

Management of Semi-Current Records in Public Offices in Tanzania: The Case of Mbeya City Council

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Abstract

This paper assesses the contribution of Tanzanian government in the management of semi-current records in public offices through the case of Mbeya City Council (MCC). Data for this study were collected through questionnaires, interviews, observation and documentary review and analyzed through conceptual framework emanating from the literature. The findings indicate that semi-current records are improperly managed as there are insufficient storage facilities, staff's failure to comply with the established legal frameworks and prevalence of low awareness of staff on the available legal frameworks for records keeping. It is therefore concluded that the overall management of semi-current records remain inadequate despite government's efforts to enhance management of records. It is thus recommended that the MCC to improve records management practices, particularly in terms of space, facilities, compliance with the established legal and regulatory frameworks governing records management in Tanzania and awareness creation among the staff through professional advice and training.

Keywords: Records management, Semi-current records

Introduction

The history of records keeping can be traced back to the year 200 AD when man started to document business transactions on wooden tablets after he found it difficult to recall all transactions he had performed in the past. By the end of the 16th Century the Egyptians started using paper for keeping records. Between the 17th and 18th Century the use of paper for record keeping gained wide acceptance and most societies started to document information on paper. These documents that were created by societies were accumulated to a large extent as a result they led to poor storage due to scarcity of space and storage facilities (Magaya, 2010).

In 1960s a model of keeping records into phases was introduced in the name of Records life cycle model as propounded by Theodore Shellenberg (Bantin, 1998). This model intends to reduce high accumulation of records in one place and that is why it is suggested to keep records of different value separately such as current records, semi-current records and non-current records. In this paper we delve in the management of semi-current records. This is because semi-current records are records that are infrequently used to support business activities in an organization as observed by Kalumuna

(2010). These records are kept for reference purposes and it is important to keep them separately in a secure place to create space to fresh records as provided in Records and Archives Management Policy of 2011.

Various scholars observe that semi-current records are vital in providing reference services to decision makers and other users of records. For example, Nengomasha and Nyanga (2012) affirm that proper management of semi-current records is needed so they can exist for as long as they are required to support decision making, deliverance of services and protection of citizen's entitlement. In this case if they are not properly managed there is a risk of arriving at inadequate decisions. We are cautioned by various scholars such as Coetzer (2012), Kalusopa and Ngulube (2012) and Bakare et al (2016) who provided evidence of poor management of semi-current records in public offices in Nigeria, Namibia and Botswana respectively. Consequently the semi-current records are at risk of getting damage, misplacement and lost even forever. This has the potential of deviating from the well-known Records life cycle model as propounded by Theodore Shellenberg (1960's). For records gurus, this mismanagement can deny future generation the right of getting documents of past events and transactions.

Like other developing countries, public offices in Tanzania experience problems relating to records management. Studies by Wema (2003), Ndenje (2010) and Kamatula (2010) reported on improper management of semi-current records in Tanzanian public offices, for them the current records and semi-current are kept together, closed records are kept on basement and there are insufficient facilities for storage of semi-current records. This practice is contrary to best practices and prevailing legislations for records and archives management in Tanzania that require semi-current records to be kept separately from other records. Following this observation, this paper intends to explore the manner in which semi-current records are managed in public services with a peculiar focus at MCC in order to come up with viable recommendations that could help the government to address problems related to management of semi-current records in public offices.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

In order to corroborate the real practice to available literature, this section reviews some literature and provides the developed conceptual framework. In a sense, literature on facilities for storage, storage area and legal frameworks are provided in the following sub-section.

Storage Area for Semi-Current Records

Records are termed to be semi-current as soon as they start being used infrequently to support business activities. Subscribing to Tanzania Registry Procedure Manual (2007), once a file is closed it becomes semi-current and this is a time where it is less used in supporting daily business transactions. For this case, it has to be stored elsewhere in a cheaper secure storage away from the registry to provide room for current files. A penetrating issue by Magaya (2010) advises that when records cease to be of current use, they should be moved to the records centre facility where they will be kept securely and used as sources of information. He argues that organizations are required to set aside storage areas special for management of semi-current records. For him, the storage area should be of low cost and allow storage of huge number of semi-current records. It is important for organizations in the opinion of this paper to abide to the established standards when establishing a records centre facility in order to ensure that semi-current records are remaining intact, accessible and usable for a long period of time.

Nengomasha and Nyanga (2012) added that organizations are required to have adequate space for storage of semi-current records. This support the idea of records life cycle model proposed by Shellenberg in the 1960's which refute semi-current records to be mixed with current or non-current records. Also Shellenberg (1960's) views are reinforced by Registry Procedures Manual of 2007 introduced by the government of Tanzania Section 9 item 9.3 which states;

"Closed files and parts of files that are no longer required for day-to- day business must be stored in the Interim Records Store or elsewhere in cheaper secure storage away from registries".

In respect to the above quote, it is important for public offices to have a place designated specifically for storage of semi-current records. Also, it is important that each record/file that ceases to support daily business of the organization be taken to the records centre in order to create space to fresh records.

In the eyes of International Records Management Trust (IRMT) (1999), a place which is designed for storage of semi-current should be more secured to prevent records from undergoing deterioration. IRMT (1999) opine that all measures must be taken to guarantee safety of records; the building should be installed with CCTV Cameras, Smoke detectors, Sprinkler systems and Fire extinguishers. Moreover, the place should be clean all the time in order to prevent agents of deterioration like insects and dust. In the same respect, all semi-current records must be well arranged in the building to allow

air circulation and facilitate retrieval of records when needed for reference. This is where the idea of records centre surfaces with required qualifications. For example, the records centre must be capable of holding all designated semi-current records in all media and must provide access to the required records in the shortest time possible. It should be economical in term of space and facilities.

Records experts caution us that if large amount of records are found in records centre it is not ease to trace files manually. Therefore, organizations must provide a search room with searching tools such as guides and indexes to assist tracing of files when needed for reference. This argument concurs with William (2006) who stresses that if an organization fails to provide good storage facilities and systems for proper management of semi-current records, the records will accumulate, as a result, they will get damaged, misplaced and their tracing cannot be easy. With a proper records management system and facilities in a records centre, it can fulfill its mandate of delivering services because records can be easily and quickly retrieved for use in decision making (Kamatula, 2010).

Storage Facilities for Semi-current Records

From public service practical point of view, storage facilities entail all equipments used for keeping semi-current records like shelves and boxes. Storage facilities are important in the storage of semi-current records because the records are not kept on basement as suggested by Nengomasha and Nyanga (2012). While there are specified standard for storage facilities the International Standard Organization (ISO) (2001) obliges organizations to keep semi-current records in standard boxes that allow files to be stored upright without folding. Therefore, in order to adhere to ISO (2001), the Tanzania semi-current records are kept in standard boxes that are provided by national archives. Public offices are not required to pack closed files using its boxes but those provided by national archives. These storage facilities are having specific measurements and balanced amount of acidity and alkalinity in the view of Magaya (2010).

Facilities play an important role in ensuring proper management of semi-current records. Suitable facilities are required to protect records against disaster and other agents of deterioration. Similarly, they allow good arrangement of records to facilitate retrieval when needed. Due to the number of semi-current records especially in public offices scholars like Magaya (2010), Yahya (2013) and Wema (2003) suggested that metal shelves are most appropriate facilities for storage of semi-current records. For them, shelves have ability to carry large number of files/boxes compared to other facilities like cabinets. On the other side, IRMT (1999) added that metal shelves are fire resistant hence they can protect semi-current records in time of disaster.

Legal and Regulatory Frameworks for the Management of Semi-Current Records in Tanzania

Williams (2006) provides that legal and regulatory framework includes legislations, policies, guidelines and standards introduced to guide a specific discipline. For the sake of protecting semi-current records in Tanzania the government and other legislative bodies has enacted various laws to guide records management in the country. For example, Records and Archives Management Act No. 3 of 2002 Section 9(d) requires heads of public offices to transfer semi-current records which have been scheduled for further retention to the records centre except those classified as confidential or secret on the ground of national security, maintenance of public order, safeguarding the revenue and protection of personal privacy. In addition, the Registry Procedures Manual (2007) requires closed files that are no longer required for day-to-day business to be stored in the interim/temporary records store or elsewhere in cheaper secure storage away from registries. Public offices are required to ensure that they provide adequate storage space, equipment and other resources necessary for safekeeping of records. Similarly, Records and Archives Management Policy (2011) obliged public offices to ensure records storage facilities and other systems are in place and ensure that they are capable of protecting records against fire, flood, environmental hazards, unauthorized access and other associated risks. In addition, these frameworks have addressed measures to be taken for proper management of records including semi-current records.

In this paper, it is observed that these frameworks are vital in management of semi-current records. Also they are important in guiding records practitioners on proper management of semi-current records. Moreover, Awareness on these legal frameworks is also important not only to records custodian but even users of records. Awareness of legal tools led to good keeping and uses of records. If these legal frameworks are in place, but people are not aware of them they will not be used and semi-current records can be mishandled, and lead to destruction of documentary heritage.

Generally, the literature and legal frameworks available in Tanzania have revealed that proper management of semi-current records needs adequate space that allows proper arrangement of records, security that guarantees availability of records overtime and cleanliness to protect agents of deterioration like cockroach, termites, rodents and mice. If organizations adhere to the suggestions raised in the literature and legal frameworks, semi-current records will be safe and properly managed.

Conceptual Framework

Kothari (2004) argues that, conceptual framework is the structure that shows relationship among variables and how variables are related to attain the desired goal. This paper is guided by a conceptual framework modified from Roper and Millar (1999b: 19) where variables contributing to the

management of semi-current records were established to guide the study. The figure below shows variables contributing to proper management of semi-current records:

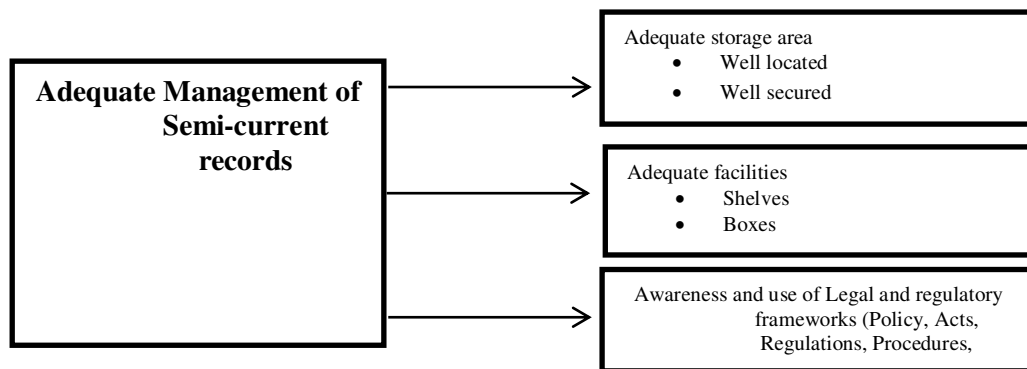


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

Description of the model

Figure 2 shows the relationship between storage area, facilities, awareness on legal frameworks and management of semi-current records. This is to say, adequate management of semi-current records largely depends on the availability of adequate storage area, facilities and awareness on legal and regulatory frameworks for records management. There is no way the organization can have proper management of semi-current records if it lacks adequate storage area, facilities for keeping semi-current records and if staff are not aware of legal frameworks governing records management.

Methodology

This study used a case study design where data for this study were obtained through interview, observation, questionnaire, documents, reports and acts. This design was adopted because the study focused on a single entity and this approach is useful in getting in-depth understanding of a particular problem or situation as well as understanding issues in their specificity. Moreover, case study design allows the use of multiple data sources thus it increases confidence on reliability of the data collected.

Findings and Discussion

This paper assessed the efficiency of storage area used by the MCC to keep semi-current records, examines the extent to which facilities used by MCC to keep semi-current records reflect required standards, find out awareness of MCC staff on the available legal frameworks for managing semi-current records and to identify the challenges MCC experience in relation to management of semi-

current records. Following to these specific objectives this part present the findings and discussion as follows;

Location for Storage of semi-current Records (Records Centre)

Objective number one of this study sought to assess the areas used for storing semi-current records at MCC. The intention was to find out if the MCC has set aside a place for storing semi-current records or if records are transferred directly to government records centres. According to Records and Archives Management Act No.3 of 2002 public offices are not required to keep both current and semi-current records in the same location the two shall be kept separate. Responding to the question as whether the MCC has a designated place for keeping semi-current records or other than the records centres established by government for storage of semi-current records, the results are indicated in figure 1 below;

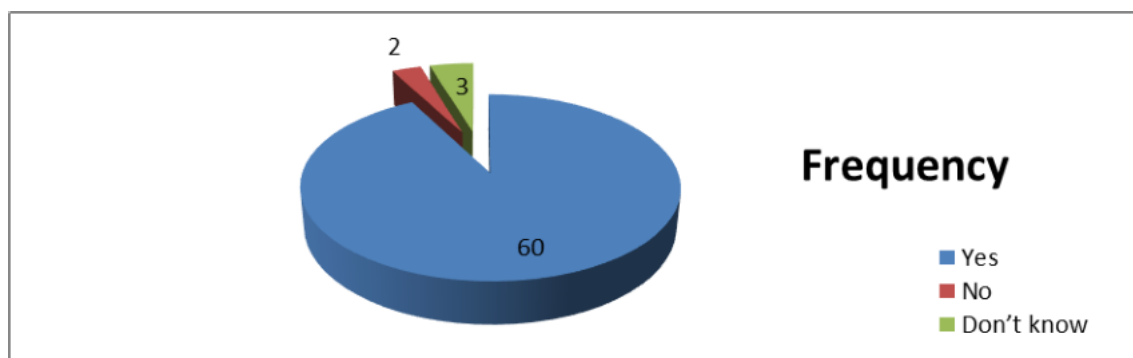


Figure 1: Existence of records centre (location for storage of semi-current records)

Source: Field Data, (2019)

The results from the Figure 1 indicate that 60(92%) respondents agree about the existence of storage area for semi-current records. This finding is concretized by response from one of the HoD who said that:

[“We have a storage place for semi-current records but it does not meet specifications of a records storage place. We just use it to reduce congestion in the registry room”].

With this response however, it indicates some reservations on the standard of the centre. As such, it reflects the rest of 40% who either do not agree or don't know. The implication is that records centre does not adequately meet required standards and security of records.

Through observation, it was possible to verify availability of a place designated by MCC for storage of semi-current records. It was noted that the place designated by MCC for storage of semi-current records does not have adequate space to accommodate records generated and it is not well equipped to

store semi-current records. This is contrary to Records and Archives Management Policy of 2011, Policy issue number 4.6 which requires public offices to store its records in proper storage facilities for as long as they may be needed to support its function. It was observed that MCC continue to keep records in the current designated, the public records are likely to get damaged and lost forever. This is because the area does not have conducive environment to guarantee the life of records for the next five years and eventually affect decision making process and service delivery. From these findings it is clear that MCC has a separate place for keeping semi-current records as it is required by government policy but the place does not merit being a records centre. It was also observed that lack of government monitoring and evaluation of records centre at MCC was the major factor for the inadequate management of semi-current records.

Through an observation check list the study sought to assess the condition of the MCC Records centre in terms of environmental condition of the place where semi-current records are kept, targeting air conditioning, ventilation, lighting and cleanliness of the area. Others included security of a building designed for keeping semi-current records targeting security alarms, smoke detectors, CCTV cameras, fire extinguishers, fire hose, lockable grills and Security guards, and procedures for accessing semi-current records. Findings revealed that the place where MCC stores its semi-current records is located outside the organization and it does not merit to be called a records centre. This is because the place is not meeting the international standard ISO15489-1(2001) and government policy (2011) for records and archives management. Both of these require not keeping semi-current records together with none usable items like broken chairs (See figure 2). Also the place is not well secured because in place there are no CCTV cameras, security guards and fire prevention facilities like fire extinguisher, fire hose and fire sprinkler systems. This situation put the security of records in danger. Moreover, the area is not clean, the records are placed one on top of the other and some are kept in the basement. Wema (2003) argues that this practice leads to speedy invasion of agents of deterioration like rats, cockroaches, termites and rodents. Inside the building the ceiling is open which allows water to penetrate inside and cause damage to records. In summation, the condition of MCC records centre is not safe to guarantee security and longevity of records. On the other side, if disaster happens nothing will remain and due to congestion rescue would be difficult. The figure 2 below show the prevailing condition of MCC storage area;



Figure 2: The Condition of MCC Storage Area

Source: Field Data, (2019)

Based on figure 2, it appears that public offices are not inspected to see if they are meeting requirements for national policy for records and archives management of 2011, that need public offices to set aside a good place for keeping closed file. This implication is that the MCC may not be pro-active in providing good environment for storage of semi-current records.

Storage Facilities for Semi-current Records

The second objective of this study sought to examine the efficacy of facilities used by MCC to keep semi-current records. The intension was to find out if MCC use recommended facilities to keep its semi-current records. Respondents were asked to indicate which storage facilities are used by MCC to store its semi-current records. Responses are summarized in figure 3.

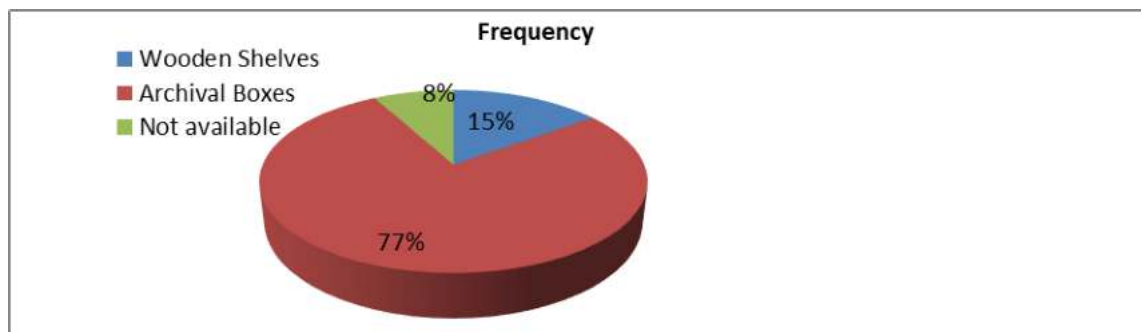


Figure 3: Storage facilities for Semi-current records at MCC

Source: Field Data, (2019)

Based on these data presented in Figure 3, it is clear that the MCC uses archival boxes and wooden shelves to store its semi-current records. However, it should be warned that wooden shelves are vulnerable to fire outbreak and infestation over time. Also this negates the requirements of Records and Archives Management Policy (2011) which makes it clear that wooden shelves should not be preferred much to hold public records. In that respect wooden shelves are not recommended for storage of records because they are susceptible to infestation and can result in permanent loss of records and render them inaccessible to future generations. These findings corroborate with those of Kamatula (2010) who revealed that the University of Dar es Salaam uses wooden shelves for storage of semi-current records. Also he found that semi-current records are kept in the basement and piled

one on top of another due to inadequate storage facilities. This implication is that the semi-current records are not given equal weight with current records in terms of value. This observation suggests that most public offices pay little attention on the need for appropriate facilities for storing semi-current records. More surprisingly it was observed that neither shelves nor cabinets are used to store semi-current records, instead they are stored in National Archives boxes. This observation contravenes the Records and Archives Management Policy of 2011 issue 4.6, which requires public offices to provide adequate storage facilities for the storage of its records. The implication is that these facilities are inappropriate in protecting records against fire, floods, unauthorized access, environmental hazards and other associated risks. This is because these facilities used by MCC to store semi-current records are not designed to protect records from impending disasters.

Awareness and Use of Records Management Legal Framework

The third objective of this study was to determine awareness levels among registry staff and use of legal frameworks for managing semi-current records at MCC. This was intended to find out adherence to the legal frameworks governing records management, understandability to records personnel and their uses in managing MCC records. Respondents were asked if they are familiar with records management legal frameworks and if they use them to manage MCC records. Findings are summarized in Table 1,

Table 1: Awareness and use of Records Management Legal Frameworks

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Aware	41	63
Not aware	20	31
Not sure	4	6
TOTAL	65	100

Source: Field Data, (2019)

Table 1 shows that majority of respondents (63%) are aware of the existing legal frameworks available to guide management of records in Tanzania. The data indicate that decision makers like human resource officers, administrative officers and heads of departments are inadequately aware with the existing legal frameworks governing the field of records management in Tanzania. Lack of awareness amongst key decision makers renders to their professional inability to enforce the implementation of these legal frameworks. This observation is made clearer through interviews whose two respondents had to say:

“I was not aware if there are laws governing records management, I only know about filing systems for records keeping”, “I have heard about the legal framework governing records management but I have never actually seen any of these documents nor have I ever heard records staff talk about them” These observations suggest that the management of records is not given top priority at MCC. These also suggest that there is inadequate awareness made regarding legislations governing management of

records and archives. For example the senior action officer who ought to be knowledgeable about the legal framework governing management of records was unaware of the existence of legal frameworks. From the findings it was realized that semi-current records at MCC are in poor condition and improperly kept due to inadequate awareness of legal frameworks for records management. Moreover, in the course of the study, irrespective the knowledge if there is existence of legal framework it was discovered that the users of the documents are not conversant with the English language used. For them then it is difficult to read and interpret in order to act accordingly.

Responding to the very same objective, respondents were asked if they are familiar with guiding legal framework for semi-current records. Thus, they were asked to indicate the existing legal frameworks governing management of records they are familiar with. Findings are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Records Management Legal frameworks

Legal frameworks	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Records and Archives Management Policy of 2011	48	73
Records and Archives Management Act No.3 of 2002	40	62
Records and Archives Management Regulation of 2007	15	23
Registry Procedure Manual of 2007	55	85
Guidelines for Managing Personnel records of 2003	7	11

Source: Field Data, (2019)

Based on the data presented in Table 2 above, it shows that the Registry Procedure Manual of 2007 is most known compared to other legal frameworks. This implies that the Registry Procedure Manual is the tool mostly used to guide management of records at MCC. It also implies that Registry procedural manual is mostly preferred by registry officials. The reason for its preference is its simplicity in application. It is found out that the manual assists records personnel to perform daily registry activities for example, it tells them how they should receive, sort, file and dispatch official letters and it guides them on how to open and close a file.

Regarding the choice of the other legal frameworks, findings revealed that the remaining legal frameworks are only known by respondents as shown in Table 2 but they do not use them to manage records at MCC. The impending risk is that to other records like semi-current records will be given inadequate attention. This is because Registry Procedure Manual of 2007 provides guidelines for management of current records which makes the registries and current records appear in good condition compared to semi-current records. The implication is that, if the staff does not consider other legal framework, other records which are not addressed by Registry procedure manual such as semi-current records and archives will remain in shamble.

4.4 Challenges of Managing Semi-current Records

The study also sought to identify the challenges faced by MCC in managing semi-current records. The purpose was to find out challenges encountered by MCC in relation to the management of semi-current records as well as identifying measures undertaken to address the challenges. Respondents were asked to point out challenges the MCC experience in managing semi-current records. Table 3 below summarizes the responses.

Table 3: Challenges of Managing Semi-current Records at the MCC

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
Inadequate storage facilities	40	62%
Staffing shortage	6	9%
Weak disaster preparedness plan	3	5%
Inadequate government support	20	31%
Lack of training for registry personnel	19	29%
Lack of security in storage area	6	9%
Poor storage area	15	23%
Lack of working tools like dust protectors	5	8%
Low priority given to management of semi-current records	12	18%
Financial constraints	3	5%
None compliance to records management legal tools	2	3%
Lack of support from top management	18	28%
Shortage of space	2	3%
Semi-current records are mixed with current records	15	23%

Source: Field data (2019)

Table 3 shows that the major challenge was inadequate facilities for keeping semi-current records with 40(62%) respondents. Apart from the mentioned challenges, it was also discovered that semi-current are in worst situation and they are poorly managed due to low level of awareness among records practitioners on the role played by these records in supporting decision making and in generating archives which are beneficial for the current and future generation. On the other hand, it was found that there is no budget allocated to support management of semi-current records. Also there is no special appointee to take care of semi-current records. The same registry staffs that also lack professional training in maintaining semi-current records are used as a result there is mixing of current and semi-current records in the registry. These challenges are reflected in works of Wema (2003), Yahya (2013), Kamatula (2010) and Ndibalema (2001). This Correlation of findings from different public offices suggest that management of semi-current records in public offices is not given due attention.

Conclusion and recommendations

The government of Tanzania has something to learn from the findings of this study. It should be understood that semi-current records in public offices like MCC are in dangerous situation. If immediate efforts are not taken to address this situation it should not expect to have information heritage for the future generation. However, there are number of legal frameworks for records management but that is not enough if there is no enforcement in implementation.

The study revealed that semi-current records are exposed to dangerous environment because there are no government follow-ups and implementation of legislations established to govern management of records for example; records practitioners and other MCC staff seems to be familiar with legislations governing records management but they do not implement them. This is a reason for having insecure storage site with no security guards, grills, CCTV Cameras, smoke detectors, fire hose and fire extinguishers as it is required by ISO 15489 (2001) and Records and Archives Management Policy of 2011.

Based on the findings, something has to be done by the government to rescue these important records so that national information heritage can be protected. To ensure this the government is advised to; enforce implementation of legal tools for records management so that its offices like MCC can adhere and comply with the established records management legal frameworks to improve management of semi-current records, ensure the established legal frameworks for records and archives management are produced in a large extent and disseminated to public offices for records custodian and users to learn best practices, ensure public offices are empowered and provided with adequate space for storage of semi-current records with sufficient and appropriate storage facilities, the government through records and archives management department should set a budget and conduct inspection to public offices at least once a year to see how public offices keep its records especially semi-current records. If the Tanzania government takes the study recommendations into implementation semi-current records in public offices will be safe and available for a long period. Also it will protect the rights of future generation of getting past information for widening their knowledge and increasing their experience in decision making.

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