



Fostering Trust and Transparency in Governance: Investigating and Addressing the Requirements for Building Integrity in Public Sector Information System in the ICT Environment

Key Issues Arising from the Case Studies

The lack of complete and accurate documentation of the employment of public servants has been recognised as a significant problem in terms of:

- reporting within government
- tracking changes to the personnel establishment listing and to the payroll
- identifying ghost workers
- identifying employees who are due to retire
- devolution of responsibility of staff in the districts
- meeting national and international audit requirements
- reporting to donors and lenders.

The environment is dynamic and fluid, with a significant human resource system upgrade either planned or being undertaken to the systems of the countries being studied. Flexible next generation software, using web-based browser technologies, is being introduced so that agencies will have greater system access and control. Business process re-engineering is being driven by procurement considerations as much as by information or records management requirements. Professional project management skills, including planning, stakeholder management and sensitisation are required. There also are moves from central management of human resource information to devolution of the HR function to local agencies. This requires capacity building to ensure that records are properly managed in local environments. The interface between the payroll and human resource information systems needs to be strengthened. There is an element of silo development between the MDA responsible for the public service management and the Finance Ministry. These two MDAs need to work together in the development of systems in order to avoid incompatibility issues and to streamline work processes.

A number of themes that have recurred in the case studies should help to inform the nature of the guidance and training material required. These themes are summarised below and are grouped under international good practice statements for records management.¹

Government offices should be aware of and *compliant* with legal and administrative requirements for recordkeeping.

The infrastructure and regulatory environments needed to ensure the survival of reliable and accurate records as evidence is lacking and needs to be strengthened. While all the case study countries have legal and administrative requirements for keeping manual records, these often are poorly understood by public servants. The legal and administrative requirements regarding the maintenance of electronic records is generally not in place, and often records in computerised environments have not been captured into any systematic recordkeeping system. Records are created in a mixed media (electronic/paper) environment, and they need to be managed in an integrated manner, regardless of format. This is not happening.

Government offices should be able to demonstrate that recordkeeping systems, procedures and practices work *reliably* to ensure that records produced are credible and authoritative.

The state of recordkeeping systems varies widely from government to government, MDA to MDA, region to region and district to district. Many systems date from colonial times and are no longer capable of supporting good records management. Some countries have nationally agreed procedures, while others rely on decentralised work practices. In some instances, systems and procedures have broken down, with slow, poor or non-existent filing resulting in records being no longer credible and authoritative. IT is widely regarded as the solution to these information management problems, but there is little if any professional records management input to systems design, and governments are not planning for the management of records as evidence in the electronic environment. While data integrity is considered a high priority, and has been managed well in certain electronic environments, procedures for input documentation and long term maintenance of electronic records over time are lacking. In addition, while system upgrades are necessary to ensure functionality (due to obsolescence of software and hardware), upgrades often do not adequately take into account the long term integrity of the data and records being migrated.

Government offices should be able to show that records are made, maintained and managed *systematically* in accordance with procedures which result in the same predictable outcome every time as part of the organisation's ordinary business processes.

Manual personnel files in civil service departments and ministries often are poorly maintained. In many instances, hard copy files are incomplete or difficult to retrieve. Multiple files for public servants are common, and there is little or no agreement about which documents should be held where, and whether personnel records should follow officers when

¹ These principles are drawn from University of Pittsburgh's Recordkeeping Functional Requirements Project, 'Standard on Full and Accurate Records', issued by the State Records Authority of New South Wales, Australia, the 'Recordkeeping Framework', issued by Archives New Zealand and the International Standard on Records Management ISO15439.

they transfer from one MDA to another. The result is a fragmentation of personnel records. One serious consequence is the delay in processing pension applications. Policies and procedures are needed to govern the creation, content and management of personnel files. Often when records are required for pension purposes information between central files has to be copied and compared with files at ministry, departmental, regional or district levels.

Government offices should ensure that recordkeeping is *managed* through an identifiable records management programme, that responsibilities are assigned, and that procedures are documented complied with and audited.

Records management programmes are patchy at best. In some countries there is a central agency responsible for records management policy and registry management; in others this is largely left to the National Archives to advise on the management of records. In still other situations, there is a fragmentation of responsibilities between the government's central records management unit and the National Archives. Without sound policy development and assignment of responsibilities there is the danger of lack of clarity of responsibilities, confusion of roles and unnecessary duplication of effort.

Registries are viewed as dumping grounds for and by staff; the calibre of records personnel is often low and remuneration is poor. The national archival authority often is unable to influence the development of sound records management due to its lack of a mandate to do so and to capacity issues. There are few well qualified and experienced records managers, and knowledge of how to manage electronic records over time is virtually non-existent. Untrained and unsuitable classified personnel (cleaners) have been used in registries. These staff tend not to understand procedures, and in many cases indexes and other access tools have fallen into disuse. In MDA's, registry staff and records managers have little or no influence and are increasingly discouraged by the sheer quantity of documents. In addition, with the introduction of computer systems they are being blamed when documents generated on computer systems cannot be found in a loss of accountability and transparency.

In addition, while governments are eager to move away from paper-based systems, huge volumes of paper records continue to be created without being properly managed. Restructuring and data clean up is necessary and decisions regarding retention periods need to be taken.

Government offices should make recordkeeping a *routine* part of business operations: recordkeeping systems should be used consistently whenever business is transacted and not employed periodically or unpredictably.

On the whole recordkeeping is considered routine for paper records, even if the practices are not necessarily in line with international good practice. While most countries still have relatively new electronic information systems, it is clear that in most situations, there is little understanding as to how these can interface with paper-based recordkeeping systems and how they can be linked to the manual files that should be in place for data verification. In particular, the lack of well managed, complete paper-based personnel records has implications for the accuracy of payroll data. Complete personnel records should provide a resource for payroll verification as well as for human resource management. The inability to verify the payroll against hard copy records represents a missed opportunity for strengthening payroll control and resolving errors and fraudulent entries.