

EVIDENCE-BASED GOVERNANCE IN THE ELECTRONIC AGE: THE IMPORTANCE OF RECORD KEEPING FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

**SUMMARY SESSION 2, WEDNESDAY 26 MARCH 2003
0800 TO 1000 EDT**

Sites

- Washington
- Malawi
- Mozambique
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe

The Current Situation and Present Needs

In the discussion of the current situation, participating countries began by outlining the current state of their records and access legislation and discussing the role of records in their societies. They then proceeded to discuss the following key issues:

- the fact that there had been many legislative changes in the last decade or so in records management, and the reality that still more had to be done to ensure proper control of records creation systems
- the move to provide more information to citizens and ensure the public sector is accountable, transparent and efficient
- the problem of civil strife and weak or fragile governments, but the value of strong political will in many governments to improve record keeping systems and make information available to citizens
- the close relationship between record keeping and public sector reform programmes
- the importance of developing ICT strategies and not just producing documents using new technologies, but also ensuring that people have access to relevant information in the most appropriate forms available
- the need to increase capacity in all electronic information projects and the importance of including human resources development programmes as part of infrastructure development

- the importance of quality records to combat corruption, such as the reduction or elimination of ‘ghost workers’ in government
- the need to maintain up-to-date records in both manual and electronic formats
- the importance of recognising that both paper and electronic records will remain valid forms of documentation over the long term
- the need to ensure that access legislation is effective and to understand that citizens access information in different ways; this means that in some jurisdictions, information may need to be published in vernacular, and communications systems may need to be developed so that they accommodate needs in both urban and rural areas
- the importance of engaging quality staff and ensuring adequate training, especially as the onslaught of HIV/AIDS has led to attrition and a loss of institutional memory
- the value of ensuring the national archives has the power to oversee the records creation process throughout government; records are important for accountable government but for that to happen the archives need to see records being managed by senior managers and not left just to registry clerks
- the importance of ensuring technology is up to date and employees across government remain ICT aware and ICT competent; and integrating ICT training and records training as an important step in managing new technologies effectively.

The Way Forward

Participants then considered actions that could be taken to improve the record keeping environment in their countries and around the world. They identified the following central issues:

- the need for a recognition of the professional expertise of people working in records management, so that records management is professionalised, in conjunction with information technology, as an integrated career path
- the need for adequate funding for records management institutions
- the need for improved security for records, especially electronic information
- the need to ensure a smooth transition from paper based records to electronic records
- the need to sensitise users to the value of records and information in government
- the need to harmonise government programmes in terms of developing information technology, including the need for information technology policies that incorporate record keeping requirements

- the need to ensure electronic records systems and information technology systems are well chosen, effective, secure and sustainable; for example, there needs to be capacity to maintain back up copies and ensure that electronic records are authentic over time, even if the technologies used to create and access them change.