

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

**SUMMARY SESSION 1, TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 2003
0900 TO 1100 EDT**

Sites

- Washington
- Kenya
- Lesotho (via audio)
- Namibia (via audio)
- South Africa
- Swaziland

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 importance of a legislative framework for the care of records and information, protecting records, providing access, ensuring appropriate confidentiality, and guaranteeing the reliability of public information.
- The importance of development legislative structures to manage both paper and electronic records.
- The relationship between records and the provision of government services and on the relationship between government and citizens as clients.
- The need to develop integrated information systems to allow information sharing between ministries.
- The need to improve internal public service systems and make government services more accessible to citizens, such as by reducing the amount of time records are closed so that government can be more open to the public.
- The related importance of ensuring the security of information and protect confidentiality and privacy for citizens and, when necessary, sensitive government departments.

- The need to modernize current systems, improve integration of government services and improve the quality of data and business processes.
- The need to ensure that governments have the capacity to develop appropriate systems and institute new processes, including funds, staff and training.
- The challenges of making government more open and accountable, particularly in those countries which historically had less progressive or more oppressive regimes.
- The problems involved with shifting from manual to electronic systems, especially with the lack of adequate training and capacity for staff involved.
- The reality that the National Archives may be only nominally responsible for records, with supervisory powers and powers of inspection but with limited staff, poor remuneration and inadequate training.
- The growth of internet usage as a means of providing the public with information about government activities, and the consequences for government records care.
- The problem of poor paper records management and the absence of coordinated efforts to move to electronic record keeping.
- The reality of fraud and corruption in government, and the importance of developing records systems that reduce the chance of inappropriate manipulation or use of public records.
- The need for a records cadre for officers and a scheme of service for records officers throughout government.
- The role of quality record keeping to underpin democracy and accountability.
- The need for IT and records management policies to regulate the conduct and use of information systems for security purposes, especially for undesired access.
- The need to establish disaster recovery plans and quality assurance to secure quality of information.
- The need for commitment by top management so that initiatives are sustained and improved and governments move to improvement of public service delivery.
- The need for centralised information resources, so that members of the public can have access to the information they require.
- The related need to educate citizens on their rights to information and to raise awareness among broadcast organizations and media of the importance of information.

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 the National Archives to establish or revise access policies for the management of electronic records.
- The need to establish effective mechanisms for the management of land records.
- The need to provide additional training in information technology skills.
- The importance of securing financial, infrastructure and technical support to enable governments to establish training and capacity building programmes.
- The need to harmonize and standardize information technology, government record keeping and archival activities, so they work together to manage information across a continuum of care.
- The importance of establishing record keeping and information technology standards, including standard platforms for hardware, software and systems.
- The need to secure, train, and retain skilled staff, which requires matching salaries with the private sector and recognising the consequences of serious social issues, such as HIV/AIDS, which is affecting the most productive components of the population.