

# Assessment on the Use of Keyword Classification Scheme in the Management of Local Government Records in Tanzania: A Case Study of Singida Regional Administrative Secretary Office

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## Abstract

*This study examined how the Keyword Filing Classification Scheme is used to manage local government records at the Singida Regional Administrative Secretary's Office in Tanzania. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected from 20 purposively selected participants through interviews, document review, and observation, and then analysed thematically. Findings showed that staff generally understood the scheme and used it as the main tool for classifying, storing, and retrieving records. It improved file organisation and information accessibility, but implementation was uneven across departments. Problems included outdated keyword lists, inconsistent application, limited integration with electronic records systems, inadequate training, insufficient staffing, and weak technological support. Compliance with legal and regulatory requirements was moderate, while institutional guidelines and monitoring mechanisms remained limited. The study concludes that the scheme remains important for effective records management, but its performance can be improved through regular training, periodic updating of classification structures, stronger compliance measures, and greater integration with electronic records management systems. These changes would help reduce misfiling, speed retrieval, and support more consistent record governance across the office and related local government units.*

**Keywords:** *Keyword Filing Classification Scheme, Records Management, Local Government Records, Records Classification, Records Retrieval.*

## 1.0 Introduction

In many developing countries, including those with colonial legacies, records management systems remain weak, fragmented, or ineffective, often due to persistent capacity gaps in handling active and semi-active records (Rutta & Ndenje-Sichalwe, 2021). In Tanzania, the government has undertaken public service reforms to address these challenges and enhance the efficiency of service delivery. Key initiatives include restructuring registries across ministries, independent departments, Regional Administrative Secretaries' (RAS) offices, and local authorities by mandating the adoption of the keyword filing classification system (URT, 2011; Registry Procedures Manual, 2007). This functional-based system

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replaces outdated hierarchical or thematic filing approaches, aiming to improve file organisation, retrieval, and overall records control in public offices.

Despite these policy directives, the extent to which local government authorities, particularly at district, municipal, and city levels, have effectively implemented and utilised the keyword filing classification system remains unclear. Non-compliance or partial adoption risks serious consequences, including fragmentation and loss of records, misfiling, duplication of files on similar subjects, accumulation of backlogs, increased costs for file searches, and inefficient use of storage space (Sospeter, 2020). Poor records management not only hampers administrative efficiency and economic development but also fosters corruption, delays decision-making, and undermines accountability in public service delivery (Manase et al., 2025).

Recent studies highlight ongoing challenges in Tanzania's public-sector records management, including continued reliance on paper-based systems, inadequate resources, insufficient guidance from the Records and Archives Management Department (RAMD), low prioritisation of records functions, and limited integration with electronic systems (Ngudungi, 2023; Manase et al., 2025; Rutta, 2020). While some research has examined broader records management issues in local authorities (Athman, 2019; Sospeter, 2020), few have specifically investigated the implementation and practical use of the keyword filing classification system. Notably, no comprehensive study has focused on its application at the Singida Regional Administrative Secretary's Office (SRASO), leaving a significant knowledge gap. This study addresses this gap by examining awareness, current utilisation, regulatory compliance, and challenges associated with the keyword filing classification scheme at SRASO.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Literature Review**

This study was guided by the Big Bucket Theory in Records Management. The Big Bucket Theory was proposed in 2003 by the United States National Archives and Records Administration. The theory explains that large volumes of records can be grouped into series, or "buckets," so that records with similar characteristics are placed together to facilitate easy retrieval and use (Matlala & Ncube, 2024). The resulting group of similar records, which may contain multiple individual files or documents, constitutes a "Big Bucket." In the records management context, an alternative interpretation refers to this grouping as a records series. Such groupings may be based on time periods, business functions, legal and regulatory classifications, or any other criterion that aligns with the organisation's operational needs and complies with applicable laws (Bizi et al., 2025).

The application of the Big Bucket Theory to records management, particularly the keyword classification scheme, provides a structured framework for describing the different types of files maintained in an office. It specifies how files are identified, where they should be stored, how they should be indexed for retrieval, and the approved disposition procedures for each file. In the keyword classification system, records derived from an organisation's functions and activities are systematically grouped into their respective series (Manase et

al., 2025). Importantly, the Big Bucket approach requires no modification to the keyword classification scheme because both systems share fundamental concepts of grouping, classifying, identifying, and retaining records to support organisational functions and activities.

Consequently, the Big Bucket Theory served as the theoretical lens for assessing whether the keyword classification scheme implemented at the Singida Regional Administrative Secretary's Office (SRASO) is consistent with the theory's core requirements. The theory enabled the researcher to evaluate the system's usefulness in managing records that support organisational functions, activities, and transactions, while also identifying the attendant challenges associated with its use. Furthermore, the theory guided the formulation of the study objectives by focusing on the effective utilisation of the scheme in performing various functions at SRASO. It also helped pinpoint areas of weakness and propose strategies to enhance the effective implementation of the Keyword Classification Scheme. In this regard, all data for the study were collected and analysed in alignment with the principles of the Big Bucket Theory at the Singida Regional Administrative Secretary's Office (SRASO).

## **2.2 Empirical Literature Review**

The Keyword Classification Scheme (KCS) is an important records management tool used by local government authorities to organise records by function, activity, and subject, using standardised keywords. The scheme facilitates the systematic creation, classification, storage, retrieval, and disposal of records, thereby improving efficiency and accountability in public administration. By assigning records to predefined keywords, local governments can reduce misfiling, enhance access to information, and support compliance with records management policies and legal requirements. Effective classification also provides a framework for access control, retention scheduling, and records disposal, ensuring that records are managed throughout their lifecycle.

### **2.2.1 Staff Awareness of Keyword Records Management System**

In the Philippines, Gesmundo et al. (2022) found that administrative staff at Laguna State Polytechnic University reported using records management strategies such as filing, backup and recovery, and tracking and monitoring. The study recommended further training to strengthen staff proficiency. In Ghana, Adusei and Mensah Senyah (2022) reported that 84% of staff at the Offinso Municipal Assembly were aware of records management policies and procedures. Work experience showed a positive association with records management systems, and the lack of ICT infrastructure remained a major challenge. In Tanzania, Newa and Mwantimwa (2019) found that records staff were aware of e-records management determinants but still faced barriers such as inadequate skills, weak infrastructure, and limited support. Mollel and Mungwabi (2023) similarly reported moderate awareness of archival services, with ICT constraints and weak finding aids reducing effective access. Overall, these studies indicate that staff awareness exists but is not yet strong enough to guarantee effective system use without continuous sensitisation, capacity building, and technological support.

### **2.2.2 The Current State of Using the Keyword Records Management System**

A study by Abdullah et al. (2021) in Malaysian public institutions found that keyword search functionalities embedded in electronic records management systems significantly improved records retrieval and information access, although system utilisation varied according to staff competencies and technological support. In Africa, Marwa (2024) reported that many organisations within the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) countries had adopted electronic records management frameworks with keyword retrieval capabilities; however, implementation remained constrained by inadequate legal frameworks, infrastructure limitations, and insufficient technical skills among records personnel. In Tanzania, Clemence et al. (2023) found that higher learning institutions had adopted electronic records systems that support record indexing and keyword-based retrieval, yet paper-based records continued to dominate many operations due to limited system utilisation and inadequate user capacity.

### **2.2.3 Compliance of Legal and Regulatory Framework in Implementing Keyword Records Management System**

In Malaysia, Mohammed and Yusof (2021) found that electronic records management effectiveness was higher when records systems were implemented in line with national archives legislation, information governance policies, and records retention requirements. In Africa, Marwa (2024) reported that although many countries within the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) had enacted laws to support electronic records management, compliance remained inconsistent because of outdated legislation, weak enforcement mechanisms, and limited institutional capacity. In Tanzania, Maturo (2025), in a study at the Workers Compensation Fund, found that compliance with organisational policies and national regulations significantly influenced the effectiveness of Electronic Records Management Systems, emphasising the need for stronger regulatory enforcement and regular policy reviews. Similarly, Dotto and Mwantimwa (2024) reported that ineffective legal frameworks and weak implementation strategies constrained the adoption and utilisation of electronic records systems in Tanzanian courts.

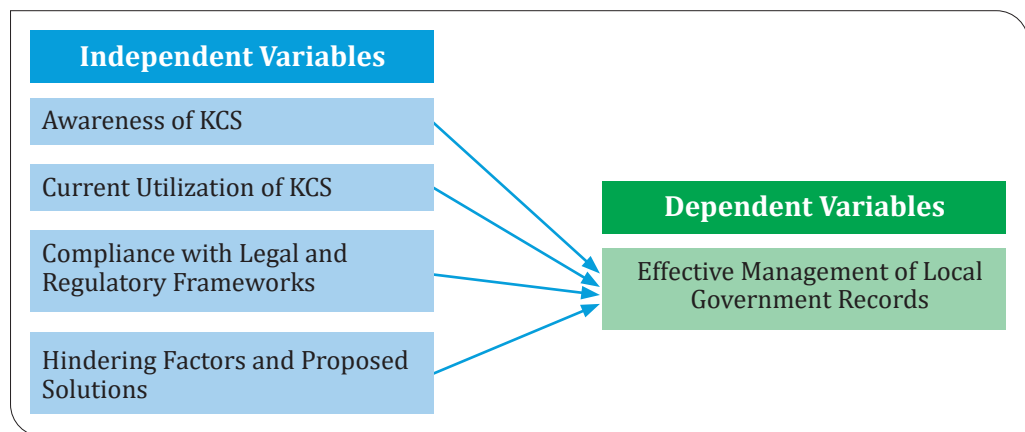
### **2.2.4 Factors Hindering Implementation of the Keyword Records Management System in LGAs**

In Asia, Gelashvili (2020), in a study of Electronic Documents and Records Management Systems (EDRMS) in Georgia, found that inadequate ICT infrastructure, resistance to organisational change, insufficient user training, and weak institutional support constrained system implementation. The study recommended continuous staff training, stronger management commitment, and investment in digital infrastructure to enhance system adoption. In Africa, Oseni (2024) examined e-service implementation in Nigerian local governments and reported that limited financial resources, inadequate technical skills, poor technological infrastructure, and weak policy implementation were major barriers to effective electronic records and information systems. The study proposed increased budgetary allocation, capacity-building programmes, and strengthened regulatory support as key solutions. In Tanzania, Pessa (2022) found that Local Government Authorities faced challenges, including the absence of clear e-records management strategies, inadequate

involvement of records professionals in system development, weak legal and managerial support, and low prioritisation of records management functions. The study recommended the formulation of comprehensive records management policies, greater involvement of records personnel, enhanced legal protection for electronic records, and increased managerial and financial support for records management initiatives.

### 2.3 Conceptual Framework

Drawing on the Big Bucket Theory, the conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between four independent variables (awareness of the keyword filing classification system, current utilisation of the system, compliance with legal and regulatory frameworks, and factors hindering implementation) and the dependent variable (effective management of local government records). The framework assumes that higher awareness, effective utilisation, and greater compliance contribute positively to records management outcomes, while implementation barriers negatively affect the effectiveness of records management practices at the Singida Regional Administrative Secretary's Office (SRASO).



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework, Based on the "Big Bucket" Theoretical Framework**

Source: Field Data (2026)

## 3.0 Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore awareness, utilisation, compliance, and challenges associated with the use of the Keyword Filing Classification Scheme at the Singida Regional Administrative Secretary's Office (SRASO). This approach was considered appropriate because it enabled an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices in implementing the scheme.

The study involved 20 purposively selected participants, comprising records personnel, action officers, human resource officers, and other key staff directly involved in records management at SRASO. Participants were selected for their knowledge, experience, and involvement in the management and use of records within the organisation.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, documentary review, and participant observation to ensure methodological triangulation. In-depth interviews provided detailed insights into participants' experiences and perceptions, while documentary review and observation enabled verification of records management practices and procedures.

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, in which data were transcribed, coded, categorised, and organised into themes aligned with the study objectives. The credibility and trustworthiness of the findings were enhanced through triangulation of data sources and methods, member checking, and the maintenance of detailed field notes. Ethical considerations were observed by obtaining institutional permission, securing informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and properly citing all sources of information.

## **4.0 Results**

### **4.1 Demographic Profile**

This study involved 20 purposively selected participants from the Singida Regional Administrative Secretary's Office (SRASO). The participants comprised records personnel, action officers, human resource officers, and other key staff directly involved in the creation, classification, storage, retrieval, and management of records. Participants were selected based on their experience, responsibilities, and knowledge of the Keyword Filing Classification Scheme and the organisation's records management practices.

The participants represented different age groups, educational backgrounds, and years of work experience, thereby providing diverse perspectives on the implementation and use of the keyword filing classification system. Most participants had served in the public service for several years and possessed substantial experience in handling organisational records. Their varied professional backgrounds enabled the study to obtain rich, detailed information on awareness of the keyword classification scheme, its current utilisation, compliance with legal and regulatory requirements, and the challenges affecting its implementation.

The diversity of participants enhanced the credibility of the findings by ensuring that views were obtained from individuals occupying different positions and performing different functions within the records management process at SRASO. Consequently, the participants' demographic characteristics provided a valuable foundation for understanding the experiences and perceptions presented in the subsequent findings.

### **4.2 Awareness of the Keyword Filing Classification Scheme**

Findings from interviews with records personnel, action officers, and administrative staff at the Singida Regional Administrative Secretary's Office (SRASO) revealed that participants were generally aware of the existence and purpose of the Keyword Filing Classification Scheme. Most participants understood that the scheme classifies records by organisational functions and activities, thereby facilitating the systematic storage, retrieval, and management of records. Participants indicated that their awareness had been acquired through formal training, workplace experience, guidance from senior officers, and exposure to records management procedures implemented within the public service.

Interview responses further revealed that records personnel had a higher level of awareness than non-records staff, owing to their direct involvement in records management activities. Participants noted that awareness of the keyword classification scheme enabled them to retrieve records more efficiently, reduce file duplication, and maintain consistency in records classification. However, some participants observed that newly appointed staff and officers transferred from other institutions often lacked adequate knowledge of the system and required orientation and ongoing training to apply it effectively in their daily responsibilities.

These findings are consistent with recent studies, which emphasise that staff awareness and professional competence are fundamental determinants of effective records management practices. For example, Matlala and Ncube (2024) found that awareness of records management procedures significantly influenced the successful utilisation of records systems in South African public institutions. Similarly, Bizi et al. (2025) reported that employee knowledge and organisational readiness were critical factors affecting the adoption and effective use of records management systems. In the Tanzanian context, Manase et al. (2025) observed that awareness of records management principles among public servants contributes to improved accountability, information accessibility, and service delivery.

Overall, the findings suggest that records staff at SRASO possess a reasonable level of awareness regarding the Keyword Filing Classification Scheme. Nevertheless, continuous capacity-building initiatives, induction programmes for newly recruited staff, and regular refresher training remain necessary to strengthen understanding and ensure consistent application of the scheme across all departments.

#### **4.3 Current State of Using the Keyword Filing Classification Scheme at SRASO**

Findings from interviews and observations revealed that the Keyword Filing Classification Scheme is currently the primary system used for managing records at the Singida Regional Administrative Secretary's Office (SRASO). Participants indicated that the scheme is used to classify, store, and retrieve records based on organisational functions and activities. Most records personnel acknowledged that the system has contributed to improved file organisation and facilitated access to information required for administrative and operational purposes. Participants further noted that the scheme has helped reduce misfiling and has enabled staff to locate records more efficiently than previous classification methods.

Despite its continued use, participants reported that the scheme is not fully effective across all departments. Several interviewees observed inconsistencies in keyword usage, particularly among non-records staff who create and use files in their daily work. Some participants explained that the current keyword list does not adequately reflect emerging functions and activities within the organisation, forcing staff to create new file titles that may not conform to established standards. Observation findings also revealed continued reliance on paper-based record management practices, with limited integration of electronic record management systems.

These findings are consistent with recent studies that highlight the growing use of functional classification systems in public institutions and emphasise the need for continuous improvement. Matlala and Ncube (2024) found that public sector organisations increasingly rely on structured records classification systems to improve records accessibility and administrative efficiency, although challenges related to technological integration remain significant. Similarly, Bizi et al. (2025) reported that many organisations have established records management systems yet continue to experience difficulties related to system modernisation, staff competence, and organisational readiness. In Tanzania, Manase et al. (2025) observed that public institutions have made progress in adopting records management practices, yet challenges related to infrastructure, technology, and procedural consistency continue to affect their effectiveness.

Overall, the findings suggest that while the Keyword Filing Classification Scheme is operational and widely recognised at SRASO, its effectiveness is constrained by outdated classification structures, inconsistent application, and limited integration with electronic records management technologies.

#### **4.4 Compliance with Legal and Regulatory Framework in Implementing the Keyword Filing Classification Scheme**

Interview findings revealed that SRASO has made efforts to implement the Keyword Filing Classification Scheme in accordance with national records management requirements. Participants demonstrated awareness of key regulatory instruments governing records management, including the National Records and Archives Management Policy (2011) and the Registry Procedures Manual (2007). Most interviewees indicated that the keyword classification scheme was adopted as part of government initiatives to improve records organisation, retrieval, accountability, and service delivery within public institutions.

However, participants acknowledged that compliance with legal and regulatory requirements remains only partial. Several respondents reported that the institution's current keyword list has not been updated regularly to reflect changes in organisational functions and activities. Others noted the absence of institution-specific guidelines to supplement national regulations and guide consistent implementation across departments. Interviewees further highlighted that the lack of integration between the keyword classification scheme and electronic records management systems limits the institution's ability to fully comply with contemporary records management standards and government digital transformation initiatives.

Observations during the study confirmed variations in how classification procedures are applied across departments, indicating that regulatory requirements are not consistently implemented. Participants emphasised that, while the organisation complies with the basic requirements for records classification and file management, greater effort is needed to strengthen monitoring, training, and policy implementation. The findings suggest that compliance is influenced not only by regulations but also by resource availability, institutional support, and staff competencies.

These findings align with recent studies emphasising the importance of regulatory compliance in records management. Ilmi and Mayesti (2020) found that compliance with records management standards enhances accountability, information accessibility, and organisational efficiency. Similarly, Matlala and Ncube (2024) reported that adherence to records management policies significantly improves the effectiveness of records systems in public institutions. In Tanzania, Manase et al. (2025) observed that compliance with records management policies remains a challenge in some public organisations due to resource constraints, inadequate training, and limited technological capacity.

Overall, the findings indicate that SRASO has achieved moderate compliance with legal and regulatory requirements, although improvements in policy implementation, system updating, and technological integration are necessary to achieve full compliance.

#### **4.5 Challenges Hindering the Use of the Keyword Filing Classification Scheme**

The study identified several challenges affecting the effective use of the Keyword Filing Classification Scheme at SRASO. Through interviews and observations, participants consistently pointed to inadequate training as a major obstacle. Many respondents indicated that some staff members lacked sufficient knowledge and practical skills to apply the scheme correctly, particularly newly recruited employees and officers transferred from other institutions. Participants also reported that opportunities for refresher training were limited, leading to inconsistencies in record classification and retrieval practices.

Another challenge highlighted by participants was the outdated nature of the current keyword list. Interviewees explained that organisational functions and responsibilities have evolved over time, yet the classification scheme has not been revised to reflect these changes. Consequently, staff frequently encounter difficulties when classifying records relating to new activities and projects. Participants further cited the absence of institutional guidelines, inadequate staffing levels, and limited integration of electronic records management systems as factors constraining effective implementation. Observation findings also revealed continued dependence on manual records management processes, which contribute to retrieval delays and increase the risk of file misplacement.

#### **4.6 Proposed Strategies for Improving the Keyword System**

To address these challenges, participants proposed several solutions. The most frequently suggested measure was to provide regular training and capacity-building programmes for all staff involved in creating and managing records. Respondents also recommended periodic review and updating of the keyword classification scheme to reflect changing organisational functions. Furthermore, participants emphasised the need to develop institution-specific guidelines, recruit additional qualified records personnel, and accelerate the adoption of electronic records management systems. Strengthening collaboration with the Records and Archives Management Department (RAMD) and the Electronic Government Agency (EGA) was also considered important for improving technical support and regulatory compliance.

These findings are consistent with recent studies. Bizi et al. (2025) identified inadequate organisational readiness, insufficient training, and technological limitations as major barriers to implementing records management systems. Matlala and Ncube (2024) similarly

found that resource constraints and lack of professional competencies hinder effective records management in public institutions. In Tanzania, Manase et al. (2025) reported that capacity gaps, weak technological infrastructure, and limited policy implementation continue to affect public-sector records management practices. Overall, the findings suggest that addressing training, policy, staffing, and technological challenges is essential for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of the Keyword Filing Classification Scheme at SRASO.

## 5.0 Discussions

This study assessed the use of the keyword filing classification Scheme in managing local government records at the Singida Regional Administrative Secretary's Office (SRASO), guided by the Big Bucket Theory. The findings indicate that although the scheme has been established and is generally recognised by staff, several operational and institutional challenges continue to affect its effectiveness.

Regarding awareness of the keyword filing classification scheme, the findings showed that most participants had a reasonable understanding of its purpose and application. Records personnel were more familiar with the scheme than non-records staff, reflecting their direct involvement in records management activities. Participants acknowledged that awareness had been enhanced through formal training, workplace experience, and engagement with records management procedures. These findings support the argument that staff awareness and professional competence are essential prerequisites for effective records management systems (Matlala & Ncube, 2024). Similarly, Bizi et al. (2025) observed that employee knowledge and organisational readiness significantly influence the successful implementation of records management systems.

Regarding the current utilisation, the findings showed that the keyword filing classification Scheme remains the primary records management tool at SRASO. Participants acknowledged its contribution to file organisation, records retrieval, and information accessibility. However, the study found that the system is not being utilised uniformly across all departments. Challenges such as inconsistent keyword application, outdated classification structures, and limited integration with electronic records management systems continue to affect operational efficiency. These findings are consistent with Manase et al. (2025), who reported that many public institutions in Tanzania continue to face difficulties in modernising records management systems despite progress in records management reforms.

The findings further revealed that compliance with legal and regulatory frameworks remains moderate. Participants demonstrated awareness of relevant policies and guidelines, including the National Records and Archives Management Policy (2011) and the Registry Procedures Manual (2007). Nevertheless, compliance is constrained by the absence of institution-specific implementation guidelines, outdated keyword lists, and limited technological capacity. This finding corroborates Ilmi and Mayesti (2020), who emphasise that effective compliance requires not only regulatory frameworks but also institutional mechanisms that support implementation and monitoring.

The study also identified several challenges that hinder the effective use of the keyword filing classification scheme. These included inadequate training opportunities, outdated classification structures, limited staffing, insufficient institutional guidelines, and weak integration with electronic records management systems. Participants emphasised that these challenges lead to inconsistencies in records classification, delays in retrieval, and difficulties in managing emerging organisational functions. Similar challenges have been reported by Bizi et al. (2025), who identified organisational readiness, staff competencies, and technological limitations as key barriers to effective records management.

Overall, the findings suggest that while the keyword filing classification Scheme remains an important records management tool at SRASO, its effectiveness depends on ongoing staff capacity building, regular updates to classification structures, strengthened policy implementation, and integration with modern electronic records management technologies. These measures would enhance compliance, improve accessibility of information, and support efficient records management in local government institutions.

## 6.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that the Keyword Filing Classification Scheme is an important records management tool at the Singida Regional Administrative Secretary's Office (SRASO). Staff generally have adequate awareness of the scheme and recognise its role in facilitating the classification, storage, and retrieval of records. The scheme is actively used to manage organisational records and contributes to improved access to information and greater administrative efficiency. However, its effectiveness is constrained by several challenges, including inadequate training, outdated keyword lists, limited institutional guidelines, insufficient staffing, and weak integration with electronic records management systems. Although the organisation has adopted the scheme in line with national records management requirements, compliance remains partial due to implementation gaps and limited technological capacity. Overall, the study concludes that strengthening staff capacity, updating the keyword classification structure, developing institutional guidelines, and enhancing technological integration are essential to improving the effectiveness of the Keyword Filing Classification Scheme and promoting efficient records management at SRASO.

## 7.0 Recommendations

The study recommends that the Singida Regional Administrative Secretary's Office (SRASO) strengthen the implementation of the Keyword Filing Classification Scheme through regular staff training and refresher programmes to enhance knowledge and ensure consistent application across departments. The office should periodically review and update the keyword classification structure to reflect emerging organisational functions and improve records classification and retrieval. It is also recommended that institution-specific records management guidelines be developed to complement national policies and promote compliance with legal and regulatory requirements. Furthermore, SRASO should modernise its records management practices by integrating the keyword

classification scheme with electronic records management systems to improve efficiency, security, and accessibility of information. Finally, stronger collaboration with the Records and Archives Management Department (RAMD) and the Electronic Government Agency (EGA) is essential to provide technical support, policy guidance, and monitoring, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of records management, regulatory compliance, and overall service delivery.

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