

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

**SUMMARY SESSION 6, MONDAY, 31 MARCH 2003
0700 TO 0900 EDT**

Sites

- Washington
- India
- Pakistan
- Sri Lanka
- Bangladesh (did not connect)

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 is a history of good record keeping in south Asian countries, based on the colonial British administration, and there has long been a stress on quality record keeping
- the recognition that the time is now right for the transformation to electronic record keeping, even though paper record keeping will still be essential to democracy, good governance and transparency until electronic records are well managed
- the recognition that regulations for record keeping are strong, based on western and Asian experience, but the fact that governments need advice from archivists and other specialists and need to include people involved with transparency and accountability, such as accountants general and auditors general, to find ways to ensure that vital information is acceptable not only in a court of law but also available to citizens
- the fact that steps are underway to automate accounting systems in many countries, but the knowledge that automating a record keeping system may not bring the intended results if governments do not address the issues involved in capturing and maintaining the integrity of evidence; the recognition that addressing these issues will help to prevent corruption

- the fact that a tremendous change management initiative is underway in government, which will lead to the automation of financial records, budgeting reports and so on; the recognition that these changes will help many institutions, such as the public accounts committee, which needs data to form an opinion about the performance of a particular audited organisation
- the fact that there are different kinds of accountability, including accountability to parliament, to administrative officials including the auditor general, to justice delivery and so on; a strong legal system helps with accountability, and so legislation needs to be strong to protect records
- the fact that there is a strong momentum towards adoption of e-governance; with the advent of ICTs, electronic technologies are increasingly seen by government as a method of providing efficient, convenient and easily accessible services to citizens
- the fact that key government records, in areas such as driving licenses and accounting, are increasingly being held in digital systems; security, access and authenticity are more critical than ever, especially in relation to the chain of accountability for the records, who used them, what was done with them, how long do they have to be kept and so on
- the need to develop effective and reliable standards for records care as governments move to an electronic environment
- the need for training and resources for all records-related work.

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 consider accountability in relation to information systems, including the need to install mechanisms that ensure reliability of information generated by any information system
- the need to ensure records are accurate and reliable and can be retrieved in a timely manner, as well as to have internal controls and internal audit in all the departments
- the value of encouraging government departments to develop their own websites, as part of a coordinate information plan, to help increase public access to information
- the critical importance of education for records professionals; capacity building and training for records staff is essential to achieving successful records systems
- the value of documenting good practices around the world and ensuring international standards are relevant to different regions; one example would be to develop a compendium of legislation on public records and FOI

- the importance of remembering that change cannot happen overnight and that electronic government cannot work in isolation
- the value of strong leadership in government to support records work, and the related need for resources and policies.