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A SERVICE DELIVERY IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY FOR A RECORDS MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

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Abstract

Good records management boosts efficient and effective public service delivery in that it minimizes litigation risks, promotes accountability and transparency, ensures compliance with regulatory requirements and supports informed decision-making. The current study sought to find out what initiatives have been implemented by land boards in Botswana, as a way of improving their records management programmes to enhance effective service delivery. An interpretive paradigm was adopted through a case study research design. This study adopted purposive sampling and collected data from 53 employees at the Tlokweng Land Board (TLB). Data were collected through interviews, observation, document review and an open-ended questionnaire. The study findings revealed that the TLB has implemented various initiatives as a way of improving the recordkeeping processes. As a result, the land board has improved its service delivery as there is adherence to policies, reduction of errors, online services, improved security of records and easy access to records. It is, therefore, recommended that organizations should move with time and continue to improve recordkeeping practices to remain relevant in the current environment.

Keywords: Records management, Tlokweng Land board, service delivery, customer service

Introduction

Records are one of the most important organizational assets that have value beyond the immediate environment (Usman & Udensi 2013). They are the lifeblood of any organization and they form the basis for decision-making, policy formulation and service provision. Various government ministries all over the world have been facing problems in the management of records and, consequently, this has affected the quality of public service delivery (Abuki 2014; Mampe & Kalusopa 2012; Marutha 2011). Good records management boosts efficient and

effective public service delivery as it minimizes litigation risks, promotes accountability and transparency, ensures compliance with regulatory requirements and supports informed decision-making (Abuzawayda, Yusof & Aziz 2013; Moemi & Rotich 2015; Okoli & Onuigbo 2014). According to Hoque and Sorwar (2015), the development of any country depends on its capability to access and use records effectively. Accordingly, records managers should refine their records management programmes by implementing retention and disposal schedules, international records management standards and procedures, disaster management plans, user-friendly classification schemes, records management policies and electronic records management systems, which will improve information access and public service delivery.

Motivation of the study

Of more interest to this study is the management of land records as a strategy for service improvement in the Ministry of Lands and Housing (MLH) in Botswana. Studies conducted in Kenya, India, South Africa, Botswana and Ghana revealed that there is a lack of transparency and accountability, loss of records, double allocations of land parcels, unavailability of centralized land registers, lack of periodic updating of records, inaccessible records and incomplete registers in Records Management Units at the land boards (Aggarwal 2014; Kwanya 2014; Kurwakumire 2014; Moemi & Rotich 2015). The high incidence of poor service delivery in the land boards due to poor records management has necessitated the need to improve recordkeeping processes and implement various electronic records management systems that will improve service delivery (Ali & Nasir 2010; Kettani & Moulin 2014; Neumeier 2013). In Botswana, the Department of Land Boards Services has been facing some challenges regarding tribal land administration (Lantmäteriet 2011). Some of these challenges included dispersed records, which leads to a vast amount of time being spent on locating records; incomplete registers; loss of records; no common register for tribal land; poor record keeping, which leads to backlogs; duplication of rights to land parcels and no proper registers over allocated land (Abankwah 2012; Bornegrim & Collin 2010; Mothibi, Malatsi & Finnström 2011). Given this background, the current study sought to find out what initiatives have been implemented by Botswana land boards to enhance effective service delivery. This was achieved through the following objectives:

- To identify the initiatives implemented in land records management programmes.
- To establish the motivation for change.
- To establish the benefits of refining land records management programmes.

Literature review

This section will discuss issues pertaining to initiatives implemented in the records management environment to aid service delivery and the benefits for improving records management programmes.

- **New records management initiatives**

As shown in Table 1, various countries have started taking advantage of ICTs to improve their recordkeeping environments. This shows that there are a lot of initiatives being implemented in various countries, and Botswana is not an exception to this endeavour to improve service delivery.

Table 1: Initiatives implemented in the recordkeeping environment

Area	Country	ERM project
Courts: Legal and judicial information systems	Singapore (World Bank & IRMT, 2002)	▪ Electronic filing system (EFS) ▪ Electronic Registry System (ERS) known as KRIS
	Malaysia (Azmi, 2010; Johare, Hussin, & Jamaludin, 2009)	▪ Electronic Court Records (ECR) programme ▪ Case Management System (CMS) ▪ Court Recording & Transcription (CRT) system ▪ Queue Management System (QMS)
Ministry of Health (Fraser et al. 2005)	Kenya	▪ Mosoriot Medical Record System (MMRS) ▪ Academic Medical Record Systems (AMRS)
	Peru and Haiti	▪ Partners in Health Electronic Records Management System (PIH-EMR) ▪ HIV-EMR system
	Uganda	▪ Careware System (EMR)
	Brazil	▪ Computerized System for the Control of Drug Logistics (SICLOM)
	Singapore (Leung, 2012)	▪ National Electronic Health Record (NEHR) system
Ministry of Lands	Malaysia (Johare, 2001)	▪ National Land Information System (NALIS)
	Kenya (Kwanya, 2014) (Nyongesa, 2012)	▪ Land Information Management System ▪ GIS-based National Land Information Management System (NLIMS)
	Pakistan (Imran, Ferdous, Adeel, & Faheem, 2013)	▪ ArcGIS Parcel Data Model
	Botswana (Malatsi & Finnstrom, 2011)	▪ The Land Administration Procedures, Capacity and Systems (LAPCAS)
Records management and Library services	Botswana (Document Bank Botswana, 2012)	▪ Electronic Document Management System (EDMS) known as PaperTrail
	Ethiopia (Mammo, 2012)	▪ National Integrated Records & Library Management Information System (NIRLMIS)
Revenue services	South Africa (Jankeeparsad, 2013)	▪ South African Revenue Services' (SARS) e-filing system

Studies conducted in Kenya revealed that poor records management practices negatively affected service delivery in the public sector (Kemoni & Ngulube 2008; Ndambuki 2015; Oyaro 2013). Another study conducted in South Africa by Marutha (2011) also discovered that poor records management negatively affected timely and effective healthcare services. These studies concluded by recommending that the public sector agencies should improve their records management programmes by implementing appropriate records management policies, developing records management standards and procedures and implementing Electronic Records Management Systems (ERMS). The reviewed literature clearly shows that poor records management has a negative effect on service delivery. Thus it is only imperative for government agencies to improve their recordkeeping processes so as to improve service delivery.

- **Motivation for improving a records management programme**

Managing change involves understanding the drivers of the change, for instance what is motivating the change to take place (Guler 2010). Having understood the drivers for change, the organization can effectively develop strategies to control both external and internal effects on the organization. Creasey (2007) states that:

> Change typically results as a reaction to specific problems or opportunities the organization is facing based on internal or external stimuli. While the notion of 'becoming more competitive' or 'becoming closer to the customer' or 'becoming more efficient' can be the motivation to change, at some point these goals must be transformed into the specific impacts on processes, systems, organization structures or job roles. (p.2).

Saruhan (2013) further explains that organizations must refine their structures, strategies and processes when current conditions are not satisfactory to create a competitive advantage in the market. This is evident in a study by Lindroth and Borg (2014), where Gambling Inc. had to implement new initiatives due to market forces. Implementing new projects helped the company to stay strong in the industry and adjust to competition, clients' needs and technological changes. In essence, the company changed in order to adapt to the external environment, to save costs and to gain control in the market (Lindroth & Borg 2014). Similarly, in the records management environment, there are various drivers that are putting pressure on both public and private organizations to improve their recordkeeping practices. For instance, in an online research survey of financial organizations (from North America, Europe and Asia), it was established that accessibility and knowledge sharing are key drivers of implementing electronic records management programmes (Miles 2011). The study further revealed that "compliance with statutory records legislation" was ranked number one, followed by "reduce storage costs" and

"compliance with industry regulations", which is said to be a very strong driver for financial organizations (Miles 2011).

Both private and public sector organizations are beginning to appreciate the need for reducing duplication of records and implementing effective retention schedules that will force safe destruction or deletion of records and archiving of those that have continuing value. This is the only real solution to the constant demand for storage space and ultimately saving costs. For many organizations, this has been the main driver for implementing changes in recordkeeping practices (Miles 2011). Another study by Weise (2013) also affirmed that compliance, effectiveness, efficiency and continuity are motivation for change in the records management environment. Compliance entails the need for organizations to create records and retain them for a specific period of time. Effectiveness involves carrying out business operations in a better way, whereas efficiency refers to productivity and cost saving. Business continuity ensures that organizations are able to conduct business transactions after having suffered substantial loss or interruption (Weise 2013). This is possible through the implementation of disaster preparedness plans that ensure that records remain safe during a disaster and can be accessed after the disaster. Literature also reveals that exponential growth in sources of information, storage formats and storage devices due to rapid technological advances has put more pressure on organizations to change the way in which they manage and store their records (Dale 2011; McKinnon 2013). Failure to keep up with these technological developments may lead to poor productivity and inaccessibility of records as technology becomes obsolete. Literature pertaining to land records management has revealed that motivation for implementing new initiatives arises from problems faced in land administration. For example, the Indian government leveraged technology to improve service delivery. Due to problems ranging from poor recordkeeping, inaccuracies and litigations at various levels, the government introduced the National Land Records Modernization Programme (NLRMP) (Rabha 2015).

- **Benefits of refining a records management programme**

Records management programmes have been operating manually throughout the world. With the introduction of technology, the records management environment has seen a new dawn as various recordkeeping practices are being automated. Automation of business processes offers the opportunity to increase business efficiencies and reduce costs. Organizations with an effective and comprehensive records management programme in place operate at a superior level in terms of service delivery effectiveness and efficiency (Mutimba 2014). Literature affirms that

the implementation of ERMS has the potential to increase transparency and accountability in making informed decisions (Abuzawayda, Yusof & Aziz 2013). They also help organizations to comply with regulatory laws and assist staff to produce accurate and up-to-date documentation. Land records management systems or programmes are improved in order to achieve numerous goals. Some of the reasons include to facilitate data sharing among land boards (Mothibi, Malatsi & Finnström 2011), to improve land allocation and manage the waiting list (Sietchiping & Ezigbalike 2010), to avoid double booking and illegal occupation (Ali & Nasir 2010), to facilitate easy access to spatial data such as minutes and information on plot allocations (Makhumalo 2014), to integrate land records systems with other government departments such as Births and Deaths, Deeds Registry, Civil Registration, Ministry of Agriculture and Department of Water Affairs (Abankwah 2012; Bornegrim & Collin 2010), to generate meaningful reports to aid with decision-making (Farah 2011), to interface with paper records, for example, show location of certificates and correspondences (Kwanya 2014) and to provide online services to the public, such as access to application forms (Lantmäteriet 2011).

Methodology

This is mainly an exploratory study that adopted an interpretive paradigm which allowed the researchers to solicit the deeper feelings and opinions of the participants pertaining to the initiatives implemented to improve the recordkeeping processes. The researchers conducted an in-depth case study at the TLB. The case study was conducted through the use of qualitative methods of collecting data being one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews, observation, document review and an open-ended questionnaire.

Purposive sampling was used to collect data from 53 employees. Purposive sampling was chosen for this study because it allows the researcher to select an informant based on the qualities they possess (Tongco 2007). As a result, employees with certain responsibilities in the implementation and use of records management programmes were purposively selected. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data while Microsoft Excel was used to produce charts for qualitative data that were quantified for statistical purposes.

The study participants were given an informed consent form to sign as a way of assuring their participation in the study and of informing them that privacy and confidentiality will be observed through retaining anonymity. As supported by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) and

Saunders, Kitzinger and Kitzinger (2015) alphabetical codes (e.g. 'participant A, B, C and D' for one-on-one interviews), numerical codes (e.g. 'respondent 17' to represent respondents who answered the questionnaire) and pseudo names (e.g. 'Neo, Nancy' for focus group interview) were used to maintain confidentiality and to preserve the anonymity of the research participants. Permission to conduct research was sought from the Office of Research and Development (ORD) at the University of Botswana, the MLH and the TLB. Human rights ethics were also considered as participants that were not subjected to any form of discrimination either by gender, religion, age or race. Falsifying, misinterpreting, suppressing and fabricating research data were avoided by all means as it is prohibited in research (Gajjar 2013).

Research findings and discussions

Questionnaires were hand delivered to 55 action officers and 46 were successfully completed and returned. This represented a return rate of 84%. This implies that the results can be deemed as reliable and generalizable to the population of the study. Face–to-face interviews were conducted with four employees while a focus group interview was conducted with three employees from the Information Technology Department. Thus, the total number of study participants was 53. Observation was conducted in the file storage room and the computer software for managing land parcels.

Initiatives implemented to improve the records management programme

Respondents were given an open-ended question asking them to list all the new records management programmes that were being implemented in the RMU. The answers to this question were grouped into themes and quantified as shown in Figure 1.

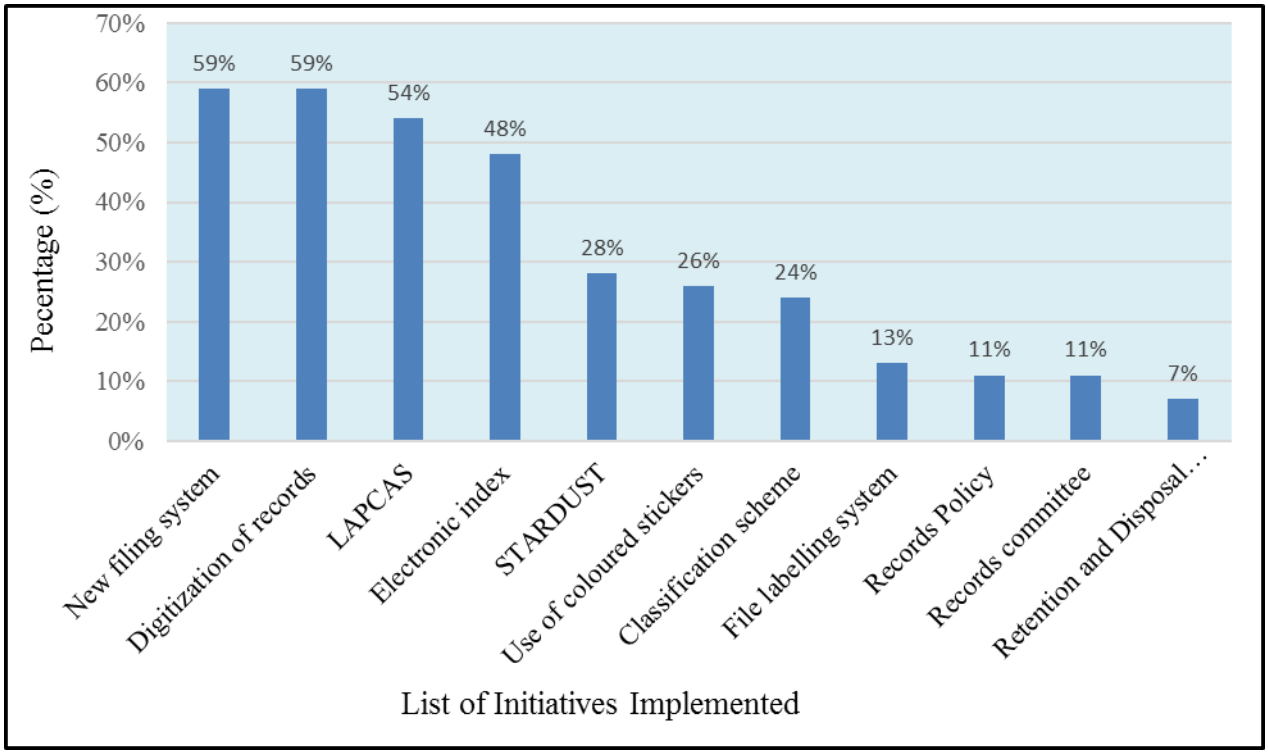

Figure 1: Initiatives implemented at Tlokweng Land Board (RMU) (N=46).
Source: Field data (2016)

As can be seen from Figure 1, there are indeed a number of initiatives implemented at the TLB. Respondents outlined the following records management initiatives taking place in the RMU: new filing system (n=27, 59%), digitization of records (n=27, 59%) and the Land Administration, Procedures, Capacity and Systems (LAPCAS) project (n=25, 54%). Only 22 (48%) respondents mentioned an electronic index, followed by STARDUST with 13 (28%) respondents, use of colored stickers (n=12, 26%), classification scheme (n=11, 24%), file labeling system (n=6, 13%), records policy (n=5, 11%), records committee (n=5, 11%) and retention and disposal schedules with three (7%) respondents.

Follow-up interviews were conducted to solicit more information on how the land board was improving its recordkeeping processes. The interviews were also meant to elaborate on what the initiatives entail and what they were meant to achieve. Findings from the interviews also support the results in Figure 1 above. According to participant B, "*most of these initiatives, for example; classification scheme, retention and disposal schedule, records committee, records policy, electronic index started taking place . . . around 2009*". Participant A also revealed that the new filing system consisted of colored files, use of plot numbers, use of thermal labeling machines and use of colored stickers. Interviewees concurred that the new filing system was much more efficient as it categorized

types of plots according to their usage, thus each category was given a color to represent it. For example, as noted during observation in the file cabinet (file storage room), files were categorized using the following colors; ***green files*** – ploughing fields, ***pink*** – appeals, ***white*** – commercial plots, ***yellow*** – residential customary plots, ***orange*** – dwelling huts, ***red*** – water rights, ***brown*** – civic and community, ***gold*** – industrial plots, ***dark blue*** – kraals, and ***sky blue*** – common law residential. As per the interviewees in the focus group, the respondents were not very much aware of what the different colors represent apart from the administrative files they use every day.

Participant A further expounded that,
"The new filing system uses plot numbers for identification and storage rather than the name of the owner. The usage of plot numbers makes it easy to follow up the ownership history of the same plot as all details are kept in one file".

Participant C also added that,
"The new filing system entails using a new labeling method. We are now using machines and thermal labeling tape which is more durable than markers".

This new filing system has improved the land registration process as it makes use of colored stickers to indicate that a certain stage has been completed. Supporting this finding, participant D elaborated that:
"We have about six colors representing different stages; **white** – capturing records into STADUST, **orange** – verification stage (using certificate or national identity card), **blue** - sketch plan production, **red** – quality assurance, **green** – adjudication and **pink** – board resolution. These colored stickers make the LAPCAS project much easier to complete, as action officers are able to tell at which stage a certain file is and where action is needed".

Commenting on digitization of records, participants mentioned that it entails referencing and scanning records into electronic files. Thereafter, the scanned documents are put in a shared folder/ network for all action officers to access. Participant D added that,

"We have a computer application called "10 days" where all received mail is entered into the system identifying the officer who needs to take action on the filed records and the reference number is also provided to allow easy access to the relevant file. We also have an electronic index

used to capture all land records according to the new classification scheme and used for retrieval purposes. The electronic index can be searched using different attributes such as the name of the plot owner, file number or the national identity number."

Follow-up interviews and documents reviewed at the TLB indicated that LAPCAS was a partner-driven project between Botswana and Sweden. It consisted of seven sub-projects, namely development of national standards for unique identifiers of land parcels and location addresses, improvement of land administration processes, computerization of the Deeds Register, systematic adjudication and registration of tribal (customary) land, improvement of IT operations and maintenance, facilitated exchange and dissemination of information, and building of capacity (Land & Malatsi 2014). Lantmäteriet (2011) also revealed that the objective of the LAPCAS project was successful social and economic development of the nation based on efficient, effective and transparent land administration.

Participant D further explained that,

"The main task at hand is for action officers to ensure smooth registration of all land parcels. The registration process requires clients to bring their customary land rights certificates and identity cards. This process will help us to have integrated information on who owns what and where. The LAPCAS project will also facilitate access of land records information from all parts of the country, thereby improving productivity and customer service."

Interview participants also made comments pertaining to an electronic tool called STARDUST. It was revealed that STARDUST was implemented to help with the capturing of land records. As observed from the computer screenshot, this tool has a list of all plot owners and allows records to be searched using access points such as the plot number and the national identity number (Figure 2). Participant D (if this not coded for confidentiality) further explained that, "STARDUST was developed by one of the IT employees in Mochudi Sub-Land Board. It is now being used for capturing data needed for the LAPCAS land registration process and it is hosted by Mogoditshane Land Board."

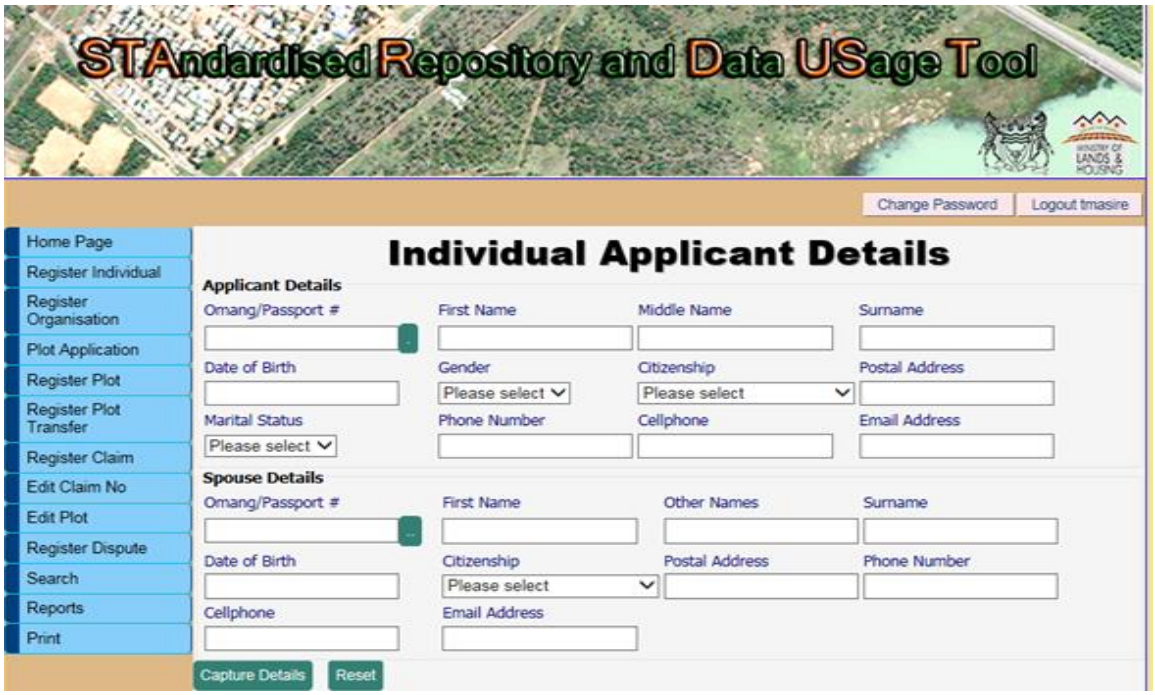

Figure 2: STARDUST interface.

Source: Field data (2016)

Data collected through interviews and document reviews further revealed that the TLB classification scheme contained alpha-numeric descriptive information for categorizing files based on the functions (records groups) and activities (records series) performed by the Land Board. Each series has a list of possible files under it. An example of the classification scheme is shown in Table 2. Participant C explained that, "We use this classification scheme to reference all records and put them in relevant files. This system facilitates with the storage of records as files are arranged systematically according to their file numbers. The system also allows easy access to files."

Table 2: Example of a functional classification scheme used at the TLB

Record group	Record series	File name and reference no.
1 Administration	1/1 Associations, Committees, Commissions, Unions And Societies	TLB1/1/1 - Records Management Committee
2 Estate management and property management	2/1 Accommodation	TLB 2/1/3 - Office Requisitions and Rentals
3 Finance	3/3 Budget and Estimates	TLB 3/3/2 - Supplementary and Virements

4	Human RESOURCE	4/5 Training and Development	TLB 4/5/2 - Land Board Members Training
5	Supply	5/1 Legislation Policies and Procedures	TLB5/1/1 Supplies Regulations
6	Land MANAGEMENT	Classification scheme attached in appendix 7- with full records series.	

Source: Tlokweng Land Board Classification scheme (2011)

Follow-up interviews and document reviews at the TLB also revealed that the existing records management policy acted as a guiding document for implementing records management programmes at the land board and ensuring that records are created, captured, maintained, stored and made accessible in accordance with legislative requirements. Participant B elaborated that.

"The records management policy also defines the records management terminology, records management areas, and outlines the key roles and responsibilities of stakeholders involved in the creation and management of records. It also lists the laws to be used when officers breach the records management policy."

It was also noted by Participant A that the TLB has an active records management committee which consists of one representative from all units, the board secretary, the records manager and the systems analysts. As stipulated in the records management committee's terms of reference document (Tlokweng Land Board 2013), the mandate of the committee is to:

- assist the records management office in the implementation of policies and procedures governing the records management programme
- review the performance of the programme on a regular basis and propose changes and improvements if needed
- review and approve records control schedules submitted by the records management officer
- give final approval to the destruction of records in accordance with approved records control schedules
- actively support and promote the records management programme throughout the land board.

The records management committee is currently known as the 'Information Management Committee'. The purpose of the new name was to enable the inclusion of the IT department that

plays an important role in the implementation of records management systems. The committee was said to meet quarterly unless there were urgent matters to attend to.

From the interviews, it was also noted that the purpose of the retention and disposal schedules was to guide the land board on which records to retain, which records to transfer to the Botswana National Archives and Records Services, which records to dispose of and how to dispose of them. Participant A affirmed that, "The retention and disposal schedule allows us to keep records which add value to the organization and supports its administrative functions. By so doing, space is saved as unusable records are moved out of the storage room."

The findings in this study are very important as they reveal some of the necessary changes required for an efficient and effective records management programme. Failure to implement some of these initiatives in land boards may lead to continuous poor records management practices and delayed service delivery. Ohio State University (2015) emphasizes that an effective records management programme should have a comprehensive set of policies and procedures that are reviewed regularly. Among others, the TLB saw it fit to implement new initiatives regarding the records management policy, the records committee and also have the retention and disposal schedules in place. As revealed by participant D,

"The records policy is vital and acts as a foundation for all records management practices in our land board. Hence, without it, we are bound to fail in our duties as records managers and there might be chaos in terms of recordkeeping practices since there will be no set standards and procedures to guide us."

This is supported by Mutero (2014) who discovered that the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) Department of Physical Planning and Works in Zimbabwe had poor records management practices due to a lack of records management policy, procedures and standards. This shows that the TLB has taken the right direction by refining its recordkeeping processes to improve the records management programme. Reports and findings in Botswana also reveal that other land boards have embarked on the implementation of various projects in their records management units (Makhumalo 2014; McGeoff 2013; Mudongo 2013). As revealed in *Mmegi/Monitor* newspaper, dated 14 October 2013, the TLB, just like other land boards, also implemented STARDUST to help with capturing all the necessary data needed to complete the LAPCAS project (McGeoff 2013). The findings of this study also act as a best practice model for the Ministry of Lands and Housing (MLH). The MLH can influence other land boards to

benchmark from the TLB and implement some of these initiatives in order to have an integrated approach towards land records management practices in Botswana and improve service delivery.

Factors that influenced the implementation of new recordkeeping processes

As revealed in the preceding discussion, there are numerous initiatives implemented at the TLB. Participants revealed that these initiatives were influenced by various challenges which were faced by the land board in providing services to their clients and conducting daily business transactions. The major problems that influenced the implementation of new initiatives were security issues and incomplete records. Participants lamented that the TLB has been facing problems of double land allocations due to a lack of a comprehensive land registry and this has led to numerous court cases. Access to records was not regulated, hence, records were at risk of being stolen, destroyed, misplaced and misfiled as most employees could access files without any authentication. Due to scattered and misplaced records, it was difficult to handle some of the customers' complaints and in the process service delivery was delayed. In an effort to minimize these problems, the TLB implemented various initiatives to improve their recordkeeping practices. In addition, as a directive from the MLH, the land board was also compelled to improve its records management programme in order to complete the LAPCAS project.

Land records are very important to the development of any country as they give a clear picture of what the country owns as well as what areas need to be developed (Bornegrim & Collin 2010; Malatsi & Finnstrom 2011). Without a proper land records management programme in place, economic development may be hindered as there are no proper records to influence decision-making. Therefore, the security of records and availability of complete records are of paramount importance to any organization as these will foster transparency and authenticity of business transactions. Moreover, the study findings indicated that it is vital to implement the necessary initiatives in order to correct ineffective business processes such as keeping board minutes in arch lever files, which makes it very difficult to access them at a later stage (Makhumalo 2014).

The challenges faced by the TLB seem to cut across many land boards in Botswana, as various studies also revealed the same challenges which have led to the introduction of new practices in records management programmes (Bornegrim & Collin 2010; Lantmäteriet 2011). For example, a survey by Ramokate (2010) and Makhumalo (2014) revealed that land boards in Botswana faced problems of poor records management practices. This problem includes misfiling, lack of records retention schedules, incomplete records, operation of a multi-colored classification

scheme, loss of court cases due to failure to produce sufficient evidence upon litigation, theft of records and damage as security measures were inadequate. All these problems LED to delayed service delivery, hence some land boards were compelled to computerize land allocation registers and introduce electronic indexes that would aid in the retrieval of records (Makhumalo 2014).

Studies conducted in Africa also revealed that land boards elsewhere are improving their records management programmes in order to deal with certain challenges. For example, Derby (2002) affirmed that a functional information system was implemented in Tanzania due to duplicate land allocation, allocated but unregistered land parcels and outdated ownership information of land parcels. Another study in Rwanda also revealed that a land registration system was implemented in 2009 due to the persisting problem of lack of official written records to prove existing land rights ownership (Manirakiza 2014). Further studies in Rwanda also revealed the need for tax authorities to generate considerable revenue for the government leads to some changes in the implementation and management of the land registry as it would enhance the property taxation process (Mukarage 2016). This shows that records management programmes may not only solve organizational problems as revealed at the TLB, but changes may also be necessary due to the need to serve other departments that depend on land records.

The problems identified in this study hinder service delivery and promote low productivity and inefficiency of public officers. For example, these problems go against the Public Service Act of 2010, Chapter 26:01, section 17, which requires all public officers to serve the public efficiently and without delay, so as to promote clients' welfare and their lawful interests (Government of Botswana 2010). In the event that the above problems continue to persist in land boards, the Botswana public service's customer service standards and the MLH's service charter will be violated, as customers will not be served in a timely manner and will not be given quality service.

Benefits of the records management programme

Study participants were asked to identify the characteristics of the new records management programmes. The characteristics aspect of the programs were used in this question as it represents the benefits posed by the new records management programmes. According to the respondents, the new records management programme has the following characteristics that act as benefits to the organization:

The new programme reduces errors in land allocation: findings revealed that the new recordkeeping processes reduce errors in land allocation. This is supported by comments from respondent 11 who stated that, "The usage of machine/ computers brings accuracy" and respondent 21 who elaborated that, "The electronic system makes land information easily accessible, hence errors are reduced during land allocation and when formulating the waiting list".

It improves adherence to policies and procedures: participants also concurred that the new programmes improve adherence to policies and procedures. "The new programmes being implemented conform to the international recordkeeping standards." (Respondent 25). Respondent 12 also noted that, "The records management system adheres to good and quality records management standards, hence enabling employees to adhere to set policies and procedures". Respondents' additional comments also stressed the fact that the RMU staff have become more professional with records keeping practices such that "conformity to set policies and procedures is ensured". Research findings show that a records management policy, retention and disposal schedule, classification scheme and a records management committee were implemented in order to govern the creation, usage, storage and disposal of records. Without proper guidelines and procedures there would be chaos in recordkeeping practices, but the initiatives implemented by the TLB have ensured that recordkeeping practices adhere to set policies and standards.

It takes into account the management of electronic records: it was also revealed that the new programmes take into account the management of electronic records. Respondents 13 and 29 noted that, "Records are being captured on STARDUST, which is an electronic tool", while respondent 29 further explained that, "All records are currently being computerized and electronic records make it easy to retrieve files". The findings also revealed that records received in the RMU are scanned and circulated through shared folders on the network. The waiting list is also accessed electronically and this has made it easy for clients to access the list. Records are no longer paper files only, but are also e-records that provide the existence of the plot and its ownership history.

The new records management programme is more efficient than the old system: it is evident from the findings that the new program is more efficient than the old system. This is supported by respondent 41 who mentioned that, "Online storage saves space and allows for

easy access to records" and respondent 11 added that, "the new program have fewer errors and oversights hence they are more efficient". Study findings have revealed that new initiatives implemented in the Records Management Unit have increased productivity as action officers spend less time on a task and also records managers are able to retrieve records in a timely manner hence clients are served in a more effective way.

Leads to better customer service: respondents concurred that customer service was improved due to the implementation of new records management programs. As supported by respondent 15, "Instead of running up and down looking for a file, one is able to search for a computerized file in less than five minutes" and respondent 34 who said, "Ever since the implementation of the new records management program, records have been easily accessible and customers are happy as there is timely service provision". The study findings show that with records information being online, it has become easier for action officers to deliver services to clients without any delay. Self-service platforms such as computerized database comprising a waiting list, have also improved customer service.

Research findings from follow-up interviews show that the records management programme was improved so as to attain the following benefits:

Integration of all land records: the new filing system that uses plot numbers as file names enables plot details to be recorded in one file. For example: if a current plot owner sells or divides the plot, the names of the new owners are added in the same file bearing the plot number. It is, therefore, not necessary to create another file for the new plot owner. This system has enabled the history of one plot to be viewed in a single file thereby increasing access to information unlike when a plot has numerous files due to change of ownership.

Have a documented land directory: implementation of STARDUST and the LAPCAS project will facilitate the compilation of a complete land directory. Participant A noted that,

"We are using STARDUST to capture all details about plot owners and different land parcels. As land parcels are registered and the system is able to show who owns what and where, then we are also able to tell which land is available for allocation. With this kind of information at our fingertips . . . we are able to make quick decisions pertaining to how many plots can be allocated at a time and this reduces customers' frustrations as they do not have to wait for longer periods in the waiting list. It will be more different this time because the waiting list will only be produced according to the land available."

The study findings revealed that with the completion of the LAPCAS project all land records in Botswana will be integrated, hence, could be accessed in all land boards. Furthermore, the land directory will aid with decision-making as the MLH is able to identify areas for economic development.

Improved security: the findings of the study showed that records are prone to theft, loss and misfiling due to improper security measures. Unauthorized employees could access records due to poor security measures. However, the new storage room (as observed) has some improved security features and only authorized records officers are allowed to access files. Misfiling of records has also been reduced due to the fact that only qualified records personnel access and organize the files.

Easy access and tracking of records: the electronic index helps records officers with locating files and the scanned documents in the shared folders, alerts action officers of new files that need their attention. The use of colored files also makes the arrangement of files in the cabinet much easier and also facilitates quick retrieval of files. For example, if a client has a query about a ploughing field, one goes straight to where green files are located and then use a reference number to locate the file. This is much quicker than when all files have the same color.

Improved service delivery: the study findings revealed that poor records management practices lead to delayed customer service delivery. Therefore, one of the expected benefits of introducing new initiatives in the records management environment was to improve service delivery and the image of the organization as a whole. The findings further revealed that the use of postal service for land application and the introduction of an electronic waiting list has reduced customer frustrations and increased productivity.

The study findings provide evidence that the TLB is indeed reaping the fruits of improving recordkeeping processes by implementing the necessary initiatives. Literature concurs with findings from the TLB, that several initiatives were implemented in order to reap the benefits of information communication technologies (Farah 2011; Mooketsi & Leonard 2013). According to Mampe and Kalusopa (2012), new initiatives were implemented in records management practices with expectations that service delivery will be improved. Another study conducted in Nigeria proved that effective implementation of records management practices positively enhances organizational performance, decision-making and service delivery (Unegbu & Adenike 2013).

Conclusion and recommendations

The benefits realized by the TLB through the implementation of new initiatives illustrate the importance of moving with time. When the records management environment is no longer suitable for the current environment, changes should be initiated so as to reap appropriate benefits and avoid tarnishing the organizational image, loss of finances and low productivity. The benefits realized by the TLB should act as motivation for other land boards to implement new initiatives and improve their recordkeeping practices. If they remain in the current recordkeeping environment where poor records management has become the norm, the MLH will continue to face various challenges in land management. Therefore, it is critical for all land boards to implement essential initiatives to improve service delivery. As seen from the research findings, all efforts to minimize redundancies, lack of productivity and poor service delivery were not in vein. The TLB has been able to improve customer service delivery and consequently its image has also improved. Other government departments and private organizations went on to benchmark at the TLB. If these initiatives are kept in place and employees do not backslide to their old ways of doing things, the records management unit will continue to yield good results. Therefore, management should maintain the new recordkeeping environment and implement more initiatives if necessary. In conclusion, continuous improvement of recordkeeping practices is a good strategy to service delivery improvement (as shown in Figure 3 below).

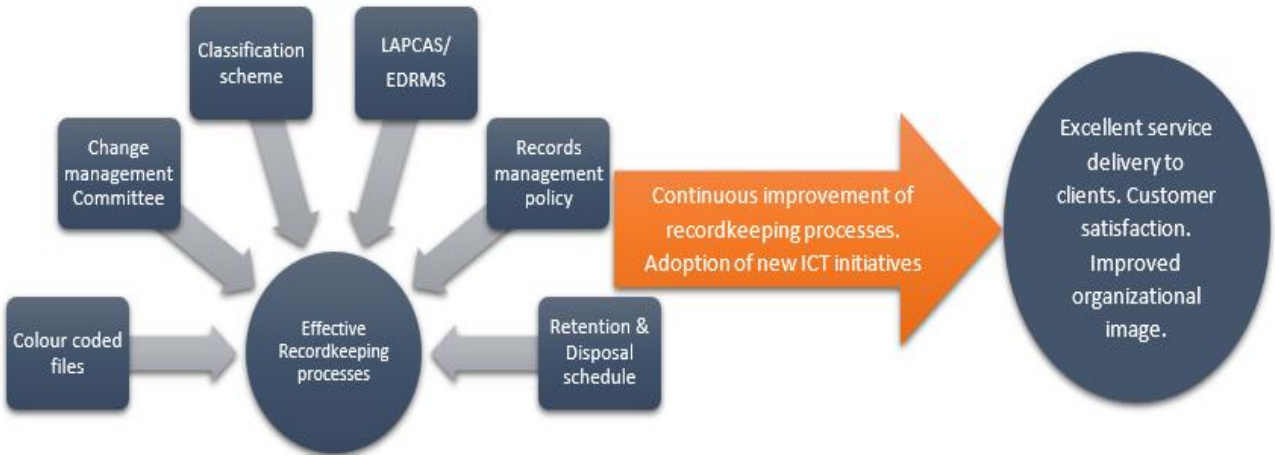

Figure 3: Service Improvement Strategy

Source: Researchers' synthesis

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