

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

**SUMMARY SESSION 4, FRIDAY 28 MARCH 2003
0900 TO 1100 EDT**

Sites

- Washington
- Barbados
- Belize (via audio)
- Guyana (via audio)
- Jamaica
- St Vincent and the Grenadines

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 many Caribbean countries have had democracies in place for many years and are moving forward on archives legislation and access legislation; in many ways countries in this part of the world have well developed government systems
- the reality that electronic records pose a challenge, especially as governments take steps to create a borderless society and interact with all countries of the world and share information
- the fact that while access legislation is emerging it is not always in place
- the fact that in many Caribbean countries there is a high level of consciousness and care attached to care of public records and information; transparency and accountability are seen as important for the protection of citizens rights
- the need for offices to be empowered to carry out the work of accountability, transparency and good governance
- the problem in the contemporary age, which challenges transparency and accountability in government, of the overuse and misuse of telephones; as a result there is a need for public managers to ensure that records are kept so they know what they have done and

what they are going to do

- the need to reconcile access legislation and archives legislation; for example, in one country the FOI act contradicts the archives act, as the FOI act says the public can see indexes from archives or any agency, while the archives act says records must be 30 years old before they are publicly accessible; to ensure the effective management of all records, the national archives must be involved from the time of creation
- the need to review and revise archival legislation, so that there is institutional strengthening, capacity building and a stronger resource base
- the need for reform programmes specifically for human resources and finance records
- the importance of coordinated plans across government and greater consistency with the formulation and implementation of electronic systems, standards, procedures and policies.

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 to develop concrete electronic government strategies, including measures to manage records relating to accounts, human resources, customs, electoral affairs, business licenses, land issues, and so on, in both paper and electronic form
- the need to teach the public, especially children, about electronic records and automation
- the need for secure networks and the development of quality computer information systems that ensure the integrity of the information managed
- the urgent need to modernise and strengthen legislation that manages both paper and electronic records, and the related need to continue the restructuring of records management units in various ministries and departments to ensure records are properly managed and, where appropriate, are transferred to the archives
- the need to establish functioning records management programmes and ensure the maintenance of records regardless of format
- the importance of identifying someone in every ministry to be in charge of public information; this person should be highly articulate and highly literate and should serve as a liaison officer with various departments to ensure accountability
- the need for national coordination of information and communications technology projects, along with installation of a stable infrastructure (such as electricity and telecommunications) so that an electronic government can exist

- the need for active commitment and inspired leadership at the highest levels.