Factors Limiting Best Records Management Practices for Improved Good Governance and Service Delivery. A Case of Singida Local Authorities

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Abstract

This paper reports the findings of a study that was carried out to determine the factors limiting the attainment of best records management for fostering good governance and service delivery by the Singida Local Authorities (SLAs). Specifically, the study had assessed the records management systems used for managing records and the attendant challenges experienced in the management of records. The study was conducted in SLAs where 41 respondents were purposively sampled from the targeted population of 50 employees. Employing a case study design, the research used a qualitative approach to collect data using interviews, group discussions and observation. The study found poor records management systems to be attributable to lack of electronic records management strategies and poor control of records files. Moreover, the SLAs faced the challenge of inadequate space and storage facilities, insufficient skilled records personnel, poor security measures, low prioritization of the records management unit, lack of records management skills, lack of legal compliance in managing records, rigidity in implementing Records and Archives Management Department (RAMD) directives, and records management personnel dealt with other responsibilities. Based on these findings, the study calls on the SLAs to establish effective systems for managing both paper and electronic records, and comply with legal requirement in managing their records. In addition, the government of URT ought to establish an independent records management department to improve records management practices for good governance and service delivery.

Keywords: Records management; Good governance, Service delivery, Singida Local Authorities, Tanzania

1.0 Introduction

Good governance and service delivery depend on the extent to which an organisation has established an efficient and effective records management system. Mnjama and Wamukoya (2007) assert that complete and reliable records help to safeguard the rights of both the governors and the governed. Records enhance consistent and timely decision making towards good governance and service delivery (Ngoepe, 2008). Additionally, Chaterera (2016) underscore the value of records by pointing out that, there is no way public offices can ensure transparency and accountability without necessarily creating and keeping records efficiently and effectively. These implicit benefits places governments in different nations took initiatives of establishing records management systems to ensure effective, efficient and systematic control of records from creation to disposition as a platform of good governance and service delivery in public offices.

In the United States, records management systems among public offices gained momentum through concerted efforts of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in the 1940s (Muemi

&Rotich, 2015). NARA received mandate to inspect records management practices and provide guidelines for the betterment of records management. Similarly, the United Kingdom (UK) also took initiatives of establishing the National Archives as an autonomous agency for improving records management systems in public offices. UK has also managed to enact the Freedom of Information Act of 2002, and Data Protection Act, 1998, in addition to adopting BS 5454-recommendations for the storage and exhibition of the archival documents standard for fostering the management of records.

In Africa, records creation can be traced back to 200 AD when man started to document activities though there were no good facilities and technology for creating such records (Magaya, 2010). The tools used to document these records in the ancient times included clay tablets, skins, papyrus, caves, pyramids paints/drawings, stones and trees. Human beings were forced to document records since time immemorial due to an increase of activities as it was not possible to remember everything that people did in cumulative activities. Consequently, Egyptians gained documentation technology by the end of sixteenth century by starting to document paper-based records. At the end of the eighteenth century, African societies started to document and keep paper-based records even though there was no systematic control of these records due to lack of records keeping systems.

Further records management initiatives in countries such as Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe emerged in the 1940s thanks to the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of International Council on Archives (ESARBICA). South Africa and Botswana established National Archives and Records Services (NARS) and Botswana the National Archives and Records Services (BNARS), respectively, to enhance effective records management in public offices. Even though Africa took initiatives of ensuring effective records management programmes were in place, local governments still face challenges to records management, which inevitably translates into poor service delivery (Chaterera, 2016).

In the Tanzanian context, after the then Tanganyika (before the historical union in 1964) gained her independence in 1961, there was poor records management in public offices. There was mass accumulation of paper records causing serious retrieval problems. Records management was in an awful state, which undermined public administration, civil service operations, and government efforts to bring about the desired changes (Magaya, 2010). In this regard, Kamatula (2011) contends that public offices failed to cope with the systems left behind by the British colonial administration. In 1962, the government of Tanganyika in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) agreed to rescue the situation. Along the same line, during the

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Public Service Reform Programme (PSRP), the government recognised that, there was no way good service delivery could emerge without better records management in public services.

To rescue the situation, in 1965 National Archives Act No 33 was passed to establish and empower the National Archives to have access to all public records and preserve such records (Magaya & Lowry, 2011). The National Archives Act No. 33 of 1965 dealt with the management of non-current records (archives) but without providing guidelines on current and semi-current records management (*ibid*). By considering that weakness, the government in 2002 passed the Records and Archives Management Act No. 3 of 2002, which repealed the National Archives Act No. 33 of 1965. This new legislation also formalised the position of the National Archives as the Records and Archives Management Division (RAMD) currently referred as President's Office, Records and Archives Management Department (PO-RAMD) (Magaya & Lowry, 2011). Other initiatives made were the formulation of the public Registry procedure manual of 2007, Desk Instructions for Registry Staff and Records Users of 2009, the Records Management Policy of 2011 and Guidelines and Procedures for Managing Personnel records in the Public offices of 2013 (Kamatula, 2011).Although the Tanzania government has played a crucial role in enhancing effective records management in public offices, records management programmes are still largely ineffective for better management of records for good governance and service delivery particularly in local authorities (Marwa, 2015; Pazi &Ringo,2014 and Rutta & Ndenje-Sichalwe, 2021). Although challenges of records management are known, there is less understanding on factors limiting effective records management for service delivery as a remedy revealed by this study.

2.0 Problem of the Study

As already illustrated, the government of the United Republic of Tanzania (henceforth URT) has taken initiatives aimed to promote records management in public offices. These initiatives have included the establishment of the RAMD, as an independent department responsible for co-ordinating records management activities in public offices, enacting records management study programmes under the auspices of the Tanzania Public Service College to impart requisite skills and knowledge among record practitioners (National Record and Archives Management Policy of 2011). These government initiatives were aimed to promote good governance and improve service delivery in the public service from the lower to the upper levels of governance. However, it is in the lower levels, the records management has been floundering significantly, hence dashing many hopes grassroots-entrenched good governance and service delivery.

Studies conducted by Athman (2019), Marwa (2015), Rutta & Ndenje-Sichalwe (2021), Rutta (2020), Leon (2020) have affirmed that Tanzania local authorities have yet to attain good governance and service delivery due to poor records management caused by the largely ineffective and inept records management programme. Marwa (2015) and Athman (2019) found Temeke Municipal Council (TMC) and Ilala Municipal Council (IMC), respectively, to be in danger of providing poor services due to poor records management.

Similarly, Singida local authorities were found to lack complete evidence for their transactions by controller and auditor general (CAG) auditing reports of 2017/2018. This sad scenario raises a question of whether records management practices toward good governance and service delivery is either effective or ineffective. Generally, apart from the audit report, the state of records management in Singida local authorities is remained unknown and indeterminate primarily because no systematic research had been conducted to do so. Such study became imperative in the aftermath of the 2017/2018 CAG reports. This study, therefore, filled the gap by assessing the factors limiting the best records management practices and revealed areas requiring improvements.

4.0 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to assess the factors limiting best records management practices in promoting good governance and service delivery in SLAs. Specifically, the study assessed, firstly, the records management systems used in SLAs, and secondly, the challenges facing records management programme at SLAs. The study worked on the assumption that poor management systems in Tanzania's local authorities would undermine their thrust towards promoting good governance and service delivery particularly at the local grassroots level.

3.0 Literature Review

This section illustrates literature on how records management systems support good governance and service delivery, the problem of records management system for improved service delivery among Africa countries and Tanzania in particular. It also elaborates challenges that should be addressed for effective records management systems toward good service delivery

3.1 The State of Records Management Systems for Improved Good governance and Service delivery

Generally, the enhanced state of records management system in developed countries has helped to foster good governance and service delivery. Ginsberg (2016) contends that Australia has managed to

comply with the Design and Implementing Records Keeping System (DIRKS) for the installation of records management system. In consequence, they have created metadata in electronic records management systems, which engender effective classification, expedited retrieval of records for consistent and timely decision-making. It also ensures security of records for future reference and the accountability of governors. Studies conducted in Africa, on the other hand, show that records management systems were largely ineffective in meeting all records management programme requirements, a situation that in turn affected good governance and service delivery prospects. Ngoepe and Van der Walt (2010) proffer that the records management system currently under implementation in South Africa was not comprehensive enough to meet all the business requirements since consultants employed to install the system had no idea about the Co-operative Government and Traditional Affairs (COGTA)'s business. In fact, the systems were incompatible with the service provided to citizens, which inevitably resulted in poor service delivery (Ngoepe & Van der Walt (2010).

In Tanzania, even though legislations and policies require public offices to install keyword filing classification systems, some of the Local Authorities had yet to do so, which considerably affects their performance in records management. Consequently, records are not found on time, and some decisions lack supportive evidence primarily because of the largely ineffective records management systems in place. For example, studies by Athman (2019) conducted at Ilala Municipal Council (IMC) and Rutta (2020) conducted at Kinondoni Municipal Council (KMC) found the absence of keyword filing classification system. This scenario is endemic in many African nations where records management is largely ineffective due to the poor records management systems in place. Such poor records management system tends to hinder\ access to and use of records for consistent, well-informed and timely decision-making. Under these dire conditions, good governance and service delivery have suffered significantly. What emerges in this background information is the importance of records management systems in fostering good governance in local authorities that operate at the grassroots where they are closer to the ordinary people than the central government.

Challenges affecting Records Management Systems for Improved Service Delivery in Public Offices

Each organisation establishes records management programme aimed to support good governance and service delivery. Public offices in developing countries have not attained good governance and service delivery due to the poor records management programme. Poor records management programme hinders timely decision-making, transparency, justice and resources control. Moreover, poor records

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management programme could result in a breach of secrecy and confidentiality of records. Nengomasha's (2013) study on the past, present and future of records and archives management in sub-Saharan Africa found that there was generally a lack of records management policies, basic records procedures, retention schedules and records keeping systems in the region. Moreover, Nengomasha (2013) contends that where the policies, guidelines and systems existed, they were not implemented to engender best records management practices.

Such an absence undermined the auditing process since records were too insufficient to support functions, activities and transactions. Tsholo and Mnjama (2010), who conducted a study on records management audit in Gaborone City Council in Botswana, discovered that regular loss and misplacement of records were occasioned by poor file movement control system, poor records storage, shortage of trained staff, lack of polices and guidelines, poor access and confidentiality and lack of electronic records management strategies. These challenges hinder good governance and service delivery in local governments due to inconsistency in the resultant decision-making and incessant delays in providing feedback to customers. Ngoepe (2012) also proffered that poor records management programmes have contributed to negative auditing reports.   And poor records management endangers auditing process. Furthermore, studies by Marwa (2015), Athman (2019), Rutta (2020), and Leon (2020) on Tanzania's local authorities found records management programme to be riddled with many challenges, which resulted in poor records management. Marwa (2015) found TMC faced the challenge of slow movement of records, misplacement, and even loss of records, and poor preservation practices which result to poor service delivery. Athman (2019) also found that records management programme at the IMC because of the absence of a records management policy, inadequate storage space, insufficient budget, and lack of qualified records personnel. Due to the poor records management programmes currently in place for many councils in the country, Tanzania local authorities are lagging in promoting good governance and service delivery. Although studies report on poor service delivery pertaining on records management, there is any comprehensive study that has investigated barriers to meet effective records management in local authorities. This gap gave the reason to investigate the factors limiting effective records management in SLAs as platform of exploring challenges that need to be addressed

Methodology

This study was conducted in Singida region's local authorities and, specifically, the Singida Municipal Council, Singida District Commissioner's office, Singida District Council, Ikungi District Council,

Ikungi District Commissioner's office, Manyoni District Council, Manyoni District Commissioner's office, Itigi District Council, Mkalama District Council, Mkalama District Commissioner's office, and the Iramba District Commissioner's office. Singida region was selected as one of the local authorities that require good records management practices for better execution of delegated functions based on the CAG's audit reports.

The case study design was applied in this research to facilitate an in-depth investigation of the problem in SLAs. Specifically, the qualitative approach was used to collect and analyse requisite data. The study employed case study design to collect qualitative data through interview and focal group discussion to meet ideas, feelings and attitude of record practitioners in managing records. Case study enhanced establishment of detailed data for analysis, discussion and reaching to conclusion. It was vital design due to nature of the study that needs more explanations to address the problem. From the targeted population of 50 respondents, purposive sampling technique was employed to select a sample of 41 respondents in SLAs. Nine other respondents were not included in the sample because they were not available for providing responses. Data were collected from26 records personnel, 8 Human Resource Officers (HROs), 4 Administrative Officers (AOs), and 3 Personal Secretaries. Records personnel and Personal Secretaries formed part of the population because they were custodians and creators of records, HROs and AOs were included in the population because they were creators and users of records. Also, HROs and AOs were supervisors of records management unit in their offices.

Data were collected using interviews, observations and group discussion. Qualitative data obtained were presented, analysed and discussed by reflecting on the specific objectives through thematic analysis. An interview guide was used to collect data from HROs, Administrative Officers, and Personal Secretaries; group discussions, on the other hand, helped to collect data from records personnel; and, finally, an observation guide facilitated the determination of the real situation of records management on aspects of records management systems and other requirements for best records management practices. These three tools complemented each other to ensure reliability and validity of the data collected through triangulation of data collection methods.

4.0 Results
This sub-section presents and discusses results of the study.

4.1. Records Management Systems Used to Create and Manage Records in SLAs
Results show that SLAs create and manage records only in paper formats. It was observed that in councils, numerical, alphabetical and alphanumerical systems were mostly used. On the other hand, the District Commissioners' offices had managed to install the keyword filing classification system

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though it was used for only paper records management. Also, results show that most of the SLAs under review have managed to create both open and confidential files for each employee. Furthermore, results indicate that, although there were systems for managing records, but they lacked written guidelines for using such systems. As a result, more than two systems were established and were concurrently in use in the same office in SLAs. An interview elaborates more: *"There is no any guideline for records classification and system creation [...] alphanumerical system is used in administrative registry though other departments like land registry use numerical system"* When researchers asked as to why the keyword system was not in use, lack of resources and understanding among administrators emerged as factors limiting the implementation of keyword system:

...when we proposed for keyword system, the management claimed that they lack resources to change the existing system, for the time being we need to focus on potential issues rather than keyword system which does not differ with other systems.

Thus, the records management system in place in the local authorities under review was ineffective due to lack of electronic records management strategies. The keyword system was not installed in some offices and there was no written guideline to enforce compliance in the creation and installing records keeping system. The municipal and district councils also lacked common system for managing records since both numerical, alphabetical and alphanumerical systems were simultaneously applied in some offices. The use of different systems affects some department in exercising their daily activities. Also, some offices lack keyword system which was introduced to address challenges such as loss of records, breach of confidentiality and poor retrieval and use of records of other systems. These results were associated with lack of guidelines and resources. Keyword system was only installed in the District Commissioners' offices only. The findings reveal how SLAs have not managed to comply with the directives of the Registry Procedures Manual of 2007. The Manual requires each public office to install and use keyword filing classification system to ensure that the right information is available to the right person, at the right time, and with the least possible cost. In consequence, records were managed poorly in the Singida local authorities under review; moreover, there was no effective control of the records in their creation, storage and usage, accessibility and tracking. These results inevitably hinder good service delivery due to failure to deal with records on time and provide requisite feedback to customers one of indicator of poor service delivery. These results are consistent with Athman (2019) and Rutta (2020) who found that the keyword system and e-records management had yet to materialise on a grand scale in Tanzania's local authorities, hence eroding the prospects of good governance and service delivery they are supposed to facilitate.

4.2 Challenges to Records Management Programme in SLAs

This objective explored the challenges limiting good records management practices in the records management programme. Through interview, focal group discussion and observation done by researcher, results show that SLAs in the study area were characterised by inadequate space and storage facilities, inadequate skilled records personnel, poor record file movement control system, poor security measures, low prioritisation of records management units, lack of records management skills, lack of electronic records management infrastructures, lack of legal compliance in managing records, rigidity in implementing RAMD directives, and records management personnel deal with other responsibilities out of their job description. Lack of enough space in SLAs since both records and staff were located in the same building. There was no space dedicated for semi current records in SLAs. Consequently, both current and semi-current records were kept in the records office. On the other hand, it emerged that both action officers and records personnel operated from the same room used to keep records. The current situation at SLAs can be exemplified by Plate1:

Plate1: Storage of records and working space in SLAs
Source: Field data (2020)

Plate 2.1 shows that both action officers and records personnel operated from one building with a lot of records which are congested in the same building. The situation results poor working environment to staff and customers. On the other hand, records personnel were on the receiving end of the blame game pertaining to inadequate storage facilities and equipment. In fact, file covers were too inadequate to meet the records available. One interviewee claimed:

… we are aware of closing files which are in bad condition and those attained all requirements for file closure, what limits the implementation is lack of new file covers because once you close one file you need to open the new file.

Inadequate space and storage facilities hindered the life span of records and sometimes abetted the breach of confidentiality due to easy accessibility of records among action officers and external customers. This situation affected good governance and service delivery.

Another challenge explored was inadequate skilled records personnel. In this regard, the study confirmed that some SLA offices had employed less than three records personnel. Moreover, researchers found that the few available staff were designated other responsibilities outside the scope of their job description. Some performed RITA functions of registering births and deaths; others acted as receptionists; others dealt with cleanliness whereas others even served as messengers or office orderlies. In this regard, one of the participants said during an interview:

… we are carrying out other activities out of our job descriptions […]you can see a lot of people are waiting for us so as to be given their death and birth certificate, sometime all activities stand, because sometimes we perform receptionists' responsibilities to our customers… Sometimes, we are instructed to clean offices and toilets by officers.

On the other hand, it emerged that due to lack of records management skills among action officers, some folios were removed and appropriated by accountants and, sometimes, by action officers. It was one of sources of breaching confidentiality since photographing mails in the file and sharing of such secret files through "group WhatsApp" spread confidential records. As one of the interviewees reported: *"Some officers are not [even] aware of how confidentiality can be breached; some staff members use their mobile phones to take pictures of mails [snapshots] for discussions in their group WhatsApp."* Implicitly, action officers can disseminate confidential information out of bounds unknowingly due to lack of records management skills.

The respondents also claimed that the records management unit attracted low priority from the local authorities under review because of low budgets dedicated to records management, lack of

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involvement of record personnel in decisions pertaining to records management. Also, these authorities treated records personnel as inferior, forcing some of them to consider planning to change their career due to such poor treatment and deplorable work conditions. Due to low priority records personnel get, the study found that there was no amicable relationship between records personnel and action officers since action officers reduced record staff to office assistant, who can serve them for their needs out of their job description, regardless of the job designation and professional qualifications:

We are not respected in this office. No one is involved in the preparation of the budget. Action officers force us to buy lunch, vouchers and water for them since they believe that we don't have any other constructive activity [pertaining to our professional] hence limiting our services to serving them in a denigrating and condescending manner. I am on the way to changing from this cadre because no one respects us [here].

Indeed, demoralised SLAs records staff working without any morale towards supporting good governance and service delivery. It was poor to find such kind of embarrassment to record personnel who serve the public on behalf of senior officers. They emerged as too inferior to practice their profession, based on their misguided treatment, hence poor records management. Furthermore, the study found that even though the RAMD had managed to visit some of SLAs by providing directives for best records management programme, the SLAs had failed to enforce those directives. The RAMD directed some SLAs to change the location of registries, building confidential registry and facilities for security of record staff but the management had not factored it in. During a focused group discussion one of the participants said: *"I remember RAMD visited us and advised the management to change the location of administration registry, provision of masks and overcoats to us in order to be protected from dust in the whole process of records retrieval and arrangement of which are still in vein.*

*"*SLAs are characterised by inadequate space and storage facilities; inadequate skilled records personnel; poor record file movement control system; poor security measures; low priority given to records management unit; lack of records management skills; lack of electronic records management infrastructures; lack of legal compliance in managing records; rigidity in implementing RAMD directives; and records management personnel deal with other responsibilities out of their job description. Lack of space was associated with lack of electronic records management infrastructures, which could have minimized accumulation of paper records. Another challenge that emerged in the study was inadequate skilled records personnel. This challenge has, actually, created a gap in records management. It delayed information retrieval, thwarted timely feedback to customers which hinder the emergence of best records management practices. As records staff were few yet performed other

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responsibilities outside their records management portfolio, service delivery suffered because there were delays in information retrieval and feedback provision to customers. Poor security measures forbidding general registry entry, accessing their own files and working in registries by action officers often resulted in the breach of confidentiality as the main factor that limited good governance in public offices. This problem was also associated with lack of legal compliance in managing records since all the directives for security of records including the availability of confidential registry, location of registry in the sensitive area had remained unattained. Consequently, SLAs are in danger of losing important records as records personnel were kept and accessed as though they were their own files. Failure to implement RAMD directives exposes the extent to which SLAs had failed to enforce legal requirements primarily because the Records and Archives Management Act No.3 of 2002 mandates RAMD to co-ordinate records management practices by providing technical advices in public offices which have not been attained, hence poor records management in SLAs. These results endanger good governance and service delivery in aspect of transparent and accountability, resource control, human rights, equality, timely feedback and availability of information for timely and consistent decision making. The above factors need to be addressed to rescue the situation. These findings confirm observations by Athman (2019), Ndenje-Sichalwe (2010), Leone (2020) and Rutta to the effect that records management programmes were generally affected by many challenges, which also hindered the promotion of best records management practices in Tanzania's local government authorities towards fostering good governance and service delivery in the country.

5.0 Conclusion

The study has established that there is a direct relationship between records management practices and fostering good governance and service delivery. Records management practices were in the study local authorities were largely found to be ineffective in meeting good governance. After all, SLAs in the study area have generally failed to attain best records management practices such as appropriate records keeping system, complying with records management legal frameworks, confidentiality, adequate skilled personnel, space and other resources. Poor records management practices affected good governance and service delivery in SLAs because of poor retrieval of information for timely and consistent decision-making. Against this backdrop, good governance and service delivery cannot be attained when there was a proliferation of the breach of confidentiality, complaints and inconsistency in making informed records-induced decisions of both internal and external customers.

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6.0 Recommendations

SLAs need to prioritise highly records management unit particularly in providing adequate and robust budgets, storage facilities and enough space for executing records management activities and storage of records. Records, as the heartbeat of an organisation, require much consideration for future reference. This should be accompanied by increasing the number of records personnel, and training record practitioners. SLAs should ensure the availability and utilisation of records management legal frameworks such as the Records and Archives Management Act No.3 of 2002 and its attendant regulations of 2007, National Records and Archives Management Policy of 2011 and Registry Procedures Manual of 2007. Meanwhile, SLAs must establish confidential registries; develop disaster preparedness and vital records recovery to protect records against disaster and unauthorised access. SLAs should also respect and maintain job description of their employees, particularly records officers who have been reduced to mere office attendants when they had a lot to offer in improving records management for engendering good governance and quality service delivery in Singida local authorities and those sharing similar characteristics in Tanzania. Each staff should, therefore, perform duties stipulated in their job description to foster professionalism and, ultimately, give the records management systems in the country's local government a break that they so much need to foster good governance and service delivery to the populace at the grassroots level. Also, installation of the Keyword filing classification system is a must in all district and municipal councils as per current URT policies. For effective control of records, SLAs should also improve their file movement control tools to ensure nothing was left to chance.

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