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ROLE OF PUBLIC ARCHIVISTS AND RECORDS MANAGERS IN GOVERNANCE AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT UNDER A DEMOCRATIC DISPENSATION

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Abstract

This article is based on findings and recommendations in a doctoral thesis concerning the correlation between governance, the management of public sector records and the Western World agenda to eradicate poverty and embark on sustainable development undertakings. The geographical focus of this article, like the study, is South Africa. The study's backdrop was the 21st century agenda formulated by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and United Nations to completely eradicate world poverty by 2030. These agencies determined governance criteria as the barometers for interested stakeholders, including citizens, with which transparency, accountability, respect for the rule of law and citizens' rights could be gauged. All of which are dependent on the accessibility of information to provide the necessary evidence. In South Africa, public archivists and records managers are responsible for managing and caring for the public sector related information sources. In recent years, the reports from the Office of the Auditor-General's on public entities reveal concerning narratives of public entities' failures to provide evidence and accountability relating to public financial management matters. The management of public sector information sources must be evident in the boardroom agenda. Poverty eradication projects in the Vhembe District Municipality and iSimangaliso Wetland Authority, for example, are also dependent on accessible, authentic information sources. Such projects depend on the public archivists and records managers in ensuring the effective management and protection of, as well as accessibility to, relevant information whenever required.

Keywords

Governance, records management, archivists, records managers, Auditor-General

Introduction

Halving the world's poverty levels by 2015 and completely eradicating poverty by 2030 are the essence of programmes, initiatives and ventures highlighted by international agencies, such as the United Nations (UN 2008; UN 2011), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2003; 2010) and World Bank (WB 1999; 2009; 2011).

Agencies such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and United Nations made it their 21st century mission to address political instability, poverty, inequality and unequal access to resources. These agencies have ascertained that poverty is often a catalyst for individuals from affected communities, being enticed to engage in confrontational undertakings and joining paramilitary groups (Leftwich 2005:688-689; Green 2013:50-51). Two concerned international agencies, namely the World Bank (1999, 2011) and International Monetary Fund (1999; 2011), propagate the concept of good governance. They have advocated for strong, effective and stable governments; constitutionally established institutions, such as the Office of the Auditor-General; well managed justice systems; and unbiased accountable electoral systems. These agencies have proposed that with these cornerstones, a country should be able to encourage and sustain economic growth and development (Leftwich 2005:689).

All of these fundamentals are dependent on accurate, accessible and reliable information sources together with the infrastructure, policies and procedures associated with creating, managing and protecting these sources (WB 2011). The importance associated with information sources, amplified by UNESCO's endorsement of the Universal Declaration of Archives (UNESCO 2011), provides South African public archivists with substantial incentives to position themselves as laudable public officials. These officials would thereby be serving the interests of all South Africans. The public archivists, as chief narrators, directors and actors (together with the ensemble of public sector records managers) script the official South African narrative. The public archivists and records managers thus contribute, directly and indirectly, to the South African tale of good governance. These role-players thereby contribute to creating conditions conducive to eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development throughout South Africa. The purpose of this article is to examine the roles of these public officials relating to the availability of information sources to facilitate governance, eradicate poverty and contribute to sustainable development undertakings. Also included are examples of two projects endorsed by the World Bank and United Nations Development Programme. Both international agencies promote the concepts of transparency, accountability and good governance. The emphasis and dependency on accessible evidence is fundamental to these ventures and their projected development outcomes. Included in this discussion are undertakings involving the iSimangaliso Wetland Authority in KwaZulu-Natal, and Vhembe District Municipality in the Limpopo Province.

Background

In South Africa, the role of the 21st century public archivist has changed from predominantly a researcher and heritage collector, to one co-narrating and participating in the poverty alleviation narrative while capturing, assessing and safeguarding public sector records. The South African national and provincial public archivists, together with the records managers from public bodies, formulate and execute the policies, processes and procedures concerning the creation, management, disposition and preservation of public information sources. The information required by public bodies to meet and attain their missions and objectives, as well as to demonstrate transparency, accountability, governance and interactions with interested and affected stakeholders, including the general public, are managed according to the record keeping systems approved by the public archivists. In addition, these public officials determine the final disposition fate of the information sources, whether they are recommended for archival preservation or destruction.

According to Leftwich (2005), the end of the 20th century appeared to usher in a milieu on the global stage conducive to humanitarian pursuits, an age of openness, freer access to information and knowledge, which resulted in the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals to completely eradicate world poverty (Leftwich 2005:687). Eight goals were identified being: eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; universal primary education; promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women; reduction of child mortality rates; improvement of maternal health care; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other communicable diseases; ensure environmental sustainability: and develop global partnerships for development (UN 2011).

This humanitarian goodwill was, however, rapidly eclipsed by the unsuspected terror attacks in the United States of America, in September 2001. In response to these attacks, the United States, European Union and international agencies determined that to safeguard international stability, address the threats to global security and quell havens of unrest and violence, it was critical to address the circumstances affecting impoverished communities (Herbst and Mills

2003:12-13). The initiative from the IMF, World Bank and United Nations to eradicate global poverty gained support from many international agencies, institutions, community organisations and individuals eager to fund and participate in poverty eradication and sustainable economic development ventures (Sachs 2005:211-213).

In 2005, celebrities such as Bono organised a *Live 8 Concert*, entitled *"Make Poverty History*,*"* to draw the world's attention to the poverty problems, and for the G8-leaders and leaders from Brazil, China, India, Mexico, Algeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania and South Africa to pledge their commitments to making poverty history (Payne 2006:918). Large areas of Africa were identified as areas requiring drastic measures to promote political and economic systems beneficial to uplifting and improving the well-being of the communities and individuals, particularly women and children (Sachs 2005:21-23). The UNDP determined that on the African continent, women and children are the victims of extreme poverty and most vulnerable to exploitation due to mismanagement and repressive leaders (UNDP 2003:13-15).

Democracies are regarded as the preferred forms of government. This has been motivated by the view that such dispensations tend to promote the rule of law, expand civil and political rights, provide adequate resources for all and create environments conducive for individuals to pursue sustainable economic prospects (Sachs 2005:367; Clinton 2007:6). In addition, the symbiotic relationship between democracies and governance, as contended by the international agencies, creates favourable climates for efficient economies and the successful implementation of ventures to empower and uplift grassroots communities (Ferguson 2006:38). Fundamental to democratic dispensations and governance criteria is access to information (Clinton 2007:3-4). Meanwhile, proponents, like the IMF, of poverty eradication programmes also articulate the correlation between records management and mechanisms to determine levels of governance (IMF 2011). Public sector records management practices, policies, procedures and programmes are thus regarded as determining factors in ascertaining transparency, accountability and integrity of public entities, through the accessibility of supporting information (WB 2011b).

The end of the 20th century also witnessed the abolishment of apartheid and ushering in of a democratic dispensation in South Africa. Under this dispensation, enshrined in the country's Constitution and statutory rights, is the right of South Africans "to know what is going on" (Allen 2009:210). However, public sector records management practices, as revealed in numerous reports from the Office of the Auditor-General, from the period 2001 to the most recent available reports for 2013, provides proof that executive and management echelons, records managers, records officials and public archivists have little regard of the importance of public sector information sources in determining the narratives characterising post-apartheid South Africa. The information sources, including the lack thereof, reveal narratives of corrupt individuals, mismanagement of funds and resources, poor security of information required to protect the state and individuals, misappropriations of funds and state resources, breakdown of trust and interest, poor, or no, service delivery (AG 1999-2013i).

According to Alexis Eliseev (2014), journalist for the *Daily Maverick*, there are on average six service delivery protests a day in one of South Africa's nine provinces stemming from grassroots' communities dissatisfaction concerning the lack of, or poor, service delivery (Eliseev 2014). The integrity, governance commitments and persona of the South African public sector are defined by the accessibility and authenticity of the information sources. However, the low status which the South African public sector attaches to the creation, management, custody and preservation of information sources, as is evident from the reports of the Office of the Auditor-General, negatively impacts on the availability of authentic information to facilitate operations, decision-

making, planning, development, transparency and accountability. All of which detract from South Africa's poverty eradication narratives.

Purpose of the article

Based on the research conducted for the purposes of the doctoral study, this article draws attention to the reports of the Office of the Auditor-General to challenges associated with the attainment of clean audits, the reliance on authentic information sources and consequences on the South African governance narrative. From the period 1998 to 2013, these audit reports have provided meticulous scorecards on the management and availability of information resources relating to the execution, utilisation and management of financial, and other, resources as utilised by all South African public bodies. These scorecards provide fundamental reasons for rather positioning the public archivists and records managers as proactive gatekeepers, than as passive custodians. The roles of these actors are furthermore enhanced and elevated to the positions of narrators. Their status as chief narrators and information management protagonists occupies the centre stage when the location and verification of information is required by public bodies when the Auditor-General visits when auditing.

In accordance with the National Archives and Records Service Act, no. 43 of 1996, public archivists are required to "ensure the proper management and care of all public records," (RSA 1996b) including those created by, and in the custody of, public bodies. In spite of these statutory obligations, the reports from the Auditor-General revealing records management irregularities remain unnoticed, with no pre-emptive intervention from public archivists. Any efforts from the public archivists to assume a governance role and improve the meta-narrative of post-apartheid South Africa appear futile. The lack of promulgated obligations, apparent disinterest and inability to intervene by the public archivists, both nationally and provincially, supplements the South African public sector's narrative relating to accountability, trust and integrity. As contended by Kenosi (2011), the lack of accessible, authentic and reliable public sector information discredits the integrity of the public sector and the country's persona to both citizens and the global community (Kenosi 2011:19-23).

Thus, the purpose of this article is threefold:
  i.   Firstly, to analyse the roles of the public archivists and records managers in managing the information required by the auditors to ascertain governance.
  ii. Secondly, to examine the availability of information as evidence of financial management controls, as viewed by the international funding entities as governance barometers.
  iii. Lastly, to recommend re-prioritising the public archivists' roles, from passive custodians to proactive protagonists concerned about governance and delivering services which include the entire spectrum of society.

Objectives of the article

The objectives of this article are:
  i.   To uncover poor records management scenarios by examining Auditor-General reports for the period 1998 to 2013, covering the period which was selected by the international community to eradicate world poverty;
  ii. To scrutinise the governance criteria, concepts for effective and coherent records management and the changing role of the public archivists from custodians to fortifiers of good governance, integrity and services relevant to all South Africans;

iii. To highlight poverty eradication and sustainable economic development ventures, which are reliant on compliance and service delivery from public bodies to attain, and sustain, the intended objectives.

The following questions which were addressed:
i. What information do the reports of the Office of the Auditor-General provide that magnify records management challenges being experienced in public bodies?
ii. How can projects related to the millennium development goals and socio-economic upliftment be affected by poor service delivery and poor access to resources, due to the mismanagement of public sector information sources?
iii. How can access to accurate, reliable public sector information be facilitated through comprehensible index systems, relevant information management policies and well executed procedures and practices?
iv. How both the public archivists and records managers contribute to the post-apartheid South African metanarrative on governance and creating conducive to eradicate governance and provide proficient service delivery of basic essential services?

Research methodology

For the purposes of this doctoral study, the "mono-method" qualitative approach, associated with "constructivism and interpretivism" (Ngulube 2013:11) was applied. These encompassed investigations into revelations in the Auditor-General reports, by records management officials and the ramifications of lost records on governance, service delivery and the commitment of eradicating poverty projects in South African communities. The original research was constructed from data collected, via questionnaires, from local government records management officials, from South Africa's 283 municipalities (RSA 2012). Documentary evidence from international entities, like the World Bank, United Nations and International Monetary Fund, and the Office of the Auditor-General were analysed. In addition, the researcher opted for a case study design to focus on the role of records management, governance-based evidence and local community developments in the country's local governments.

Through inductive analysis and data correlation, the study illustrated the consequences of lost records, local community developments, effects on service delivery, governance and eradicating poverty. From the 283 South African municipal public entities which, in accordance with the National Archives and Records Service Act, no. 43 of 1996, should all have a records manager. In terms of this archival legislation, this official is responsible for overseeing the records management obligations of each public entity and the records management component. This component constitutes 32,4% of public sector staff, serving as records officials (Research Focus and Content-at-Work 2010:65-66). The researcher received responses from 64 officials in the provinces of Gauteng, Mpumalanga, North West, Limpopo and Eastern Cape (Schellnack-Kelly 2013:77-80). By means of purposive sampling, the researcher was able to comprehend the correlation between records management, evidence required to demonstrate governance commitments and the country's reputation to national and international observers. These components were central to the purpose of this research (Merriam 2002:16).

In addition, documentary analysis from individuals and institutions were identified as representing the different parties involved in socio-economic development projects, in South African local communities. Documentation, like official reports and social media were sourced to provide information on the governance indicators. Such evidence was obtained from on-line and social media sites of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, United Nations and

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related international agencies supporting humanitarian efforts, around the world and in South Africa. The Auditor-General audit reports relating to local governments were analysed. Particular attention was directed towards the evidence relevant to records management practices and accessibility of authentic evidence required to demonstrate governance compliance. Written documentation, media reports and television programmes provided the evidence for the two internationally-funded projects, included in this article. The first example is the World Bank-funded project involving the iSimangaliso Wetland Authority, in KwaZulu-Natal. The second example is the United Nations' Development Programme undertaking in the Vhembe District Municipality, in Limpopo Province (Schellnack-Kelly 2013).

Findings of the study

The findings of the doctoral study, which have been included for the purposes of this article, are discussed under the following subheadings:
- Authentic reporting and the Auditor-General reports
- Sustainable community development projects
  - iSimangaliso Wetland Authority and the World Bank
  - UNDP and the Vhembe District Municipality
- Examining public sector records management policies and tools

Authentic reporting and the Auditor-General reports

The significance of the Office of the Auditor-General in producing authentic auditing reports must be viewed in the context of the collapse of the multi-national corporation, *Enron*, in November 2001. This American multinational corporation funded operations around the world, by attracting large amounts of capital, while concealing its performance through false accounting, financial misdemeanours, inflated stocks and profits to fabricate "a rosy picture" (Healy and Palepu 2003:9). *Enron's* demise "shook the corporate world around the globe" and challenged the roles of the archivists and records managers (Isa 2009:23, 63). The purposeful shredding of supporting documents and accounting records and the generation of bogus records, orchestrated by their auditing firm, were executed to conceal improprieties. These findings simultaneously directed the focus towards failures in accountability processes (Healy and Palepu 2003:10-11).

Two resultant developments from *Enron's* demise was the *Standards of generally accepted accounting practices (GAAP)* This is the benchmark observed by the South African Auditor-General. These standards require financial transparency, so that investors are able to assess the reliability, integrity, prospects and risks undertaken by entities, including public bodies. In addition, as evidence of good corporate governance, this standard elevates records management to the status of the boardroom agenda. As contended in Isa's study (2009), boards of directors are accountable for the actions and business operations of their subordinates. Furthermore, directors should be wary of declaring their unawareness of wrongdoing of subordinates, particularly when records are prematurely destroyed or appear to be lost (Isa 2009:63, 233). *Enron's* demise provides the context within which the records managers' and archivists' roles may be viewed as narrators of the metanarrative, rather than as passive custodians.

The following extracts from the reports of the Office of the Auditor-General, from 1999 to 2013, reveal the absence of effective records management policies and practices. These reports are publicly available, to citizens, investors and potential investors. It is contended by the researcher that these reports should be critically viewed and analysed during strategic planning ventures, undertaken by both public archivists and records managers. Bold, urgent measures are required to transform the narratives illustrated below:

i. "Lack of or inadequate supporting documentation. Various transactions were found which lacked supporting documentation or where existing documentation was inadequate" (AG 1999:1).

ii. "Employees' personnel files lacked documentation such as, for instance, appointment letters, applications, copies of IDs, acceptance of appointment, salary package structures, and signed agreement for deductions; basic backdated salary approvals and information on supplementary payments. Some personnel files could not be submitted for audit purposes." (AG 1999:10).

iii. "Except for three transitional rural councils, all other audit reports of local governments in the Free State were qualified, in one way or another… restrictions on the scope of audits and uncertainties arising from the inability to attest to figures in annual financial statements, deficient accounting systems as well as incomplete or lacking records and/or supporting vouchers or the absence of annual financial statements…" (AG 2000a:9).

iv. "Major shortcomings in the administration of subsidised housing projects, such as incomplete accounting records, inadequate systems and/or lack of documentation supporting transactions…." (AG 2000b:18).

v. "… many new officials who … had not always had the necessary skills, formal training and/or knowledge stepped into vacant senior positions" (AG 2000c:27).

vi. "The fact that… books and financial statements of local authorities are not … available for auditing has a negative effect on public accountability" (AG 2003b:7).

vii. "… it was noted that various critical and key financial records were not maintained by local authorities … council minutes not always signed by the chairperson of the council, so as to prove the authenticity of decisions … decisions implemented on such minutes be regarded as unlawful" (AG 2003c:9, 11).

viii. "Whilst national and provincial governments face similar challenges with regard to audit qualifications, the number at local government level is far higher. The issue of capacity, which is assessed in this report… is fundamental if audit results and service delivery are to improve… It is generally recognised that public sector delivery essentially rests on the shoulder of local government. Untimely and unreliable information makes it difficult to assess the performance of management and undermines the accountability process. The challenge for role players and strategic partners is to meet the simple requirement of providing information in the public domain that can be relied upon… the outcry from citizens regarding the lack of, or backlog in, service delivery seems to be on the increase" (AG 2005:1,3).

ix. Basic good practice indicators are: clear audit trail of supporting documentation, accurate and effective financial statements and management information; aptness of financial statements and management information; presence of key officials during audits; development and compliance with risk management; good internal control practices; and effectiveness in leadership supervision and monitoring (AG 2006).

x. Only 33% of municipalities were able to provide effective, accurate and timeous audit trails of supporting documentation for the 2006-2007 audits (AG 2008a:14-15).

xi. In 2010-2011 reports, 90% of South African municipalities received unclean audits. Information communication technology and documentation were cited as contributing factors (AG 2012a, AG 2012b).

xii. In the financial year 2011-2012, only 16 local governments received clean audits, with attention being drawn to limited competencies and skills, lack of consequences for poor management and leadership to assume ownership of implementing strategic controls (AG 2013a:25).

Sustainable community development projects

This section illustrates examples of areas in South Africa, where sustainable economic development and socio-economic upliftment projects are being undertaken through funding from agencies, like the World Bank and UNDP. The objectives of the projects are discussed and the possible consequences of mismanagement of allotted funds and resources, by public entities, on these undertakings. The sustainability of these projects is centred on good management, good governance, democracy and human rights. In post-apartheid South Africa, the formidable impact which social movements and local protest groups played in dismantling apartheid appears to be largely underestimated and shelved. Poverty eradication and sustainable development projects, like those in the geographical proximities of the iSimangaliso Wetland Authority and Vhembe District Municipality, are beneficial and conducive to local communities to achieve development goals and economic growth targets (Coetzee 2010:21). Narratives such as these would be evidence of undertaking to address the aspirations of marginalised communities within South Africa's democratic dispensation, rather than the tainted narratives of violent service delivery protests.

iSimangaliso Wetland Authority and the World Bank

One of the millennium development goals is to ensure environmental sustainability to eradicate poverty, militarism and ecological degradation (UN 2011). A World Bank-supported project for the development, empowerment and conservation of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park and surrounding areas, in KwaZulu-Natal, is such an example. The project began in 2010. It is expected to be completed by the end of 2014 (WB 2009). The three objectives of the projects are to:
  i.   Protect the biodiversity of the wetland park through conservation, sustainable use of resources, coherent land use planning and local economic development;
  ii. Maintain the availability of fresh, quality water from the lake; and
  iii. Increase conservation-compatible economic opportunities to the local communities (WB 2009; Otto 2013).

In accordance with the formulated work plan, through the availability of reliable, authentic records from feasibility studies to investigations related to the procurement processes for service providers, funding students, capacity building for local communities and audits on the utilisation and management of resources; the project's progress has been, and will continue to be, monitored, with the final financial audits scheduled for November 2014. The focus of this World Bank project has been to integrate social, economic and environmental programmes resulting in job creation, infrastructural development and capacity building (Nzama 2009:35). The success of these undertaking requires the cooperation of the records managers and their supporting records officials in the iSimangaliso Wetland Authority and the provincial public archivists, in KwaZulu-Natal in ensuring the accessibility of required information. Good record keeping and the effective management of information are crucial to demonstrate accountability, transparency and evidence to all national and international interested stakeholders. The positive outcomes of this undertaking has been revealed to the general public through current affairs programmes reporting on the provision of housing, basic essential services, to the, and the improvement to the living conditions of the neighbouring local communities, including the settlements in the area of the Dukuduku Forests (Otto 2013).

The development initiative includes the upgrading of roads, tourism infrastructure, rehabilitation of the wetlands, malaria control, sites for investors, and mobilisation of small-scale economic activities (Nzama 2009). However, the need to achieve clean audits, to provide evidence on how

the resources were utilised, remains an essential requirement from the World Bank. As indicated, the clean audits are dependent on the ability of the auditors being provided with complete, accurate evidence related to supply chain management, service delivery reporting and human resources management (AG 2012a:12). This project is one example of endeavours being undertaken in South Africa dependent on good governance and best practices concerning management of records (AG 2012a:37).

The Auditor-General Report for KwaZulu-Natal for the period 2012-2013 reported on the need for local governments in that province to address governance, security, skills management, internal controls and for leadership and coordinating structures to improve on the outcomes and attain clean audits (AG 2014:10-11). This indicates that more effective measures are required to ensure the records are better managed in order to ensure the success and sustainability of this World Bank-funded endeavours. The Auditor-General report also noted the community development outcomes in the vicinity of iSimangaliso. The areas of False Bay and Mtubatuba managed to increase the number of households accessing electricity, piped water and toilet facilities. In the report, statistics for 2011 were recorded. Noted in the reported was the 43% and 65% of False Bay and Mtubatuba households having access to electricity respectively. In the same communities, 96% and 69% of households had access to piped water. In addition, 87% of False Bay households and 79% of Mtubatuba households had access to toilet facilities (AG 2014:184, 188).

United Nations Development Programme and Vhembe District Municipality

In 2012, the United Nations Development Programme revealed one of its projects involving the Vhembe District, in the province of Limpopo. The UNDP ascertained that in this area of South Africa, 1.3 million people are living in poverty. Through the Industrial Development Corporation, with funding of R1.9 billion, the Vhembe District Municipality was encouraged to create conducive conditions to support economic opportunities in the agricultural, tourism and manufacturing sectors and stimulate job creation initiatives for young, budding entrepreneurs (UNDP in South Africa 2012).

According to Sachs (2005:244), the provision of basic services such as water, power, sanitation and infrastructure are fundamental to producing conditions beneficial to enabling local communities to improve their socio-economic conditions. In order to attract and retain viable economic ventures and employment opportunities, the Vhembe District Municipality needs to comply with the Municipal Finance Management Act, no 56 of 2003, and provide the relevant documentation which enables reliable auditing. Evidence needs to be provided to the UNDP and Vhembe District communities on how allocated financial resources are utilised (Leftwich 2005). The most crucial proof of the outcomes of this UNDP funding would be the visual evidence and personal accounts, from the intended beneficiaries of these initiatives.

Currently, however, the narrative of eradicating poverty and ensuring sustainable development in Vhembe may not be achieved when evaluating the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 qualified audit reports of the Auditor-General. These reports have revealed the following scenarios with the Vhembe District Municipality: poor reporting of pre-determined objectives; findings of non-compliance with legal obligations; inadequate disclosure of information related to revenue, expenditure, including wasteful expenditure; and poor supporting documentation (AG 2012b:84). The narrative further reveals the nonchalant approach of the records managers and public archivists, in effecting good record keeping and responsible management of electronic information management systems. All this evidence distorts the commitment and sincerity of the country's government in eradicating poverty and discourages funding from international entities,

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like the UNDP. Media reports on the Vhembe District, such as in the *Mail and Guardian* in March 2013, reporting on the 144 complaints received by the South African Human Rights Commission relating to the quality and supply of water, for the period 2011 to 2013, and the subsequent impact on the education, health, work and dignity of the local communities (Water complaints . . . 2013), tarnish the humanitarian objectives of the UNDP project.

Examining public sector records management policies and tools

According to the South African National Archives and Records Service Act, no. 43 of 1996, the objectives and functions assigned to the public archivists include:

i.   Preserving public and non-public records with enduring value for use by the public and state;
ii.   Making such records accessible and promote their use by the public;
iii.   Ensuring the proper management and care of all public records;
iv.   Collect non-public records with enduring value of national significance which cannot be more appropriately preserved by another institution, with due regard to document aspects of the nation's experience neglected by archives repositories in the past;
v.   Assisting, supporting, setting standards and providing professional guidelines to provincial archives services;
vi.   Promoting awareness of archives and records management and encouraging archival and records management activities; and
vii.   Promoting the preservation and use of a national archival heritage (NARS 2007:56-58).

Even though South African public archivists are required to focus on measures to attain and maintain an archival heritage, they are also mandated to provide effective management and care to public records in public bodies (NARS 2007:55). The public archivists are obligated to oversee and enforce records management programmes, which enable public bodies to manage their information so that they can meet their intended missions and objectives.

In terms of records management responsibilities, section 5 of the National Archives and Records Service Act, no. 43 of 1996, requires public archivists to undertake measures to arrange, describe and retrieve records; and provide information, consultation, research and services related to the achievements of the promulgated objectives. Section 13, of the same Act, promulgates the records management-related responsibilities and duties of the public archivists. These duties include the proper management and care of public records in the custody of public entities; providing written authorisation to public entities which are intending to transfer records to an archives repository, destroyed, erase or otherwise dispose; the granting of approval for record classification systems, like the file plans for both paper and electronic records, conditions of records being microfilmed or electronically reproduced and electronic records systems; and conducting inspections to ensure public entities manage and care for their records according to acceptable archival standards and conditions, and investigate related irregularities (NARS 2007:51-62).

Recommendations

The importance of observing governance, creating and managing credible sources of reliable evidence and the importance of poverty eradication initiatives are fundamental to South Africa's developmental state. The roles that the South African public archivists, and their symbiotic relationship with the public sector records managers, in determining the records management systems and which records should be permanently preserved, cannot be ignored. In addition,

the records management weaknesses identified in the audit reports should not be relegated to the side-line.

The researcher's proposed recommendations entail closer examination of the role of the South Africa public archivist, in relation to their promulgated obligations. The first aspect is the criteria employed by the archivists to grant approval of record keeping systems for public bodies. The second aspect relates to the appraisal and disposal functions on public bodies' records. These are discussed under the subheadings:

- Aptness of approved record keeping systems
- Archival value versus governance.

Aptness of approved record keeping systems

As mentioned above, the public archivists approve the record keeping systems which public entities may use, under the direction of the records managers, to manage all the information sources, regardless of form or medium. Traditionally, the record keeping system, referred to as the file plan, was formulated to manage paper-based records. These records were arranged and stored on what is referred to as "correspondence files". These file plans are also the indexing systems advocated by the public archivist to be the basis of the systems for digital records. The file plan is described as a "functional subject file plan" and is the record keeping system which South African public bodies are required to compile, have approved by the public archivist and, under the guidance of the records managers, implement for both paper and digital records (NARS 2007:61-62). The inclusion of managing digital records complies with requirements from the Electronic Communications and Transactions Act, no. 25 of 2002, which requires manual and electronic records to be managed according to similar indexing systems (RSA 2002).

The functional subject file plan, on its face value, is an effective indexing system. The objective of the plan is to utilise an organogram of the particular entity and to dissect the business functions to identify series and then individual subject files. Then, according to these subject files, the records (information sources) associated with the business activity are arranged and stored (NARS 2007:107). The selections of and choice of naming conventions (Rajh and Sabotic 2012), under the guidance of public archivists, are then coupled to a numbering system.

One of the biggest challenges being encountered in South Africa's public sector records management environments is the skills shortages, and records management personnel, from previously disadvantaged communities, who have not had opportunities to acquire adequate literacy and numeracy skills (Research Focus and Content at Work 2010). In a survey conducted in 2010, it was determined that 51,4% of the records officials working in the registry offices have education levels below the National Qualifications Framework Level 4, being the matriculation qualification (Research Focus 2010). Bearing this in mind, the education levels of the records officials and the complexities of selected descriptions coupled to an elaborate numbering system should be considered as a factor for the poor record keeping in public entities. Furthermore, it may thus be contested as to whether the approved file plans indeed meet the public archivists' requirements of being "simple, flexible and user-friendly" (NARS 2007:72). Fig 1 illustrates the prototype main series for **Finance** required by the public archivists.

The power play continues into the realm of digital records, where poorly skilled records officials, with minimal computer skills and computer literacy, are required to manage complex information management systems, such as electronic document records management systems (EDRMS). The EDRMS is advocated, internationally and nationally, as an integrated systems management solution to manage paper and digital records (Staunton 2012). The system complies with international standards and best practices, it observes statutory requirements and

enables entities to manage information sources related to integrated human resources, enterprise resource planning, purchasing accounts, customer relationship management, enterprise content management, e-mail and entity-specific information-management systems, like databases (Staunton 2012:3-6).

Figure 1: Prototype main series in the functional subject file plan, for Finance (NARS 2009)

Fig 2 hypothetically illustrates the corresponding EDRMS (electronic document records management system) for the same main series.
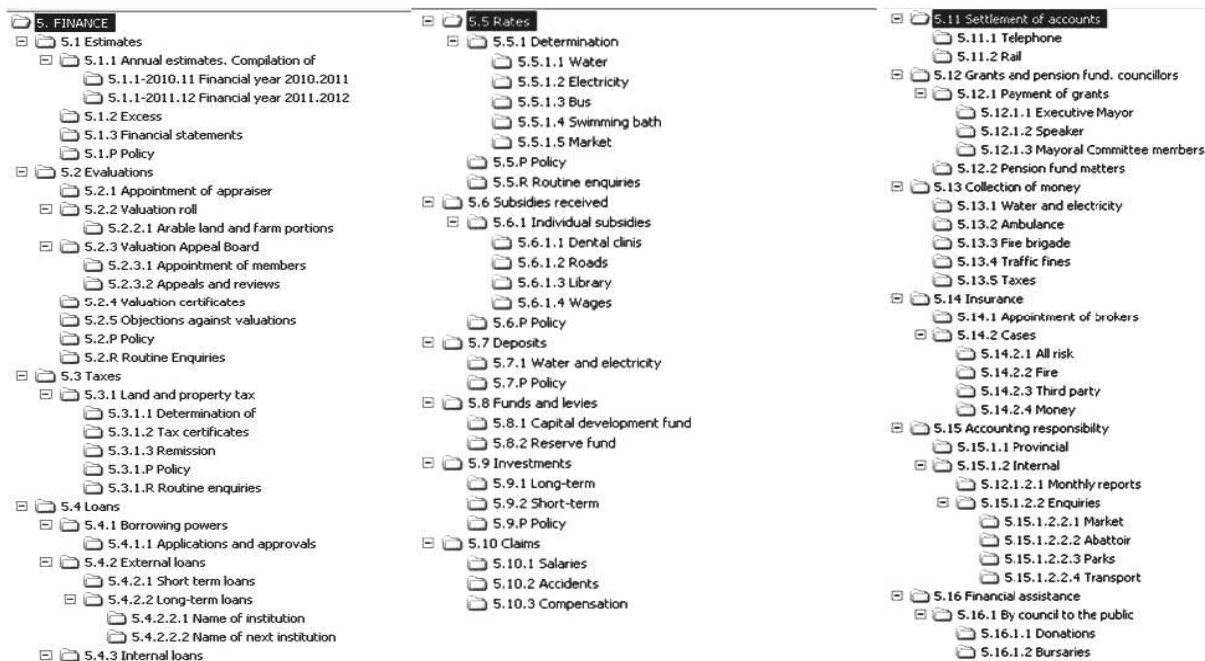

Figure 2: Proposed electronic file plan structure for series 5: Finance (Authors' configuration)

Accentuating the challenges encountered by the records officials, while conducting the conducting the study, records officials were asked the following questions:

i)   How adequately does records management enable the organisation to meet its legal, financial and administrative requirements?

ii) Illustrate the perceptions of the organisation concerning records management matters and what is provided to enhance the programme?

iii) Identify the challenges involved with managing the records. Describe the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation in managing its records.

iv) Does the organisation possess adequate records management policies and procedural directives enlightening all users on matters relating to the creation, maintenance and disposition of records? (Cox 2005: 39-40).

Only two of the local government officials believed that the entity's records management programme was able to meet the legal, financial and administrative requirements by means of their extensive filing systems. In these particular entities the records are being filed in an orderly manner, cabinets are well labelled and documents are stored in fireproof storage areas and adequate security. Another official believed the obligations could only be met because the documents were being captured into a credible electronic document management system. This is in spite of the fact that the majority of records officials feel that the records staff are poorly involved and trained in the transformation from paper records to electronic records. However, all of entities had experienced incidents where the information had been lost, misplaced or misfiled and scattered information. Majority of the officials reported that their offices did have approved file plans that had been approved by the National Archives but, many components were intent on managing and maintaining their own records and own filing systems. In addition, there is a general lack of enforceable policies and procedures resulting in confusion because of the multiplicity of indexing systems. Respondents also revealed the large volumes of records belonging to the previous dispensation which occupies basements areas and fire escapes with no clear guidelines on the disposal of these records (Schellnack-Kelly 2013: 112-113).

If, as contended by Derrida (1996) and Foucault (1992), lexicology is the power play of the public archivists in defining and directing the metanarrative of the public bodies; then the public archivists' are also accountable for the evidence required in audit investigations. As proposed by Isa and Nordin (2012), if accountability is largely based on financially-related information, standard accounting practices should be one of the criteria determining the design and approval record keeping systems (Isa and Nordin 2012). Observing this criterion may improve the accessibility by ensuring the information is correctly filed and can be retrieved whenever needed.

Archival value versus governance

In accordance with South African archival legislation, public archivists are assigned with the responsibility of identifying and ensuring the preservation of archival heritage. Public archivists are obligated, in terms of the country's archival legislation, to identify public records of enduring value which should be arranged, managed and preserved according to accepted archival requirements, which involve observation of archival principles. Twenty years from the date that the records came into being, these records may be accessed by the general public (Harris 2000:40). The purpose of this appraisal function, which in South Africa is conducted by the public archivists, involves differentiating between records having enduring value from those adjudicated as being purely ephemeral. The latter records may not be transferred to a public archives repository for safekeeping. Instead, these are records which may be considered for destruction, by the creating public entity. The destruction of public records, including the completion and submission of destruction certificates, is assigned to public sector records

managers (NARS 2007:26-27). Meanwhile, the records adjudicated as having enduring value are recommended for eventual transfer to a public archives repository, twenty years from the date that the records were created.

This appraisal function is an influencing factor considered by the public archivists when approving the record keeping systems of public entities and processing requests from public entities for written authorisation to dispose of records. In essence, public archivists view all public records from this perspective because they must consider the volume of information sources requiring accommodation in the country's public archival facilities. Like archival institutions around the globe, the South African public archives services and related archival programmes operate on the "proverbial financial shoestring" (Cox 2005:37). This is particularly evident from the budget allocated to the National Archives, in 2011-2012, of R694 452.00 (Duggan 2012).

Nevertheless, much of the information sought by the Office of the Auditor-General concerning financial transactions, chain supply management and human resources, are records not regarded as having archival value. In fact, the records managers may consider the destruction of these ephemeral records. The disposal actions applied to a sample of financially-related records is illustrated below, in fig.3. These records represent information required to demonstrate transparency, accountability and ultimately governance but, are side-lined by the public archivists for being irrelevant to their heritage pursuits. It is the contention of the researcher, that this may be one of the reasons public archivists, and records managers, have largely ignored the records management irregularities identified in the audit reports. The public archivists, and records managers, have failed to realise that the poor access to information, in the approved record keeping systems and the in-effective management and control of public information sources, are contributing to citizens' mistrust of in providing the relevant information to facilitate improved service delivery from public entities. The records need to provide evidence that the public entities are efficient and technically functional institutions (Ferguson 2006:84).

Treasury Regulations: PFMA

Type of record	Years after which records can be disposed of
General ledger and cash books or similar records	15
Main transaction summary records, including general journals and transaction summaries	10
Internal audit reports	
System appraisals	
Primary evidentiary records, including copies of forms issued for value, vouchers to support payments made, pay sheets, returned warrant vouchers or cheques, invoices and similar records associated with the receipt or payment of money	5
Subsidiary ledgers, including inventory cards and records relating to assets no longer held or liabilities that have been discharged	
Supplementary accounting records, including, for example, cash register strips, bank statements and time sheets	5
General and incidental source documents not included above, including stock issue and receivable notes, copies of official orders (other than copies for substantiating payments or for unperformed contracts), bank deposit books and post registers	5

17.2.4　When financial information is required as evidence in proceedings before a court, Parliament, a provincial legislature, an official inquiry or otherwise, or for purposes of an audit, it must be secured in its then current form until no longer required, even if the National Archivist has authorised its disposal.

Figure 3: Treasury Instructions relating to the disposal of public records (NARS website 2013)

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Conclusion

Derrida (1996) contends that the *archive* is a construction created from power and that the archivists (and records managers) are assigned powers to control and determine the metanarrative (Allan 2009:206). The *archive* can be composed from collections of documents, records, images, data, personal collections and their relations to power (Eichhorn 2008). These sources are selected, assembled, arranged, described and interpreted by the public archivists and records managers to formulate the narratives (Eichhorn 2008:3), such as is evident in this investigation in the Auditor-General reports. The public archivists and records managers, in their involvement with the creation, management, preservation and disposal of these information sources, contribute to the dissemination and accessibility of information required to ascertain governance, transparency, accountability (Lynch 1999:75-76) and the narrative of making poverty history. However, as argued by Harris (2007) even the gaps in the information sources, those items that appear to be lost or destroyed, provide space for interpretations and assumptions (Harris 2007:6), which may sow mistrust and question the integrity of the entities and individuals.

South African public archivists and public sector records managers are participants in the history-making narrative, in not only ensuring the information is accessible for governance assessments but, also for the information required to carry out poverty eradication and sustainable socio-economic development projects, like the examples of the iSimangaliso Wetland Authority and Vhembe District Municipality. The public archivists and records managers should be intent on formulating records management tools and policies that are cognisant of the processes and production of information sources. As contended by Cox (2005), the record keeping systems must enable the public entities to achieve their intended goals and objectives. These public officials must be aware of the subjectivity involved in choosing descriptions for the information sources, as in the case of the approved file plans. The role of language in controlling and restricting access, transparency and openness (Harris 2007:260), literacy and technological challenges cannot be ignored when information is required from the information sources to ensure access to basic services like water, electricity, sanitation, housing, infrastructure, health care and education.

Although the South African public archivists' roles in facilitating access and management of public sector information sources should be viewed as crucial to enable public bodies to "provide effective, transparent, accountable and coherent government" (RSA 1996a: section 41(1)(c)); their insignificance in the public sector is emphasized in the limited allocation of financial resources (Duggan 2012) which then impacts on the employment and retention of skilled public archivists and the services they can provide (Research Focus 2010:78).

The role of the public archivists need to be transformed from the realm of the elite, and the heritage-searchers, to providing services to manage and preserve the information sources required by all South Africans to ensure that the voices of ordinary people are heard and enable the country to achieve a transparent, accountable public sector (Harris 2007:259, 404) and a society free from poverty. The public archivists and the records managers need to demonstrate their responsibilities to ensure resources are used accountably and transparently, with accurate, authentic information as evidence of good governance and best practices.

However, like the directors of *Enron*, the political leaders, executive and management echelons involvement in public entities cannot shun responsibility, or be oblivious, of the transgressions relating to poor record keeping and missing or destroyed information sources. In essence, public archivists and records managers must actively participate in endeavours to ensure public sector information resources are created, managed and preserved to meet the mission and objectives of

the public entity. Improved access to accurate information would facilitate better service delivery and enable impoverished areas, like the Vhembe District Municipality and communities neighbouring the iSimangaliso Wetland Authority, to engage in sustainable economic development. Improved access to public sector information would create a climate conducive to generating confidence, earning citizen's trust in the democratic dispensation and constructively writing the narrative of eradicating poverty in South Africa.

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