelated data); machine instruction sets (records created by the action of intelligent machines); image files (records containing computer processable images that generally exist as hard copy before being converted into images) and digital documents (files consisting of numeric data, images or sound recorded digitally in one uniform structure).

The increasing use of ICT, especially the Internet, in government operations around the world driven by public sector reform, has given impetus to the generation of e-

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records, touted as strategic assets vital to the functions of the state. Like traditional paper records, e-records support the day-to-day operations of government services and interactions with citizens, private and public sector partners. By and large, in developed regions such as North America and Europe where government services have increasingly moved online, e-records are becoming the basis for confirming pension and other entitlements; registering births and deaths; verifying citizenship, certifying voting rights; enabling collection of taxes, supporting financial management; and supporting litigation (IRMT, 2004).

Public sector reform is contributing significantly to the generation of e-records, especially in the developing countries, where such reforms are increasingly being undertaken. Public sector reform refers to interventions that affect the organisation, performance and working conditions of employees paid from central, provincial or state government budgets (DFID and University of Birmingham, 2003). Public sector reform initiatives first began in developing and transitional economies in the 1980's and initially focused on down sizing, following the structural adjustment programmes supported by the IMF and the World Bank. The emphasis was on controlling salary costs primarily through job reduction. The second stage of public sector reform began in the 1990's and presented a broader range of reforms aimed at performance assessment, monitoring, transparency, benchmarking, decentralisation, regulation and sound financial management (DFID and University of Birmingham, 2003).

The public sector reform initiatives of the 1990s coincided with the ICT revolution especially the Internet and the World Wide Web, and their increased use in governments to enhance efficiency, accountability and transparency in the management of public affairs. Moreover, the public sector reform agenda, especially of the 1990s, gave great impetus to increased generation of e-records and the need for their proper management while still in use and when they eventually get disposed to agencies with statutory responsibility for records such as national archives.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

Despite the fact that all the East and Southern African member countries have been subject to the public sector reforms demanded by the World Bank and IMF, most of their official records and archives have not changed much to enhance transparency and accountability in government. The East and Southern Africa region faces major

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challenges with regards to the management of records and archives due to historical, political, cultural, managerial and technological factors. In October 2003, a meeting of Ministers responsible for records and archives management in East and Southern Africa held in Cape Town, South Africa, underscored the importance of archival heritage and good records and archives management practices. The Ministers pointed out that one of the critical challenges facing the region was the inadequate support by governments to archival institutions, yet such institutions played a key role, not only in the preservation of the heritage of Africa but in information management, that inevitably supported the economic and social developments of nations.

The Ministers called for a collaborative action in a number of areas relating to the management of records and archives including the need to build electronic records capacity. The Ministers affirmed the need for governments, records management and archival professionals, multilateral organizations and donor agencies to give full support to endeavours of national and other archival institutions to better manage official records irrespective of media. They expressed the need to coordinate and develop programmes within the frameworks of the African Union and New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in order to promote the culture, heritage and human dignity of Africa's peoples; and provide for more open, transparent, accountable and good governance for the betterment of the continent (ESARBICA, 2003).

Mnjama and Wamukoya (2004) pointed out that there were real challenges faced by East and Southern Africa member countries in the capture and preservation of records. These include: absence of organisational plans for managing records; low awareness of the role of records management in support of organisational efficiency and accountability; lack of stewardship and coordination in handling records; absence of legislation, policies and procedures to guide the management of records; absence of core competencies in records and archives management; absence of budgets dedicated for records management; poor security and confidentiality controls; lack of records retention and disposal policies; and absence of migration strategies for records.

A case study undertaken by Akotia (2000) in the Ministry of Finance in Uganda on the management of financial records in government established that throughout the government of Uganda, ICT was considered an indispensable tool for enhancing productivity, yet little attention was paid to the information management issues and to understanding the forces of change that affect the form and integrity of the record

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created within an IT environment. Akotia further noted that the Ministry had no capacity for managing the basic elements of an electronic records programme including: staff who understood the functional requirements for record keeping and had the competencies and skills required to manage electronic information delivery systems; legal and administrative requirements for managing electronic records; and accurately documented policies, standard operating procedures and formal methodologies for managing e-records.

E-READINESS IN THE EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

The concept of e-readiness originated as a result of an attempt to provide a unified framework to evaluate the breadth and depth of the digital divide between the developed and developing countries during the later part of the 1990s. In 1998, the Computer Systems Policy Project (CSPP), a public policy advocacy group that consists of the United States information technology companies, developed an e-readiness assessment tool known as Readiness Guide for Living in the Networked World. CSPP defined e-readiness with respect to a community that has high-speed access in a competitive market; with constant access and application of ICTs in schools, government offices, businesses, healthcare facilities and homes; user privacy and online security; and government policies which are favourable to promoting connectedness and use of the network (Bridges.org, 2001).

Since 1998 several organisations and agencies largely from developed countries have developed different macro e-readiness assessment methodologies that are used to measure the phenomena at national level across key sectors of the economy. These organisations include McConnell International (MI), a global technology policy and management consulting firm, the Centre for International Development at Harvard University, the Economist Intelligent Unit, the International Data Corporation, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the Mosaic Group. Generally, each of the e-readiness assessment methodologies uses a different definition of e-readiness and techniques of its measurement (Bridges.org, 2001).

In discussing the diversity of e-readiness definitions, Docktor (2002) observed that the term e-readiness represented the multiple levels of ICT development and the exact definition of what constitutes 'e-readiness' was still open for debate. There are many degrees of e-readiness and each could include any one or more than one of the following activities: using e-mail as the most preferred communication method;

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using a web site for internal and external communications; selling goods and/or services using the Internet; making travel arrangements using online Internet services; finding and purchasing computer equipment and software, supplies and even services through a company website; sending electronic invoices to customers and receiving electronic bills from suppliers and electronically paying and receiving payments. The choice of e-readiness tool largely depends on the purpose and goals for which a particular assessment is meant to achieve.

The Economist Intelligence Unit and IBM Corporation has since 2002 been undertaking a global ranking of countries based on their level of e-readiness status. For example, in 2004, 64 countries were ranked for their e-readiness using both quantitative and qualitative criteria such as technology infrastructure, business environment, degree to which e-business was being adopted by consumers and companies, social and cultural conditions that influenced Internet usage and the availability of services to support e-business (Economist Intelligence Unit and IBM Corporation, 2004). This ranking showed that most of the countries in Africa including those in the East and Southern Africa region save for South Africa were lagging behind their counterparts in the developed world with respect to broadband households, mobile Internet users; software sophistication, wireless telephone subscribers and PC penetration and education levels.

Moreover, in the 2003, a ranking by the International Data Corporation involving 53 countries worldwide placed only South Africa from the East and Southern Africa region at position 30. Likewise, the 2004 e-readiness ranking by Economist Intelligence Unit of sub-Saharan Africa, rated South Africa the most e-ready country at position 32 out of 64 countries surveyed globally. However, due to ineffective government policing of the liberalisation process, this has prevented the introduction of new telecommunication carriers to compete against the de facto state monopoly. In addition, weak infrastructure development and high costs are conspiring to keep connectivity rates for voice services and Internet services depressed (Economist Intelligence Unit and IBM Corporation, 2004).

In 2002, a study on e-readiness of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) member countries (all of which are members of East and Southern Africa) established that there was a need to develop ICT policies, legislation and regulatory frameworks and capacity building in terms of information infrastructures and human resources (SADC E-readiness Task Force, 2002). The assessment further showed that South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, and Mauritius were some of the countries that had advanced telecommunication infrastructures and were making good

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progress in implementing e-readiness initiatives at macro level. For example, as far as connectivity readiness was concerned, Mauritius, South Africa, Botswana and Namibia were ranked as having made very good progress, while Angola, Lesotho and Zimbabwe were rated low (SADC E-readiness Task Force, 2002). The assessment revealed that there were two distinct groups of countries. Group one which included Seychelles, Mauritius, South Africa and Tanzania had more developed ICT infrastructure than the rest, and to the extent that they were participating in the networked world (global electronic environment). However, this group of countries had serious challenges such as shortage of skilled manpower, expensive subscription fees and relatively low PC penetration. On the other hand, group two countries such as Namibia, Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe showed significant potential to participate in the networked world. The rest of the countries faced serious challenges of poor infrastructure, poor skilled societies, low education levels, high cost of Internet access, and lack of ICT awareness (SADC E-readiness Task Force, 2002).

Furthermore, there were great variations between countries in their levels of e-readiness. For example, South Africa, Mauritius and Seychelles took the lead with regards to policy on infrastructure. However, in these countries, some fundamental enablers for advancement to higher levels of technology such as universal service with regards to basic telecommunications and electricity were still being progressively addressed. Similarly, Zimbabwe and Botswana were reported to have achieved a fairly well developed fundamental infrastructure such as electricity and broadcasting. On the other hand, Angola Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique showed the lowest scores with regards to the fundamental level of e-readiness (SADC E-readiness Task Force, 2002)

South Africa and Seychelles were placed in the first and second top slots respectively, while Mauritius fell into the low scoring section in the middle level readiness as far as policy strength, PC penetration and higher-level telecommunications were concerned. Thus, it would seem that the SADC region was generally ill prepared for the move to higher levels of e-readiness and advanced applications. However, as far as the advanced level readiness on policy strength was concerned, South Africa showed strong leadership with regards to e-commerce activities and banking infrastructure. Similarly, as far as PC penetration was concerned, Seychelles and Mauritius had the highest levels while Botswana was rated at number 5. PC penetration was one of the key indicators of a country's middle level e-readiness. Additionally, with regards to the number of Internet users, South Africa was leading with 2.4 million, followed by Tanzania at 2.0 million.

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Botswana was positioned at number 11 behind Angola and Swaziland. As far as Internet affordability was concerned, the Democratic Republic of Congo had the most expensive monthly subscription charges (US\$ 120). Botswana was placed at number 5 as one of the countries with the lowest Internet charges behind Namibia, Lesotho and South Africa (SADC E-readiness Task Force, 2002).

Efforts are being made to establish institutional frameworks to enhance e-readiness within the SADC member countries. For example, the member countries were signatories to the region's ICT protocol whose main goal was to improve and broaden equitable access to ICTs as a means of creating new opportunities for socio-economic development in Southern Africa (SADC Secretariat, 1999). There are individual country's efforts within the region geared towards enhancing e-readiness status. For example, in Tanzania, the ICT policy articulated ten priority areas, amongst them, a strong and competitive economy capable of producing sustainable growth and shared benefits in such productive areas as ICT; the Internet with its potential to create wealth and economic growth and in conducting business interactions in all sectors of the economy; ICT industry to support the extensive and innovative application of ICT; and the export of competitive ICT products and services (Sawe, 2004). There are on-going efforts within SADC to end the telecommunication monopolies and establish ground level initiatives in Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, South Africa and Zambia. Similar initiatives underway include the World Links' program to train teachers and students in the use of technology to improve teaching and learning in South Africa, Mozambique, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Swaziland (Johnson, 2001).

South Africa was ranked on the whole, as advanced as far as policy, and strong leadership with regards to e-commerce and banking infrastructure were concerned while countries such as Angola, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Tanzania, Zambia and Botswana scored low on these criteria (SADC E-readiness Task Force, 2002). The SADC member countries were found to be at different levels of developing their e-readiness infrastructure.

E-RECORDS READINESS IN INSTITUTIONS WITH STATUTORY RESPONSIBILITY FOR RECORDS

The International Records Management Trust (IRMT) developed a record readiness tool in 2002 to enable governments to conduct high-level assessments of key areas of e-records readiness in relation to other aspects of e-government and to determine

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whether the records and information management infrastructure is capable of supporting e-government initiatives (IRMT, 2004). The tool uses a brief questionnaire that provides a risk assessment of e-records readiness in government, at national and enterprise levels. The areas addressed by the tool include among others: staff competencies in maintaining software and hardware; human resource capacity; telecommunication infrastructure to support growing volume of work; adequacy of electric power; information management policies and responsibilities; information management products and technologies; internal and public awareness programme of information management; compliance with information management procedures such as security, documentation standards and system engineering procedures for ICT; guidelines for management of electronic records; national ICT strategies; supportive legal and regulatory framework for information management; and freedom of information and protection of privacy

It is evident from the literature whether any of the East and Southern Africa member countries have undergone e-records readiness assessments using the IRMT tool. However, going by recent developments, it would seem that by and large, the statutory institutions with responsibility for archives in the East and Southern Africa region fall short of the e-readiness standards of the IRMT benchmarks. For example, a meeting held in Vienna, Austria on 26 August 2004 between some members of the East and Southern Africa Branch of the International Council on Archives (East and Southern Africa Executive Board) International Records Management Trust (IRMT) and the National Archives of England, Wales emphasized the need for effective records management in East and Southern Africa with respect to capacity building in the area of e-records management. Similarly, the general e-readiness assessments that have been undertaken by SADC E-readiness Task Force in 2002 revealed that, staff competencies, skills and tools needed to manage e-business processes and e-information in a shared work environment has not been adequately developed in many public sector organizations in East and Southern Africa region (Wamukoya and Mutula, 2005). Among records and information managers, and national archivists, there is insufficient capacity and training to articulate e-records issues and provide guidance and input to policy makers and planners. This situation is complicated further by the fact that at policy level, senior officials and legislators are often unaware of the requirement to manage electronic records over time so that the evidence base of government will be secure and accessible when needed by authorized users. At the planning and operational level, systems designers and IT specialists tend to focus primarily on current information needs resulting in inadequate attention being paid to long-term preservation requirements (IRMT, 2003).

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There are no systematic strategies that being implemented for making transition from paper-based systems to electronic means where this is possible. The lessons learned in Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda have shown that automated systems cannot simply be superimposed on dysfunctional or chaotic paper systems, as this has often been a recipe for failure in many countries. Given that many African governments have largely operated in a paper-based environment for a very long time, the change process from paper to e-systems is bound to be more complex than is often realised. Firstly, there is a need to fix the paper mess before contemplating automation. Secondly, it is necessary to maintain, for a period of time, some sort of hybrid system that allows for parallel or complementary paper and e-systems to co-exist. The third stage allows for gradual integration of the manual paper system with the computerised system by focusing on specific products to support the business process (Mnjama and Wamukoya, 2004). This systematic approach has not been documented within the institutions with statutory responsibility for records within the East and Southern Africa region.

Various obstacles hamper the e-records readiness of institutions with statutory responsibility in Eastern and Southern Africa. A study carried out by Mutiti (2001) to assess technological infrastructure and needs in the East and Southern Africa region revealed that limited progress had been made in the area of managing electronic records created by public institutions. She noted that although national archives, as the agencies with statutory responsibility for records in the region had been working to address computerization issues, most of this work has focused on automating the description of their holdings. Mutiti's study revealed that the most common application of computers was word processing. Although seven national archives had embarked on automation of archival services, these automation programmes were in the initial stages of development.

Mutiti (2001) pointed out that most countries had no specific legal or administrative framework within which to operate an electronic records management programme and had not begun to address the broader issues involved nor did their staff have the skills to do so. Similarly, the national archives were not playing a role in the introduction of electronic government, and electronic records issues were not being addressed systematically. For example, only one national archive had put in place rules and regulations to govern the management of electronic records; three others had received electronic records created by other institutions; several more, operated local area networks, although only one country had a national network which could be accessed from various places in the country. Internet access was more widespread, while several institutions were busy launching websites. Other

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problems facing the East and Southern Africa region included lack of digitization projects, general lack of prioritization of automation functions and services; lack of standards, practices and procedures for the management of electronic records; records creating agencies tended to overlook long-term preservation of electronic records; electronic records were being created in public institutions and some were being mismanaged and lost; and inability to determine appropriate hardware and software.

MANAGING E-RECORDS IN ARCHIVES

Individual countries are continuing to make important strides in the area of computerization. For example, the Umgeni water project in South Africa has initiated an e-documents and records management system that has been used to redesign and decentralize records systems. Similarly, the Namibia National Archives has published the Namibian database using upgraded CDS/ISIS software that links the archives and the National Library of Namibia. Other countries that have reported progress in records automation include Kenya, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Botswana is in the process of finalizing tendering for a project to automate the agencies with statutory responsibility for records that will also provide a link with record creating agencies.

Mukotekwa (2002) points out that in Zimbabwe there are minimal activities going on at the National Archives of Zimbabwe. Notable amongst the electronic records is the computerized catalogue of films that was produced using the CDS/ISIS software. Yahaya (2002) observed that government computers were generating enormous volumes of e-mail, word-processing documents and automated databases. The challenge is to preserve the mounting plethora of these digital records.

Mutiti (2002) observes that the technological infrastructure within the region varies significantly from country to country. Countries such as Malawi, Swaziland, Seychelles, Tanzania and Zimbabwe are operating standalone computers whilst Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia, Kenya and South Africa had local area networks and were also linked to wide area networks through websites and most countries in the region had Internet access. Some countries such as Tanzania, Seychelles and South Africa were undertaking document imaging. Mutiti (2002) noted that the computers were being used for word-processing, record control of holdings through databases including audiovisual collection in Zimbabwe, strong room management in South Africa, holdings automation in Kenya, Zambia and South Africa.

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Computers were also used to automate retrieval and finding aids in Kenya, Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Other automated functions in the region include document imaging in Tanzania, Seychelles.

Mutiti (2002) also noted that the responsibility of managing electronic records is not well defined in countries such as Mozambique, Seychelles, Tanzania and Zambia. In Kenya and Malawi, individual departments take responsibility while in Swaziland the Ministry of Public Service and Information is responsible. In Botswana, Kenya and Zimbabwe this mandate is derived through the national archives legislation. Apart from South Africa the other countries do not have an explicit policy to institute and manage electronic records. Only South Africa has in place measures to manage e-records destruction and disposal through a disposal authority

E-RECORDS MANAGEMENT IN EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR GOVERNANCE

The importance of e-records management in general and for East and Southern Africa member countries in particular need not be over emphasized. Accurate and reliable records form the documentary evidence needed to provide a foundation for all development strategies. The loss of control of those records and information systems, particularly in electronic environments, is a highly significant global problem. In the electronic age, sound records management systems are critical to the public sector so as to be accountable and transparent as well as to improve services to citizens, especially in the poorer countries. Well-managed e-records systems provide a strong foundation for enhancing accountability, transparency, democratic governance, poverty eradication, elimination of corruption, and efficient use of donor-funded resources (IRMT, 2003).

Increasingly, various activities within East and Southern Africa are generating vast amounts of electronic records that need to be properly managed in order to enhance transparency and accountability in the management of public affairs and in the effective delivery of services. Sound record keeping practices are increasingly being tied to enhanced performance, transparency and accountability in government. In Botswana, public sector reforms is reflected in projects such as performance management system; annual performance plans and performance based reward system; work improvement teams to assist ministries in improving service delivery and organisational performance; human resource management capability enhancement through increasing the consistency of policies and procedures and

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further implementation of the computerised personnel management system; and privatisation, commercialisation and contracting out strategies as a way of right-sizing the overall size of the public service (Maitlamo, 2004).

Governments play a central role in all elements of national society. The public sector is the principal factor in the macro socio-economic policy making and the key catalyst for national development. It has the responsibility for the planning, formulation and implementation of policies, programmes, and projects for the delivery of goods and services to the nation. Mnjama and Wamukoya (2004) point out that without reliable records, governments cannot effectively manage state resources, civil service, delivery of services such as education and health care. Without accurate and reliable records, and effective systems to manage them, governments cannot be held accountable for their decisions and actions, and the rights and entitlements of citizens and corporate bodies cannot be upheld.

As governments make the transition from the traditional paper-based records management environment to ICTs, the emphasis has largely been on improving access to information and transaction-based services for the public, clients and partners. But ultimately, there is potential for restructuring and improving internal management and administrative processes such as policy formulation and implementation, development planning, service delivery, monitoring and evaluation; creating new governance partnerships involving different levels of government, the broader public sector and the private sector; reengineering the way major public sector systems such as health, justice, land, education, transportation and human resource are managed and how they function, thereby increasing efficiency and delivering a broader range of services; fostering digital democracy and increased citizen involvement in their own governance through two-way communication and feedback between citizens and the government (IRMT, 2003).

E-government provides the opportunity for governments throughout the world to improve the delivery of information and services to citizens and businesses, to streamline public sector functions, and to increase citizen participation in government. In some instances this is just a matter of providing electronic access to existing information. In others, electronic services, such as land searches or submission of tax returns, are being delivered online. Electronic government has the potential to transcend constraints imposed by distance and increase the speed of service delivery, but it also poses a number of challenges for accountability, the rule of law and the maintenance of organizational memory. Further more, governments face increasing public pressure to demonstrate that they are accountable to their

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citizens and that they are committed to efforts to root out corruption or malpractice. As more citizen/state interactions occur in electronic form, it is vital to ensure that electronic systems support evidentiary record keeping. Citizens will expect that their rights are as well protected and documented in an electronic environment as in a paper-based one. This can only be achieved if the records generated through the electronic government are carefully managed through systems providing constant intellectual and physical control. The aim must be to preserve the combination of content, context, and structure which give electronic records meaning over time, to protect the fragile media from degradation, and to ensure efficient access (IRMT, 2003).

IRMT (2004) points out that as e-government services are delivered using new ICTs, the intended benefits will be compromised unless there is an adequate infrastructure for managing the e-records that will be created. Traditional records and information management tools, such as classification schemes and disposal schedules are necessary to ensure that e-records are protected as reliable evidence. Failure to address these issues could lead to reduced government effectiveness; increased operating costs; gaps in recorded memory; reduced public access to entitlements; erosion of rights; and weakened capacity for decision making.

Chronic weaknesses in government record keeping can adversely affect private sector investment. For example, overseas firms may hesitate to invest in a country if they feel its courts do not handle civil cases (especially commercial cases) efficiently. Likewise, large-scale infrastructure investments, such as the construction of gas pipelines, may be delayed or may incur significant additional costs if government land registries cannot provide complete and definitive statements of titles to property. Poor record keeping can contribute to a lowering of the general standard of service offered to businesses. For example, there may be delays in replies to written inquiries about the registration of businesses, the issue of licenses, and other matters necessary for companies to pursue their business.

Within an e-environment, the role and participation of the private sector is critical especially with regards to e-commerce and e-business transactions. In order to achieve this, governments need to provide a conducive environment through enabling legislations, and regulatory frameworks. As more and more private sector and government activities are carried out online in electronic format, such legislations and regulatory frameworks will be critical for ensuring the availability of reliable evidence of activities transacted to protect the rights, obligations and entitlements of all parties involved. IRMT (2004) observed that under existing

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legislation, courts around the world have struggled with applying the traditional rules of evidence to e-records with inconsistent results. In order to facilitate dispute resolution and avoidance, governments need to adopt laws that establish ground rules for e-transactions, e-commerce and the use of e-signatures

THE WAY FORWARD FOR EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA REGION

Various recommendations have been in the past to rectify the e-records problems in the East and Southern Africa, but little has really. Mutiti (2001) pointed the need for the training of archivists in electronic records keeping enabling them to perform an active role in the management of electronic records. Electronic records management has to become one of the core functions of the agencies with statutory responsibility for records. Existing national archival legislations in the East and Southern African region should be revised to incorporate aspects of electronic records management. Finally, additional funds are needed from governments for national archival institutions to meet the added costs of managing electronic records

It is important to point out that within an e-government environment, a central agency such as the national archives should be designated to coordinate e-records management activities and to ensure that government-wide standards and practices are developed and implemented, and appropriate facilities and resources are available for the management of official records in digital and other formats. For the agency to fulfil its mandate effectively, these additional roles and responsibilities should be recognized and embedded in the national archives legislations.

Keakopa (2002) noted that although archivists in the region have been concerned with automation, the main emphasis has been on adopting the new technologies without any clear strategy for managing the information created. Although Keakopa does not provide specific strategic directions for developing new skill sets in the management of electronic records, her paper suggests that the following issues need to be addressed: identifying automation needs of archival institutions; identifying e-government initiatives within the region; determining current status of e-records management within East and Southern Africa; determining level of adoption of new technologies by the public service including agencies with statutory responsibility for records; assessing national ICT infrastructure; assessing policy, legislative and regulatory frameworks; identifying capacity building requirements that would include creating awareness and training needs; and creating awareness about

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freedom of information involving governments, agencies with statutory responsibility for records, legislators, and civil society.

CONCLUSION

There is a general understanding within East and Southern Africa for the need to address issues relating to e-records management. Some work has already been done to address some of the issues that have been raised in this paper. For example, e-discussions on e-governance and records management held in January 2003; video conferences on issues relating to public sector reform and records management held in 2002 and 2003; and the Cape Town meeting of ministers responsible for archives held in October 2003, are examples of efforts being undertaken.

Given the dynamic nature of information technologies and the obsolescence issues associated with them, it is important to put in place a digital preservation strategy to ensure that e-records created as a result of e-government activities are preserved and remain accessible and useable over time. However, it is important to point out that in an e-records environment, generation and management of such records tend to be decentralised. This calls for national preservation strategies that define the roles and responsibilities of the agencies with statutory responsibility for records vis-à-vis electronic and paper records creating agencies.

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