

## **PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM, ACCOUNTABILITY AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF TANZANIA**

**Malimo Thomas Manyambula**  
**President's Office, Records and Archives Management Division,**  
**Tanzania**  
**E-mail: [manya1965@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:manya1965@yahoo.co.uk)**

Received: 19 May 2007

Revised: 15 December 2008

Accepted: 25 January 2009

### **Abstract**

*Well-established records management systems in public sector organisations may force public servants to be accountable, transparent and have high integrity in their decisions and actions. Improved quality and availability of information provides the foundation of improving service delivery, which is the prime objective of the Public Service Reform in Tanzania. Starting with tracing the development of records management in Tanzania during the German colonial period, the article demonstrates that most countries have acute problems when it comes to managing their current and semi-current records. In Tanzania, the Public Service Reform led to the improvement of records management practices.*

### **Introduction**

The concept of the Public Service Reform across the world certainly is not a new idea and not unique to our eyes and ears. Every country in the world being developed or developing has a deliberate move and efforts at different stages to bring a new culture of providing high quality services to the public. The outcry of citizens to increase productivity, eradicate poverty and the growing concerns of value for money service delivery is pushing many countries to reform their public service in order to cope with these new demands.

In Tanzania, Public Service Reform can be traced back to the Arusha Declaration, which was launched in 1967. Following the Arusha Declaration, Tanzania saw a dramatic expansion in the role of the state in all areas of the economy. The Arusha Declaration yields results and showed improvements in social services to the public – health, education and water services. The government at that time was sole provider of goods and services. Apart from these achievements, the public service of that time was evidenced more on employment rather than productivity. As years went on, results in terms of delivery of services became less important; public servants were no longer held accountable for non-performance and non-compliance. This resulted in the public to loose hope and to have a negative attitude to services provided by the government.

The government response to this frustration was to reform the public service in the early 1990s. The fundamental goal of this reform was to achieve a smaller, affordable, well compensated, efficient and effectively performing public service. The reform stated that the overall purpose of the Public Service Reform Programme is to support the attainment of a high rate of economic growth and ensure that delivery of quality services within the priority sectors conforms to public expectations for value and satisfaction by 2011 (Public Service Reform Programme n. d).

To achieve all these promising directions of PSRP, the need for availability of accurate and reliable information is essential. Every activity of PSRP depends on availability of information. Well-managed records are essential components for the government to function effectively, develop and implement policies, increase performance, provide quality service to the general public as well as achieve productivity, transparency, and accountability.

Good management of recorded information is the milestone of PSRP to implement its agendas effectively. Without improved management of public records public servants will not be held accountable, and without accountability citizens will have no trust to their government. Due to the recognition of the importance of proper records management systems and their contribution to quality service delivery, Tanzania's Public Service Reform Programme integrated the records management component in its reform objectives.

## **Records management in Tanzania from the colonial period to independence**

This section discusses records management during German and British rule. It winds off by discussing record management in post independent Tanzania and shows how the situation became untenable.

### *Records management during the German colonial period*

The history of the German colonial system in Tanzania began in 1884 after the Berlin Conference which divided Africa into colonies under European countries. The Germans who had no experience of colonial administration at that time used the “direct rule” type of administration in the sense that all matters were controlled from the centre. Record keeping in the German administration in Tanganyika can be traced as far back to those early days of the German invasions in Tanganyika. In these early days of German administration, little is known of what happened to the records creation and handling. The knowledge that we have is that the registry organisation of the government during the German colonial period in Tanganyika was very similar to that of the Prussian administration in Berlin. Files were classified in order of the functions they dealt with. Letters were filed in hard brown paper covers which in the front bore in black thick letters the words “Akten des Kaiserlichen Government von Deutsch Oust Afrika” (Files of his Imperial Government of German East Africa) (Kalugila 1989:14).

In 1901 a government circular from Berlin instructed the reorganisation of the records system by classifying records into units and sub units, that is “referate and correferate”. The files of the colonial government and its departments were kept in a central registry. The whole filing system was divided into about 16 main subject groups. These groups are: Organisation and administration; Finance; Shipping and the Navy; Army; District Administration; Medical; Customs and Taxes; Post; Personnel; Justice; Library; Construction; Trade; Mining; Missions and Schools; Scientific expedition (Kalugila 1989:14)

Between 1917 and 1918 Germans were overwhelmed by their enemies during the World War 1. When Germans realised that they were about to lose the war, they decided to bury their records at their headquarters in Tabora and in different places in the country. These records were hidden by the order of the governor so that they did not fall under the control of the enemies - the British. Germans thought that after the war, these records would serve as evidence of the legal rights of German settlers. Unfortunately these records were discovered by the British in the early years in Tanganyika. This discovery led to the negotiations with the German government to dig up other documents wherever they were hidden. Since these documents were buried for some years, most of them were ant and rat eaten. These records are the nucleus of the German activities in Tanzania and are kept permanently at the National Archives of Tanzania.

### *Records management during the British colonial period*

Tanganyika came under the mandate of the League of Nations at the end of World War I. This was the result of the defeat of Germans in the war. The League of Nations handed Tanganyika to the British in 1918. As opposed to the German system, the British used "indirect rule" by means of using the existing traditional authorities with the tribal social structure in the local administration. The British applied the principles of indirect rule at the local level, native authorities were relied upon, either traditional chiefs or headmen or else individuals selected by the colonial administration. Tribalism was deliberately promoted in order to facilitate domination and hamper the growth of militant detribalised natives who might define themselves as future citizens of a nation, rather than a tribe.

The Governor as the highest executive office in the country, also had other responsibilities which included the maintenance of peace, order and security. He had no powers or authority of formulating the general principles of the territorial policy which, were formulated by the colonial office in London.

British administration used a different system to manage their records from current to non-current stage. The British colonial administration had centralised records in the office of the Chief Secretary. The classification in early years of British colony in Tanganyika followed

subjects and reference numbers were allocated. The British administrators used bound volumes for minutes and dispatches in the colonial secretariats. British records which were created in Tanganyika are found at the National Archives of Tanzania. Records which were created in the Colonial Office are stored at the UK National Archives.

Managing non-current records during the British colonial period was also given an important role by the central government. Non-current records were discussed and considered important and these records were kept in a separate storage place. In 1927 a memorandum on destruction of old records for example was issued and it stated that:

I am directed by the Governor to inform you that you are authorised to destroy any obviously useless volume correspondence and relations except financial which must await the issue of order. Papers with land questions should of course not be destroyed (Nyirenda 1993: 24).

In 1931 a set of disposal of records rules governing court records was introduced. This rule was known as the Disposal Ordinance, 1931. Moreover, formal rules which regulated the disposal of documents were put in place. Some departmental rules also existed which covered land and mines matters, Prisons standing orders covered prisons records, financial orders 430 and customs department instructions 331 and 332 applied to financial records. Destruction was of two kinds: authorised and unauthorised destruction. Authorised destruction took place under the governing instruction as described above and was contained in circulars issued from time to time. The unauthorised elimination of records arose from neglect. Records were allowed to deteriorate to the extent of allowing whole sale destruction.

The British colonial period came to an end on December 9, 1961, the day Tanzania got its independence.

#### *Management of the records in Tanzania after independence*

The emphasis of effective records keeping in independent Tanzania started in 1963 whereby the President issued a circular No. 7 of which the emphasis was the proper care and disposal of public records. This circular established the archival services in Tanzania. The circular emphasised particular aspects which included orderly

arrangement and storage of records, care of records must begin where and when they are created by the agency until they find their final destination. The circular also posed limitations to access of public records. Most of the contents of this circular were later included in the National Archives Act No. 33 of 1965. The major aim of this Act was to establish the National Archives of Tanzania, to provide for the preservation of public records and for the connected purposes.

### *What went wrong?*

Although there were early efforts to control and manage records from their creation to their final disposition, the situation deteriorated year after year. Files continued to increase, clogging the most valuable office spaces. Incidences of lost files, poor services to the public, and ghost workers continued to increase. Closed files were not separated from the current ones. Hundreds of thousands of files which had for a long time ceased to have administrative, financial, legal or historical significance continued to be held in registries and offices. In 1992 UNESCO conducted a study on records management in Africa and it was revealed that most of the countries had acute problems in managing current and semi-current records. The report described that something went wrong. Who did not play their role? Registry personnel? The National Archives? Top management? Or all of them? In Tanzania poor record keeping was influenced by a number of reasons as follows:

1. In Tanzania records at different stages of the life-cycle were managed by different agencies. The Civil Service Department (now known as the Public Service Management) was responsible for managing current records. Whilst the National Archives was responsible for managing non-current records with permanent value. Managing semi-current records was in theory the responsibility of the National Archives in collaboration with the creating departments, but practically was no man's land. This caused the registries in government ministries to be congested with semi-current records.
2. The National Archives Act, 1965 covered only records of permanent value and the other records were left without legal backing. Therefore there was no control of records during the

- creation stage. In that regard, heads of public offices assumed no responsibility to manage their records effectively.
3. Registries in ministries, independent departments and regions generally had and still have inadequate storage facilities, accommodation and supplies. Due to space problems most of the public offices accommodate both closed and current records in the same storage area.
  4. Most of the registries were staffed by officers who have received little or no records management training. In-service registry training and staff development ceased for some time. Registries were a dumping place for non-performing employees. Sometimes office attendants, messengers and gardeners were promoted and worked as registry personnel.
  5. The standard procedures manual which all registries use was outdated. The subjects to be covered by the system were not revised or changed since the manual was introduced in 1968.
  6. There were inadequate mechanisms for the transfer of semi-current records from ministries to the National Archives. As a result of this situation there was a huge backlog of semi-current and non-current materials in ministries.
  7. The records management function was given a low priority by the top officials in the sense that there was inadequate management attention.
  8. After independence Tanzania inherited a system from the colonial administration. Records management systems during the colonial period supported the information needs of a small and centralised public service. While the public service expanded to address more priority areas, it brought a corresponding increase in the flow of paper. But systems to manage these papers were not reviewed or changed. In that regard, files of the post independence period continued to be poorly organised in terms of labelling and indexing.

### **Public service reform and records management**

The Public Service Reform in Tanzania can be traced back to 1991 when the first phase of the reform was launched. The aim of this reform was to overcome the problems that led to poor performance of the public service. The overall purpose of the reform was to provide support to the attainment of a high rate of economic growth and

ensure that delivery of quality public services within priority sectors conforms to public expectations for value and satisfaction (World Bank 2005). In order to achieve this purpose, the reform set an objective to improve accountability, transparency and resources management in the delivery of public goods and services.

As years went on, the Public Service Reform opted for a more comprehensive programme to address more challenges that were facing the government including the proper management of public information. It became abundantly clear that for a successful economic adjustment and public sector reform to take place relevant information is essential and must be available. However it was detected that the information available to address the new demands to provide better services to the public were not accurate, readily accessible and usable. Records were manually held in files and haphazardly stored making their retrieval and informed use difficult, if not impossible. The effectiveness of public service managers as regards to decision making throughout the echelons of the public service was partly been impaired by lack of accurate, reliable and timely information. Change of direction to reform the record keeping systems in the government was highly needed.

There was a need to make a serious and critical examination of the information systems with a view to improve the existing registry and records management systems which were inherited from the British colonial administration. A new records management system which is user friendly was needed to enhance efficiency at all levels of the Public Service operations, as well as bringing about savings in space, equipment and manpower.

It became obvious that the successes of PSRP would depend upon the availability, accurate and reliable records. PSRP recognised that records management is a corner stone for the successes of its objectives. Therefore the Records Management Project as the sub component of the Public Service Reform was launched in 1997. The aim of this project was to support the wide reforms on which Tanzania embarked, by improving the quality and availability of information in the Tanzanian Public Service.



The records management sub component focused to improve the following areas.

1. Establishing a viable legal and organisational framework. The issue was to have a new Act that would control the management of public records from creation to disposition. Also there was a need to transfer the National Archives from the Ministry of Education and Culture to President's Office – Public Service Management so that the life-cycle of records could be controlled by one institution.
2. Decongestion of registries and establishing efficient and effective registry systems. This aimed at removing all semi-current and non-current records in the registries and installing a new indexing system known as the "keyword list" in all central ministries.
3. Establishing a National Records Centre for semi-current records. The records which were no longer needed by the ministries and decongested were supposed to be transferred to the low cost storage facility area – the National Records Centre. The National Records Centre therefore was a priority for records management sub component of PSRP.
4. Capacity building. To sustain efficient and effective record keeping systems will automatically depend to a larger extent on developing new skills and awareness within the public service. There was a need to draw up a comprehensive staff development programme which aimed to strengthen the professional, managerial and technical capacity of records personnel at all levels. There was also an overriding need to create user awareness of their role in the process of managing records.

## **Achievements**

In the ten years (1997-2007) of the records management sub component notable achievements have been realised by the government and the public as whole. The achievements are:

1. New legislation to govern the management of records from creation to disposition was passed by Parliament in January 2002. This legislation is known as "The Records and Archives Management Act Number 3 of 2002". This Act repealed the Records (Disposal) Ordinance of 1931 and the National Archives Act of 1965. Section 9, 11 and 19 of the

Act, have provided responsibilities for heads of public offices to manage the records that they create properly throughout their life-cycle.

2. The National Archives of Tanzania transferred to the President's Office, Public Service Management from the Ministry of Education and Culture to form a new Department known as the Records and Archives Management. This was done by Government Notice Number 289 published on 1 October 1999. The aim of this was to ensure that management of public records in their entire life-cycle is controlled by one department as opposed to previous arrangements whereby the National Archives controlled the Archives and the Public Service Management controlled the current records.
3. A standard filing system based on functions has been installed to all ministries. The system which has been introduced is known as the "keyword filing system" and replaced the old system known as the "theme" filing system which used to classify files based on themes rather than functions.
4. Retention and disposal schedules have been developed. The schedules cover all categories of records and are divided into two groups: Generic records (administration, finance and human resources) and a ministry's specific functions. The retention schedules will help to retire records that are no longer required by public offices for business continuity.
5. A new scheme of service for the records cadre has been introduced. This will raise the profile and career progression for records staff. To date the government have a scheme of service for Records Officers (land, judicial, health and administrative records). Also there is a scheme of service for Records Management Assistants of the same category like Records Officers.
6. There have been numerous capacity building initiatives across government that raise awareness of the importance of records management at all levels from senior staff to registry clerks. Diploma and Certificate courses at the Tanzania Public Service College have been introduced and are running for a third year now. Capacity building also focused

for the staff of the Records and Archives Management Department. Prior to 1999, there were only two graduates while the rest were diploma or certificate holders. To date the department has 22 graduates, and out of these 9 have a MA degree.

7. A Records Management Policy is needed to provide guidance to ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) on all aspects of records management. At the moment a Records Management Policy for the Government of Tanzania is being prepared. This will bring a significant achievement since Tanzania started to enact a law before the policy. Standards and Guidelines for Personnel Records are also being prepared.
8. The President's Office, Public Service Management (PO-PSM) is improving the management of personnel records using scanning technologies to provide electronic copies of key documents. The document management application KoVIS is being used to import the scanned images, which are held in a database. Currently this exercise has been completed in seven MDAs, namely PO-PSM, Finance, Education and Culture, Health, Judiciary, Agriculture and Food Security, and Natural Resources and Tourism. This exercise will be rolled out to the rest of MDAs. This in turn will help to process employees' benefits, especially pensions since all information of the employee will be accessed from a single point.

### **Evaluation of records management in the public service**

In 2004 the President's Office Public Service Management carried out an evaluation of record keeping in the Public Service as part of the monitoring and evaluation of PSRP activities (President's Office, Public Service Management 2006). The evaluation intended to assess whether there is quality records management in the Public Service. Areas which the assessment covered included filing accuracy, file retrieval times, the physical state of records storage, and the satisfaction of records staff and users.

Five years before the assessment, PO – PSM set a milestone that it should not take more than 30 minutes to retrieve a requested file or

provide feedback. When the assessment was completed, data analysis was done and the results were as follows (President's Office, Public Service Management 2006):

- 85% of all files were found in their correct locations
- On average it took 18 minutes and 18 seconds to retrieve a file
- Files were retrieved within 30 minutes in 84% of the instances sampled
- 96% of all folios were correctly placed
- The physical state of registries was quite good. No registries visited were on a poor condition
- Control books were kept 78% of the time
- 53% of all public institutions have working fire extinguishers
- Records users and registry staff were generally satisfied with records management systems and recorded a significant amount of improvement

Two years after this assessment, a follow up evaluation was conducted in December 2006 under the World Bank Mission to review the progress of PSRP activities. This evaluation used the same methodology as of 2004 in order to make it possible to compare results. The results were as follows:

#### **Comparison of key indicators 2004 and 2006**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>Variance</b>
Filing Accuracy	% of registry files in proper location	81%	91%	10% improvement
	% of requested files which were correctly retrieved	85.25%	77.6%	7.65% reduction
	% of folios correctly filed	96.9%	93%	3.9% reduction
Timeliness of Retrieval	Number on minutes taken to retrieve a file	18.49 minutes	13.42 minutes	5.07 minutes improvement

**Source:** President's Office, Public Service Management (2006)

When you compare the two assessments you can generally judge that the records management sub component of the PSRP has contributed significantly to the improvement in the management of public information. Though these results do not mean a “perfect” records management system, the following assumptions can be made:

- If files can accurately be retrieved in a short period of time, decision makers will respond or provide decisions on time.
- If the folios are accurately placed on proper files in 93% of the times it is expected that decisions will be accurate by the same percentage since the decisions will be based on accurate information.

### **Way forward**

Though there are significant improvements in record keeping practices in the central ministries, there are a lot of work to be done in order to attain the intended results of Public Service Reform Programme. The work that has been done so far to improve record keeping systems and practices is infinitesimal since most of the upcountry offices have not been covered by this exercise (Regions, Districts and Councils). This is the level of government operations where service delivery is closer to the grass roots and at the same time these offices are implementers of policies and other directives from the central government. In order for these offices to have good quality services that they deliver to the public, a comprehensive records management programme to improve their record keeping system is essential. Effective and efficient management of information for regions, districts and councils is essential since it will create better service delivery, accountability, transparency and prevent corruption.

Another area of concern for the government to take action is the management of specialised records (Land, Financial, Judicial, Health, and Personnel records). This is the area where rights of citizens can be deprived easily if the information relating to these areas of speciality are not well and effectively managed. Specialised records document an individual’s rights (e.g. land title), they are a primary mechanism for citizens and the state mechanism (e.g. provision of health care), are primary mechanism for holding government accountable (e.g. expenditure of government revenues), they protect

rule of natural justice (e.g. court proceedings and judgements) etc. Due to the importance of these records and the role they play to the entire public, PO – PSM prepared proposals to develop records management systems for each specialised records category. The proposals were submitted to responsible ministries in order for them to integrate into their reform agendas for implementation. Up to now no ministry has started the implementation. It is now high time for the government to push this project so that it can start up. Successful implementation of this project will bring high impact to the general public since these records directly relate to human rights and social services issues which normally affect citizens especially the poor who can not defend themselves.

Also as a way forward the Government of Tanzania will need to come up with standards, guidelines and procedures for managing electronic records in MDAs. Currently the situation is haphazard since there are no standards to guide MDAs on the creation, retrieval, security and other records management issues relating to management of electronic records.

Another area to be addressed as a way forward is the issue of ownership and sustainability of the records management systems installed in MDAs. Currently MDAs have not fully owned the installed systems. Their perception is that this job is a responsibility of the National Archives. This kind of perception is dangerous since it can make the systems collapse again. MDAs should change their mindsets and be in the forefront to own and sustain the systems. The Records and Archives Management Act of 2002, sections 9, 10 and 11 clearly stipulates the responsibilities of heads of public offices. So the government should ensure that all MDAs adhere to this Act.

## **Conclusion**

The Public Service Reform Programme has various intended potential results of which all aim at better service delivery, eradication of poverty and enhanced accountability. Every person has an expectation and is interested to see the Public Service Reform in Tanzania achieves its intended objectives. These dreams will to a large extent come true if records are well managed and easily

accessed. Records are the basis for accountability and effective delivery of services. Modern governments rely heavily upon written policies and procedures and upon written records of formal transactions. Public sector records document the various functions, activities and transactions of the state in its dealing with citizens or other organizations. The management of recorded information is thus a cornerstone of any government's ability to ensure the degree of openness, accountability and integrity necessary to fulfil the government's basic responsibility to serve the public interest.

Proper records management is a strategic resource towards achieving the expected results of public sector reforms. Records management systems will make particularly valuable contributions for these reforms and in so doing promote good governance. Proper timely provision of information empowers citizens to exercise their civil rights, providing them with information and data, which they use to questions or criticize government actions and hold governments and officials accountable. Provision of accurate, reliable and verifiable information also helps to detect and prevent corruption or unearth fraudulent dealings, which undermine the efficient and effective provision of services by the public servants. The records management function has changed its role, from a neglected aspect into a cornerstone of the foundation of our house known as the "the Government operations".

## References

- Kimambo, I. N and Temu, A. J. 1969. *A History of Tanzania*. Dar es Salaam: Historical Association of Tanzania.
- Lumley, E. K. 1976. *Forgotten mandate: a British district officer in Tanganyika*. London: C. Hurst and Company.
- Kennedy, J and Schauder, C. 1998. *Records management: a guide to corporate record keeping*, 2nd ed. Melbourne: Longman.
- Kalugila, J. M. 1989. German records in Tanzania. *Journal of African Research and Documentation* 50:11-15.
- Nyirenda, H. D. 1993. Development of archives administration in Tanzania 1963 – 1993: problems and prospects. MA thesis. SLAIS, UCL. London.

- Rugumamu, S. M. (ed) 1998. *Civil service reform in Tanzania: proceedings of the national symposium*. Dar es Salaam: Institute of Kiswahili Research.
- President's Office, Public Service Management: Public Service Reform Programme. 2006. Evaluation of records management in the public service. Report.
- Public Service Reform Programme. n.d. [Online]. Available WWW: <http://www.tanzania.go.tz/psrp/PSRP.html> (Accessed 8 January 2007).
- Sperber, K. W. 1970. *Public Administration in Tanzania*. Munchen: Welforum Verlag.
- World Bank. 2005. Capacity building in Africa. [Online]. Available WWW: <http://www.worldbank.org/oed> (Accessed 17 January 2008).
- World Bank and IRMT. 2000. *Managing records as the basis for effective service delivery and public accountability in development: an introduction to core principles for staff of the world Bank and its partners*. Washington, DC: World Bank.