Archives and records management in Kenya: problems and prospects

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Abstract

The Kenya National Archives and Documentation Services is seen as a success story by many other African archival institutions. The Department has made major strides in developing records services, opening five regional centres and partially automating most of its finding aids. However, as this article indicates, major aspects of managing public sector records remain chaotic and regulations governing the management and disposal of public records are flouted by many Civil Servants. The article concludes by suggesting that the time has now come for the National Archives to focus on the management of the entire life cycle of records rather than managing only the archival preservation stage.

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Early history of Kenya National Archives

The Kenya National Archives and Documentation Services was first established by an Act of Parliament in 1965. Prior to that date colonial administration had operated a small archives repository in Nairobi. Musembi (1982a) argues that the failure to evolve an effective archives service in the country can be attributed to lack of interest by colonial administrators. Nathan Fedha, the first African archivist, who succeeded Derek Charman in 1964 as Chief Archivist in Kenya, continued in Charman's footsteps and nothing major happened except the collection of district and provincial records. Fedha was replaced by Dr Maina Kagombe in 1974. During Kagombe's period, the Kenya National Archives underwent a period of uncontrolled growth, and its responsibilities came to include a wide range of non-archival functions (Walford, 1982a, p. 1). Ian Maclean, an Australian records management expert who spent six months in Kenya as a Unesco consultant in 1978, was:

> ... astonished at the number and range of objectives and programmes postulated by the Chief Archivist for the Kenya National Archives (Maclean, 1978, p. 4).

He noted that, apart from conventionally accepted public archives and records management functions, the Chief Archivist had envisaged programmes for the retrieval of migrated archives, collection of oral traditions, the preservation of the freedom tree, establishment of a documentation centre, a programme for the preservation of sites and monuments and the establishment of audio-visual archives. He observed that:

> ... the only caveat to be made is that the original and essential but less publicity-catching activities in the records and archives management field must not be starved of their necessary share of resources of space, finance and management support (Maclean, 1978, p. 4).

Maclean came to the conclusion that no records management programme would succeed in Kenya without proper emphasis being placed on the responsibilities of the various arms and offices of government (Maclean, 1978, p. 2).

Maclean's fears proved correct. As a result of the proliferation of these non-archival and

records management functions, the Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service was unable to assist in the development of records management programmes, within the government. This period of uncontrolled growth came to an end in 1981 following the dismissal of Kagombe from the service. The government then invited John Walford, a Unesco consultant from the UK, to visit Kenya. His terms of reference were to:

- Evaluate all the functions currently being performed by the Kenya National Archives and make an assessment of their effectiveness.
- Recommend to the Kenya government which functions are relevant to the National Archives and which are not, taking into consideration the legal basis under which the department operates at present and the need for amendment, if any.
- Examine the possibility of establishing new divisions in order to facilitate the preservation of some of the records which have been overlooked, e.g. films and map archives.
- Assess the personnel requirements for each relevant division, the number and their professional qualifications.
- Evaluate user services and public relations of the department.
- Review the space utilization within the archives headquarters, particularly the present and future storage (space) requirements.
- Recommend to the government of Kenya the best way in which the archives can be linked with other institutions concerned with the preservation of cultural materials.
- Submit to Unesco, within one month after completion of the mission, a typewritten report encompassing the findings on the above and a summary of recommendations (Walford, 1982a).

The above requirements were later modified to include a review of the organizational structure of the department in terms of chains of command, the organization of archival operations into divisions and the deployment of staff and management of records in the custody of the Kenya National Archives.

Walford argued that the ambitious programmes initiated by Kagombe were already having adverse effects on the performance of the Kenya National Archives. He also noted that a large number of graduate staff and para-professionals were engaged in non-archival functions. At that time, the senior and mid-level staff at the Kenya National Archives were distributed as shown in Table I.

Walford (1982b, p. 6) came to the conclusion that:

> ... partly as a result of the proliferation of functions and resources which have diverted attention and resources away from essential functions and partly because methods for dealing with archives as opposed to the storage of non-current records have never been adequately developed, the Kenya National Archives is failing to carry out its essential and non-essential functions effectively.

Following the acceptance by the government of Walford's report, Kagombe who had been seen by many as Kenya National Archives empire builder was relieved of his duties. David Lyle, a documentalist from the UK was appointed to act as Chief Archivist, but was soon replaced by Musila Musembi.

Although no evidence was forthcoming to show that the Chief Archivist had misappropriated public funds, nonetheless he was still retired "in the public interest". Dr Kagombe must, however, be credited for initiating the collection of oral traditions country-wide, an elaborate recruitment programme of new graduates, an excellent training programme which saw several graduates proceeding for further training in the field of archives and records management, the construction of a permanent stand at the Agricultural Society's Show Ground in Nairobi, establishing a documentation centre and facilitating the organization of the Round Table Conference of the International Council on Archives in Nairobi in 1978. The period also witnessed the beginning of the retrieval of Kenya's migrated archives from the UK and North America, and a massive publicity campaign towards enhancing the image of the small and relatively unknown National Archives. This same period also saw the movement of the National Archives from the basement of Jogoo House "A" to its present location at the Old Kenya Commercial Bank Building along Moi Avenue in down-town Nairobi. This period

Table I Distribution of staff working at the Kenya National Archives in 1982 (Walford, 1982b, p. 6)

Section	Total staff	Graduates	Para-professionals
Records management	36	5	9
Archives administration	35	5	9
Private and foreign	9	3	3
Microfilming and conservation	12	–	4
Central government library	13	3	2
Murumbi Africana	11	–	5
Audio-visual archives	5	–	2
Oral tradition	4	4	–
Documentation	6	5	–
Art gallery	10	–	–
Sites and monuments	–	–	–
Total	141	25	34

Source: Walford, 1982b, p. 6

might truly be referred to as "the golden age of the Kenya National Archives" when funds were readily available. There is no doubt that the National Archives had embarked on a programme aimed at transforming itself from an insignificant government department to a key player in the collection and preservation of the national cultural heritage. What were then considered as non-essential functions of the department would be seen today as major areas of interest for archivists and records managers. For instance, the department was criticised for its oral tradition programme, but how do we give the voiceless a voice in our history if their activities, which were not documented in official records, are not collected? Another criticism levelled against the department was in the construction of a public gallery at Jamhuri Park, Nairobi, where annual International Agricultural Shows are held. Today, the world over, archival institutions are striving very hard to take the archives to the people, yet the efforts of the department at that time were interpreted narrowly as empire building by the then Chief Archivist.

The management of registries

The Kenya Public Archives and Documentation Service Act of 1965 states that the director of the National Archives shall:

> ... be responsible for and have charge of the service and of all the public archives and shall take all practical steps for the proper housing, control and preservation of all public archives and public records.

It further empowers the:

> ... Director or his nominee to examine and advise on the care, preservation, custody and control of any public records.

Although the Act assigns the responsibility for managing public records to the Director of the National Archives, it does not specify at what stage in the records management cycle the director should assume this responsibility. Most government ministries, departments and parastatals assumed that it was the responsibility of the archives staff to deal with all aspects of records except current records.

The Act further stipulates that the Director of the National Archives may:

> ... approve any institution, whether private or otherwise as a place wherein may be deposited, housed or preserved either permanently or temporarily any public archives, or records which have been declared public records.

The relationship between the Kenya National Archives and various ministries and departments has not always between cordial. In many instances the advisory role of the Kenya National Archives has been ignored. For instance, in a 1983 report to the acting Chief Archivist, a Kenya National Archives Records Management Survey Team reporting on the former East Africa Community records expressed dissatisfaction with the manner in which a railway official had denied the team access to the records. The team called upon the Chief Archivist to invoke Section 4(2) of the Public Archives Act (1965) which states:

It shall be the duty of every person responsible for or having custody of any public records to afford to the Director or any officer of the service authorised by him reasonable access to such public records and appropriate facilities for the examination and selection thereof and comply without any undue delay with any lawful directions concerning assemblage, safe-keeping and preservation of public records, or the transfer of such public records to the National Archives to form part of the National Archives.

It was left to the acting Chief Archivist to review and decide whether an infringement of the Act had taken place.

The reasons which have hindered the development of an effective and efficient records management programme in many Kenyan public institutions must therefore be sought from two perspectives – problems within the public institutions themselves and the Kenya National Archives' failure to effectively play its role as the main adviser to the government on the management of public records. Beatrice Githaka, a lecturer in archives and records management at Moi University, Kenya, argues that the major constraints hampering the development of archival services in Kenya should be attributed to quality and quantity of staff, brain drain, inadequate funds, lack of standardized registry systems and apathy among top government officials (Githaka, 1996).

Perhaps the poor state of record keeping practices in Kenya can be explained by:

- failure by senior management to establish acceptable records management goals and practices;
- failure to hire competent and qualified staff in the area of archives and records management;
- failure to provide adequate storage facilities, thus causing registry staff to lose morale and motivation;
- failure to encourage training in the area of archives and records management;
- failure to provide financial and administrative support to those involved in registry work;
- failure to provide close supervision of those engaged in registry work;
- failure to implement various recommendations on the management of records; and
- emphasis on the introduction of information and communication

technologies as a means of solving information management problems at the expense of developing paper-based records management systems.

Although the above reasons might have contributed significantly toward the National Archives' inability to manage public records in registries, the greatest weakness might have been with the 1965 Archives Act itself. This had first been noticed in 1978 by Maclean (1978, p. 2), who recommended that Section 6, which deals with the responsibilities of public offices, should be amended, arguing that:

> ... the main Act, though quite admirable, is an Act for a conservative Public Archives organization and obviously needs broadening to cover the wider objectives of the National Archives. In particular, no records management programme will succeed without proper emphasis being placed on the responsibilities of the various arms and offices of Government.

Five years later, the Kenya National Archives' own Records Management Team, in a report to the Chief Archivist (Kenya National Archives, 1983, pp. 3-4), highlighted the same issues, pointing out that:

> ... most of the creators of these records are extremely ignorant of the role played by the Kenya National Archives in respect of non-current records. They are totally uninformed about the Public Archives Act and the need to properly organise and maintain the closed records. They either regard Archives as a mere dumping ground or else they are quite suspicious about the survey team's intentions and, therefore, very cautious at the time of contact ... As a matter of urgency it is now suggested that educative archival workshops or seminars should be organised by the Kenya National Archives to embrace all the creators of the public records with particular reference to corporations under review ... It is therefore imperative that the Kenya National Archives devises effective methods of eradicating the general ignorance, laxity and carelessness by the creators of the records and instil into them the necessity for proper management of non-current records for posterity.

It would, however, be wrong to lay too much blame on the Kenya National Archives for the many problems that were noticeable in the management of public sector records in the country. Many of the problems which the Kenya National Archives was being called upon to solve were not unique to Kenya. Most developing countries face similar

problems. It might even be argued that most of the professionals in Kenya were ill-trained for the tasks they were expected to perform.

In many developing countries there has been this assumption that national archives will receive regular transfers of records, or at worst they will have to deal with a backlog accumulation, and the training of archivists has always reflected this perspective. Archivists have not been expected to undertake any systems analysis of organisations which created the records. Nor have they been expected to deal with such issues as the re-structuring of registries to ensure that records pass through their life cycle smoothly. Yet, these are problems which faced the Kenyan archivists. Until recently, the common practice for the Kenya National Archives has been to conduct a records survey and identify valuable records for transfer to the Kenya National Archives and ephemeral material for disposal. In most cases, the National Archives team prepares a records transmittal list and transfers the records to the Archives.

Realising the weaknesses inherent in managing public sector records, the Kenya government embarked on various measures which it thought could assist in rectifying these problems. Some of the measures which the government introduced are discussed below.

First, in 1985 when implementing some of the recommendations of the 1978 Maclean Report, the Office of the President issued a circular defining the role of the National Archives in the management of records prior to their transfer to the National Archives. The circular, which was addressed to the Attorney-General, Permanent Secretaries, Heads of Departments and Chief Executives of Parastatal Bodies and Local Authorities, lamented that in the past some important documents had been destroyed or lost through unsatisfactory record-keeping practices and warned that the situation would not to be allowed to continue. It went on further to clarify the role that each record-creating office was expected to play, saying:

> Government Ministries and Departments must provide appropriate accommodation for their non-current records in order to avoid loss, misplacement or possible destruction of such documents. A proper record shall be kept for

such records for control and appraisal purposes (Permanent Secretary, 1985).

Second, the government attempted to address record keeping practices in the country through the revision of the scheme of service for executive officers to include responsibility for the management of registry services. Specifically, an Executive Officer II is responsible for:

- organising and supervising of registry services to ensure efficient despatch of government business by action officers;
- sorting out and classifying documents for filing;
- reviewing and up-dating filing systems and the files index for efficient repository and retrieval of information – this may include responsibility for organising and setting up departmental registries;
- managing records which include the care and maintenance of records and control of the quality of records, that is case files, reports, documents, and so on;
- disposing of obsolete records, including the development of time schedules for retirement or disposal of dead records to the archives or for destruction;
- ensuring the security of information and records in the registry; and
- supervising of registry staff including their training on the job (Republic of Kenya, 1987, p. 4).

Despite the great emphasis laid down by the scheme on the role of executive officers, no mention is made of their training in the area of archives and records management. For direct appointment to the post of Executive Officer II:

> ... the candidate must be in possession of a degree in any of the social sciences from a Kenyan university ... or possess such other qualification as may be adjudged equivalent to a degree (Republic of Kenya, 1987, p. 5).

An Executive Officer is charged with responsibilities for managing registry services. Appointments to these posts are made on a promotion basis from Executive Officer II or the candidate:

> ... must have passed Part II of the Public Certified Secretaries (Kenya) Examination.

Third, the syllabus for the Proficiency Examination for Clerical Officers was amended in 1990, making it a mandatory

requirement for clerical officers to have basic knowledge in the following areas:

- registry services;
- filing and classification systems;
- indexing; and
- records disposal procedures: the Public Archives Act, the Records Disposal Act, and Financial Orders (Republic of Kenya, 1990, p. 7).

Although clerical officers are expected to take proficiency examinations, of which 25 per cent of the total mark is derived directly from knowledge in records operations, no formal training is required in these areas.

Fourth, in 1989 the government issued a new circular aimed at re-enforcing the provisions stipulated in the Public Archives Act of 1965 to ensure that reports, correspondence files, etc. are properly managed from the time of their creation to the time of their disposal. The implementation of the circular was to be monitored by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs and National Heritage, under which the National Archives falls. There is no evidence to suggest that the Kenya National Archives is vigorously monitoring this aspect, as there are several reports that are yet to be transferred to the National Archives for safe custody.

The circular was important in that it required ministries, departments and parastatal bodies to establish libraries or documentation centres without further delay. These documentation centres were to be linked to the District Information and Documentation Centres and were to operate in close liaison with the Kenya National Archives. It was hoped that they would provide a comprehensive means of acquiring, controlling and maintaining reports and other documents received or created in the government and in other government agencies. This was considered to be an essential condition to underpin research and policy development (Permanent Secretary, 1989). Moreover, the circular sought to establish, in the Civil Service and in other government agencies, the fact that information is a resource that is required for effective planning and decision making. The Kenya National Archives was selected to be the co-ordinator of this vital programme and this is reflected in the amendments to the

Public Archives Act in 1990. Furthermore, the circular was aimed at streamlining procedures for the disposal of semi-current and non-current records. It pointed out that, where records were no longer required for administrative or other reasons, arrangements were to be made with the Kenya National Archives for their disposal or transfer to the National Archives (Permanent Secretary, 1989).

Finally, the government sought to strengthen its records management programme by amending the Public Archives Act. The Public Archives (Amendment) Act 1990 requires that the Kenya National Archives should not only be involved with the preservation of records but also assist in the establishment of documentation centres in government ministries, departments, parastatals and local authorities. It requires the Kenya National Archives to:

> ... initiate appropriate measures for the establishment and development of such centres.

Yet, despite all these efforts, a new approach is still required if the department is to be effective. Hall, in a study on the operations and functions of the Kenya National Archives, observed that:

> ... the present approach of scheduling only files for permanent preservation to the Kenya National Archives' custody, seeking permission to destroy ephemeral material after listing, is a process which needs to be repeated time and again (Hall, 1990, p. 17).

He suggested that:

> ... in order to improve efficiency a new concept of records management needs to be adopted which assumes that records should be scheduled for retention or destruction in the main when they are current (Hall, 1990, p. 10).

Scheduling records is one of the key elements of a modern records management programme. But schedules can only be useful if the records were created in a manner which enables the schedules to be applied easily. Unless records are organised into clearly identifiable series, records retention schedules cannot be developed. The time has now come for the Kenya National Archives to re-assess its position and determine if it is not time for it to embark on a programme of managing the entire life cycle of records from creation to disposition as opposed to only dealing with the archival preservation stage. Experience gained in Botswana, The Gambia, Ghana and

lately Tanzania indicates that there are enormous benefits to be gained by the National Archives in managing the entire records life cycle.

Retrieval of Kenya's migrated archives

Perhaps among all African countries, Kenya is the only country which embarked upon and executed a migrated archives retrieval programme successfully. The need to locate and retrieve Kenyan records held overseas stems from several factors. First, until the eve of independence, the country lacked a strong archival institution. During the colonial period, the collection and preservation of public records were accorded very low priority and thus many would-be public archives were lost. Second, in 1939, the then colonial secretariat in Nairobi was gutted by fire, destroying virtually all the records held by the government. Third, Kenya was among the few African countries which gained independence after a long armed struggle involving a group commonly referred to as the Mau Mau. On the eve of independence the imperial government opted to remove certain records from the country, arguing that it was not common practice for one government to hand over its records to a new government. Obviously, this was a direct attempt to hide the atrocities committed by the imperial government to a newly independent state.

Efforts to retrieve Kenya's records from the UK began in 1963 when a cabinet committee was established to consider ways and means of preserving Kenyan records. The Chief Archivist raised the issue again in 1967, but at this juncture it was still not possible to establish the volume and nature of records held outside the country. A broad-based inter-ministerial committee was established in 1973, which clearly delineated the boundaries of the programme. It was, however, not until 1978 that the first survey of records held in the UK was conducted. This was followed by yet another survey in 1979 (see Thurston (1991) for a complete report on Kenya East Africa sources held in the UK. A final survey was carried out in the USA in 1980, after which the government decided to open an office at the Kenya High Commission in London with the sole objective of acquiring microfilm copies of records held in various institutions in the UK. By the time the office

was closed in 1990, several microfilm copies, photographs, photocopies and original manuscripts had been obtained through purchase and donation. The entire project was fully funded by the government and has contributed significantly to the information resources held locally in the country (see Musembi (1982b) for a full account of Kenya's migrated archives programme).

Records disposal

The disposal of records in Kenya is regulated by the provisions contained in the Public Archives Act (1965, Ch. 19). Section 7(1) of the Act lays down the criteria to be used in the disposal of public records. The laid-down procedure for seeking authority to destroy public records is as follows:

> ... a department wishing to dispose of its valueless records must compile and submit a list of such records to the Director of the National Archives, who will seek authority to dispose of the records from the Minister for Home Affairs and National Heritage. However, before seeking authority from the Minister he must satisfy himself that the records to be destroyed are either duplicates or records which are no longer required for administrative, legal, financial or other purposes. Once formal authorisation has been obtained from the Minister, the actual destruction of the records can commence.

In a recent memorandum from the Office of the President, the heads of departments and public corporations were reminded that failure to follow the laid-down procedures outlined above constitutes a criminal offence. The memorandum further went on to state:

> ... in the event that a Government Ministry or Department considers that particular records are valueless or for some other reason no longer needed for administrative purposes, the Director of the National Archives shall be notified without delay and requested to arrange for their appraisal and disposal. No public valueless records should be kept longer than necessary as this will result in wastage of public funds through uneconomical usage of office space and equipment (Kenya National Archives, 1985).

This article has demonstrated that in some offices this procedure is not being adhered to. This is a clear violation of the law. In the past when the attention of the Director of the Kenya National Archives has been drawn to this problem he has opted to deal with it administratively, arguing that "it is difficult

for one government department to prosecute a sister department" (Kenya National Archives, 1994).

The disposal of accounting records is governed by financial orders issued by the government. Sections 26 and 27 authorise accounting officers to destroy certain financial records after agreed retention periods. However, no records that are subject to audit queries may be destroyed under these financial orders (*Financial Orders*, 1968, p. 43). Certain financial records with archival value are supposed to be preserved.

Perhaps the most problematic area relating to the disposal of records is very evident in personnel records. The question of managing personnel records has been a subject of considerable discussion in Kenya. Each time the Kenya National Archives conducts records surveys the question of how to deal with personnel records has featured prominently. The main problem raised in relation to the disposal of personnel records has often been the payment of pensions. More often than not management at various levels has been reluctant to dispose of any of the records of its former employees for fear of losing vital data that might be needed in processing pension payments. This causes congestion of files in the record stores.

The issue of managing personnel records is compounded by the fact that it is common practice in many offices to maintain at least three different files for each officer at the same time. An open file is held by the head of the employing department and another at the Ministry headquarters, documents relating to normal day-to-day matters, such as leave forms, sick sheets, salary sheets, etc. In addition, a separate confidential file is held for each employee at the Directorate of Personnel Management in Nairobi containing details such as appointments, promotions and disciplinary record. More often than not none of these files contains complete information of an employee. Hence, on retirement all three files have to be assembled in order to collate the information on any one employee. This is no mean task for the officers charged with the processing of pensions. Even after the pensions have been settled, personnel files are never destroyed. In one office that was surveyed, a general guideline relating to the disposal of personnel records was that:

- all non-essential documents such as sick sheets, leave forms, etc. should be

removed from the files and the remaining correspondence should be retained for three years after termination of employment. The retention period for this class of records was extended to eight years in 1985;
- personal files for all living pensioners should be retained as long as the individuals were alive;
- personal files for deceased employees and pensioners should be retained for a period of five years or until the estate of the deceased was fully administered;
- personnel files of employees who left the service without retirement benefits should be retained for five years; and
- employees leaving the service without retiring benefits should be retained for five years (Honer, 1975).

Efforts to harmonise retention periods for personnel records led to the issuance of a circular approved by the Directorate of Personnel Management and the Kenya National Archives, recommending retention of personnel records, as indicated in Table II (Directorate of Personnel Management, 1991).

Electronic records

The Kenya National Archives Act (1965) defines public records as:

> ... the records of any Government Department, and of any Commission, Office, Board or any other body established by or under an Act of Parliament.

According to this definition, electronic records form part of the public records. The introduction of various computerization projects in the public sector has resulted in large quantities of records being created electronically. To date, no country-wide survey has been undertaken to establish how records created electronically are being managed. The need to undertake such a survey cannot be overstated. Whereas in the past records were only created in paper formats, increasingly government institutions are creating records in electronic formats. As the introduction of modern information and communication technologies is a welcome development, the underlying issues relating to the management of electronic records remain yet to be addressed. Many of the attendant

Table II Recommended retention periods for personnel files in government offices

Type of file	Recommended retention period
Serving employees	Retain
Living pensioners	Retain
Deceased employees	Destroy three years after death
Employees who leave the service without a pension or retiring benefits or who resign	15 years after the file is closed except for files of officers who reached the level of a head of division or above or held a statutory appointment which may be kept permanently

problems associated with electronic records such as the legal admissibility of electronic records, the speed at which they can be altered without trace, their dependence on hardware and software which are constantly changing, etc. are all issues yet to be resolved. Moreover, there appears to be some misconception amongst policy and decision makers that the introduction of modern information technologies would solve many of their information needs.

The introduction of electronic records has also had a major shift in the way registries are viewed. The link between registries and the new information technology departments has not been clearly defined. In the past, the role of the registry was quite apparent as it was placed within the supportive units of the office. As David Stephens has rightly observed:

> . . . this situation was not too bad during that era, because business record keeping was not technology-driven. Today, however, this organizational placement poorly positions the records management discipline to make a successful transition from managing visible media to managing the electronic record-keeping systems of the present and the future (Stephens, 1998, p. 6).

A similar conclusion was arrived at by Kimberly Barata and others when they wrote, arguing:

> . . . introducing ICT solutions under present conditions increases the vulnerability of official and public records. External consultants and government ICT staff often ignore the statutory obligation of the National Archives to manage records, whether they are paper-based or electronic (Barata et al., 2001, p. 36).

The problem of managing electronic records is made even worse by lack of trained records personnel. The few that are trained in Europe and North America:

> . . . return with skills that are considered rare and therefore highly marketable in the private sector. As a result those staff seldom remain in the public service (Barata et al., 2001, p. 3).

Kenya is no exception to some of these problems.

Although the introduction of information and communication technologies in government ministries and departments might have been hailed as a major step towards improved information-processing provision, it has had negative effects on the development of an efficient records management programme. First, the introduction of ICTs has led to an increase in the generation of paper records, especially accounting records. Second, the introduction of computers and the incorrect assumption that automation is the only way of providing quick and accurate information for decision making, leading to a neglect of the management of paper-based records, which still constitute the vast majority of recorded information in the country. Finally, no efforts have been made to link the use of computers with an efficient records management programme. As a result, while many departments have embraced the use of computers, registries have been left to struggle with unqualified registry clerks, thus contributing to many of the problems discussed above.

Conclusion

The article has outlined the major issues involved in managing public sector records in Kenya. There is no doubt that there is a need for greater co-operation between the Kenya National Archives, ministries and departments if an effective records management programme is to succeed

throughout the public service. Should this not happen, the present procedures adopted by the Kenya National Archives, which involve conducting records surveys, sorting out records, compiling lists and leaving the records in the same stores, will have to be repeated again and again. This piecemeal, bottom-up approach needs to be changed. The "diplomatic procedure", which the Kenya National Archives has been using to solve records management problems, does not work. The programme has failed simply because the Kenya National Archives has attempted to manage records without ensuring that all the necessary elements for an effective programme are in place. It is for this reason that this article proposes that the Kenya National Archives should be responsible for the management of records as they pass through their entire life cycle.

The performance of registry clerks is further hampered by the lack of any operating manuals. Training is on-the-job. However, little if any training is given in the records management field. It is common practice to transfer registry clerks from one department to another. No scheme of service for registry clerks is in place and the only way registry clerks climb up the administrative ladder is by joining the executive line. It is time for the Kenya National Archives to adopt new approaches to managing public sector records. The need to manage records effectively and efficiently cannot be overstated. One of the main objectives of the new government which came to power towards the end of December 2002 is to fight corruption in the public service.

Poor record keeping has been cited as one of the major areas through which corruption has been thriving. Is this an indication of the National Archives' failure to play its supervisory role effectively? Perhaps the time has come for them to assume a leading role in auditing records management practices throughout the entire Civil Service, comparable with what the Auditor-General's office is presently doing. Failure to do so may result in the National Archives remaining a purely cultural institution, with no meaningful role to play in assisting the government to achieve its objective of being transparent and accountable to the public through effective management of its vast quantities of information holdings. Examples abound within the African continent (for example, Botswana, The Gambia, Ghana and Tanzania) where national archives have been transformed into national records services with responsibilities for managing the entire records life cycle. Why should not Kenya be the next country to follow this approach, which has yielded considerable results where it has been adopted?

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