

**BATTLING THE APPRAISAL BACKLOG:
A CHALLENGING PROFESSIONAL OBLIGATION FOR
BOTSWANA NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICES**

Kago Ramokate
Botswana National Archives and Records Services
E-mail: kramokate@gov.bw

Trevor Moathodi
Botswana National Archives and Records Services
E-mail: tmmoathodi@gov.bw

Received: 29 March 2009

Revised: 5 January 2010

Accepted: 1 May 2010

Abstract

This article discusses the challenges faced by Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS) in addressing its appraisal backlog. The backlog is a result of a fragmented records management system where the Department played a custodial role for semi-current records and preservation of archival records. Management of current records was not in the control of BNARS, but rather lay with creating agencies. For various reasons no appraisal was done in these agencies resulting in accumulation of unappraised materials. The backlog of unappraised records presents challenges of denying access to information which, according to law should be availed. It also presents a space management problem as Records Centres and records management units get congested with ephemeral records. The Department initially struggled to make an impact on the backlog, but with the introduction of new initiatives and resources significant progress has been made. An assessment of attempts to resolve the backlog is made and lessons are drawn from that. The challenges presented relate to professional records management matters, the records management structure in the public sector, human resource

issues and BNARS operational issues. Ongoing strategies and planned solutions addressing the challenges are also discussed.

Keywords: Records appraisal, Records disposition, Records centre, Classification scheme

Introduction

The Botswana National Archives was established in 1967 but it was only in 1978 that Archives Legislation was passed by Parliament. Upon its establishment, the Department was given the mandate to manage public archives and take a lead in the area of archives and records management in Botswana. However, the focus at this point was more on the custodial role of archives. Archives were seen as societal memory which has to be preserved for future generations, and used as primary sources for historical research. Therefore Botswana National Archives (BNA) built a sizable archival collection dating as far back as 1873.

A major change in direction and strategic focus occurred in 1992, 25 years after establishment of the archives service in Botswana. Permanent Secretary to the President (PSP) Circular No. 4 of 1992 was issued to establish the Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS). This expanded the mandate of BNARS to include responsibility for managing active and semi-active public sector records. BNARS was henceforth in control of the entire lifecycle of public records in the country (Directorate of Public Service Management 1992:3). This has since been legislated for through the National Archives (Amendment) Act of 2007. BNARS now manages an Archives Repository, Records Centres and all government Records Management Units (RMUs). The function of public records and archives in BNARS' control is to protect rights of citizens, ensure accountability of elected representatives (government), to provide reference services for research and to facilitate administrative processes. Menne-Haritz (1997:9) concurs that archives play a part in assuring political and administrative transparency in democratic societies.

One of the Department's key responsibilities is making public records, which have enduring value, accessible to the public by providing a reference service for archives. To attain this objective, public records

transferred from different Ministries and Departments have to be appraised. Appraisal is the process of evaluating records to determine their value with a view to deciding on those which have continuing value and need to be kept for posterity, and those which are ephemeral and need to be destroyed, that is the process of determining the archival value of a set of records (ICA 1994:4). The objective of appraising records at Botswana National Archives and Records Services is primarily to open them for access by the public who use them for reference research.

Background

Botswana National Archives and Records Services has about 10 000 boxes of archival records. The very first collection of archives was appraised in 1965 upon the relocation of the seat of government from Mafikeng in South Africa to Gaborone in modern day Botswana (Botswana National Archives 1975:1). This collection of the colonial administration records forms the basis for the establishment of the archives service in Botswana. The collection consists of 70 records groups, among them Secretariat records, Resident Commissioners records, District Commissioner records, and Veterinary records. Since the archives service started in 1965, only four other records groups have been appraised and processed for use by researchers, being the District Commissioner (Serowe), Botswana Meat Commission (BMC), Office of the President (OP) and Ministry of Finance and Development Planning. Of these, the Office of the President collection opened in 2001 and Ministry of Finance and Development Planning collection opened in 2006 are the latest acquisitions. Therefore there are information gaps in the chronicle of the historical development of the country and its people.

Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS) currently maintains a Records Centre consisting of six stack rooms of 154m² in its headquarters building. The Records Centre has been receiving semi-current and non-current records deposited by different government agencies since its completion in 1982. The Centre has been receiving more records and not disposing of any for an extended period of time, resulting in congestion. It is therefore full and has not been accepting any more consignments for the last three years (BNARS 2008:8). As Nicol (1992:58) puts it, if we do not appraise

and destroy records “we should be buried beneath a mound of paper”. A survey conducted by BNARS in 2003 revealed that there were 14,800, boxes of records in the Records Centre. Of these, over 7,500 boxes were due for appraisal as per the 20-year rule, thus there is a backlog of unappraised records.

This scenario has caused space management problems for the Department. There is a shortage of storage space in the Records Centre and a chain reaction of lack of space and congestion of Records Management Units across government. In addition to problems of storage space, there are large volumes of records that should, according to the National Archives Act, be open for public access. The National Archives Act Section 12, provides for all records that are 20 years and above to be evaluated and made accessible for public inspection. Basically, users are denied access to information which, according to law, should be availed to them and be open for access. This, if challenged by the public, could put the Department in a compromising position.

This situation presented a major challenge to the Department. It is on the basis of this situation that the Department in 2003 took a deliberate step to avail resources and time to making an impact in addressing the appraisal backlog. New strategies were initiated to undertake appraisal on such a scale as to make a significant impact on the backlog.

Records appraisal at BNARS

Though records appraisal had previously not been given sufficient attention, in 2000 the Department engaged two archivists intensively for a year to address the status quo. During this period a total of 490 boxes of the Office of the President consignment were evaluated. Of these, 198 boxes were recommended for preservation and the rest destroyed. This exercise was completed and an inventory for this collection was developed. The collection of Office of the President records was opened to the public in 2002 (BNARS 2003). Although it was a welcome development, this proved to be very slow and did not yield the expected results, especially in terms of freeing up space. Management decided that more resources and time were needed to make an impact on the backlog.

In this regard, a project was initiated in 2003 to engage all the 10 Records Managers and Archivists for a week every three months of the year to continue the appraisal. This was meant to have a more significant impact on the backlog of unappraised records than that of the previous exercise with two archivists. This exercise resulted in 3379 boxes being appraised and 845 recommended for preservation as archives and the rest recommended for destruction. This project produced more satisfactory results, as there was marked improvement in the volume of records appraised and space created. This provided an encouraging platform and a more effective, organized and well-resourced strategy, which was initiated in 2004. This involved a total of 12-18 Records Managers and Archivists spending one week every other month undertaking the appraisal exercise as a team from then on until 2007. This made a major impact on the unappraised records with 5015 boxes being appraised and 1267 recommended for preservation and the rest being recommended for destruction. This yielded the desired impact, and developed a team spirit among professionals. It also gave the team good experience and an opportunity to learn from one another.

Appraisal process

Appraisal method

The Department has adopted the micro-appraisal approach, i.e. appraisal at item level. This involves evaluation of individual files in a series of records. It is a slow process as it involves reading through a mass of records and making a decision as to each item's disposition status. The process, though time consuming, is considered the most suitable approach under the circumstances. This is because at the time of creation and deposit of these consignments, Records Management Systems were almost non-existent and misfiling was the order of the day. Records were classified mainly for convenience and not by organizational function. In this situation, macro-appraisal would be ineffective and lead to loss of vital information.

Although Chebani (2003:60) proposes macro-appraisal as a viable option in addressing the appraisal situation at Botswana National Archives and Records Services, it is more to speed the process than to help in making appropriate disposition decisions. He argues that

rather than assessing records for their potential value, a macro-appraisal analysis of the creator's functions must be undertaken. According to Boomgaard (1994:88) macro-selection is employed in the appraisal of archives of municipalities in the Netherlands where records management systems are advanced. Kromnow (1986:246) proposes preservation of sample years, the Turnes method, regional sampling and statistical sampling as ways of appraising large quantities of records in a short time. However preservation of samples is considered unsuitable for Botswana National Archives and Records Services, as that would lead to loss of very significant archival material. The post-independence era was a period of rapid growth for Botswana. Any form of sampling would not be considered as it would lead to loss of information generated in samples not selected. Records creation and classification was not systematic or orderly during colonial administration. Weeding was also ruled out as removal of folios is not only considered tampering with the originality of information flow, but is also a time consuming activity.

Appraisal criteria

The value based approach underpins the appraisal process at BNARS. The 20-year rule as outlined in the National Archives Act is used to select records for appraisal and values of records are applied. On starting appraisal the team was reminded to consider the four major principles of evidential value, administrative, fiscal and informational value. Evidentiary or functional documentation values are considered most critical. These are documents reflecting the historical development (evolution) of an organization, individuals' powers and functions, organizational structure, policies etc (Reiger 1986:263). Thus appraisers are mainly encouraged to look for, and preserve information and evidence relating to the establishment of the organization and the record of its core functions i.e. relevance to substantive programs is a key determining factor. Since the records being appraised are no longer in use by creating agencies, mainly secondary values are considered. According to Schellenberg (1956: 6), such values can be evidence of an organization and functioning of the (government) body that produce them, and the information they contain relating to persons, corporate bodies, conditions, problems and issues it dealt with.

Generally appraisers were encouraged to prioritize records which contain information of continuing value for administrative, legal/fiscal value to the creating agency even after becoming non-current. Records which possess values that may be used to protect civic, legal, property and other rights of individuals, organizations and the public at large are preserved. Lastly records considered for selection for preservation include those which are able to contribute substantially to research and scholarship in different fields. Records not meeting these conditions were recommended for destruction. Examples of documents preserved include minutes of meetings, decisions, projects files, land issues, policy matters etc.

Appraisers apply these values of records to make decisions to destroy or preserve records. On borderline situations i.e. where the appraiser is undecided on the disposition status of a record, consultation with team members is encouraged and often leads to resolution of the matter. This process has been employed for a couple of years now and officers have adapted to it and are making headway. New officers continue to be inducted and be guided on the process to ensure consistency of appraisal decisions. It is the intention of the Department to continue along this route until the backlog is addressed. Though significantly successful, this exercise has major challenges and far reaching consequences for preservation of vital information.

Major challenges in appraisal

Appraisal of records results in an incomplete account of the history of any organization. Ideally, appraisal must select documents which are the richest and most focused reflection of the organization (Harris 1996:7). Deselecting documents for preservation will distort the historical development of an organization and influence research trends. It is worth noting as well that taking wrong appraisal decisions can be a barrier to society's access to archival information (Garaba 2007:59). The major challenges in appraising records at Botswana National Archives and Records Services include the controversial nature of the appraisal process, poor classification of records, lack of retention and disposition schedules, lack of primary appraisal, unavailability of administrative history, low staffing levels, and lack of skills and experience.

Nature of appraisal

As an archival process, appraisal is a challenge as it requires decision making on whether to preserve or destroy records and there is no clear-cut formula for the process. As observed by Schellenberg (1956:20), records pertaining to implementation of government programs are difficult to manage in the archival context especially because they present a major challenge of evaluation. Daniels (1988:53) concurs that appraisal is often difficult as any materials could be of some use to one researcher or another in future, therefore presenting an argument for keeping everything. The process requires that the appraiser uses his knowledge and experience to anticipate research trends and is therefore likely to prejudice historical research. Ngulube (2001:259) asserts that appraisers' objective decisions will always be fraught with social and political influences. In this regard, BNARS officers are challenged to determine the 'fate' of recorded information and the judgement of each individual is put to the 'test'. One other major challenge is that records that could be useful to the present and future might have been lost since appraisal that has been taking place has not been based on any sound theoretical and functional framework (Ngulube 2001:261).

Poor classification of records

Prior to the integration of RMUs in to the National Archives in 1992, records management in government departments was chaotic and uncoordinated. Among other problems, this led to poor classification of records, as records were created and captured haphazardly without being informed by analysis of business processes or functions. This was evidenced by many incidents of misfiling leading to low appreciation of records service work by action officers (Directorate of Public Service Management 1992:10). Unrelated information was therefore filed together and in a lot of cases related records were separated. It is no surprise therefore that going through the records it is observed that some related information is fragmented across different files. In addition, there are file titles, which do not accurately represent the contents in some cases. This makes evaluation of the records even more time consuming as in some cases, less than 20% of the contents of a file is worth preserving, the rest being of little or no value. This fragmentation of information meant that macro-appraisal, which would be a faster and less energy sapping approach, was

ruled out. Classification Schemes of the various Departments are also not available to be used for reference. The lists of records, where provided, do not provide sufficient contextual information to assess the significance of the records in relation to organizational functions. Therefore disposition decisions are based largely on file content.

Lack of retention and disposition schedules

It follows from the above stated poor classification of records that retention and disposal schedules were also non-existent. These would have been employed to dispose of some ephemeral records instead of transferring and keeping all records generated, as is the case currently. According to the BNARS (2007:5) the existing retention schedule for "records common" dates back to 1981 and is outdated. It is also evident when going through the consignments that it was not applied by creating agencies in government when transferring records to the records centre. This therefore needs review and updating for publication. Records retention and disposition schedules for specific ministries and departments are non-existent. Lack of retention and disposal schedules for both primary and secondary appraisal pose a danger of premature destruction of records and unguided decision-making during the exercise.

Lack of primary appraisal

An off-shoot of the above mentioned scenario is that records were transferred to the Records Centre without being subjected to primary appraisal which would result in disposal of ephemeral records. Transfer of records to Botswana National Archives and Records Services was mainly motivated by shortage of space in the creating agencies and as such transfer was not systematic. The current scenario is that applications for employment, magazine subscription receipts, and other documents that should have been disposed of before transfer are found in the consignments. This consumes time of the appraisers that would otherwise be used on evaluating more valuable records. The Botswana National Archives and Records Services 1999-2001 Report indicates that preliminary records surveys revealed that there was massive accumulation of non-current records occupying valuable space in Records Management Units across government. The report concludes that extensive appraisal is needed (BNARS 2002:7).

Unavailability of administrative history

Availability of administrative history of a record creating agency is critical for appraisal of its records. Administrative history refers to an outline of the history of an organisation which usually describes what the organization did, and how it changed over time, and is intended to give some idea of who created a given body of records and how those records may originally have been used (City of Victoria 2009:1). Public service organizations change in management, structure and mandate over time. This therefore affects judgment of the importance of documents where core-business is a determining factor for preservation. Without this background information on the changes in structure, mandate and functions, officers appraise on the basis of current information or common knowledge they might have come across. This could lead to loss of vital records. For example, not being aware that the current Ministry of Home Affairs used to have the health mandate as well would result in a decision to dispose of health records found in this Ministry's consignment. Daniels (1988:55) concurs that one needs a thorough understanding of the nature of functions and activities for which records were created to be able to make informed appraisal decisions. In an attempt to resolve this, Records Managers seconded to respective ministries were required to provide a brief of the functions of their organizations and any structural changes that may have occurred since creation of the records.

Shortage of staff

Staffing levels at Botswana National Archives and Records Services Records Centre have always been very inadequate with the first full time Records Centre officer only recruited in 2001. From its early years the Department operated with one Records Manager responsible for a myriad of other activities. However the situation has improved with a second officer (Records Manager) introduced in 2005. A shortage of staff meant that there was no one directly responsible for Records Centre functions including managing the transfer of records to the Records Centre. Currently the Department utilizes up to 18 Records Managers and Archivists seconded in other Ministries and Departments to assist in records appraisal. It is with appropriate staffing levels that this problem can be resolved and Records Centres maintained up to date. The appraisal method chosen, of evaluating

records at item level, is a slow process compared to series level appraisal or sampling techniques, and requires a large number of officers for it to be effective. The Department has cited staff shortage as a major problem affecting effective appraisal of records as far back as 1985 (BNARS 2001:7). Mnjama (2006:49) confirms that staff shortage is a common problem in the ESARBICA region, which has contributed to backlog of unappraised records. This problem continues to plague BNARS to date.

Lack of skilled personnel

Professional archives and records management training is an area of scarcity in Botswana, and presents a major challenge to BNARS. Since 2000, the Department has had two to four trained professionals at any given time. This number could not deal with all archives and records management functions of the Department. The total number of professional staff, Archivists and Records Managers currently stands at 38. None have postgraduate training in archives and records management, being university graduates who majored in the arts and library and information studies. Postgraduate training is critical for the professional development of staff and enables them to operate effectively. Limited resources have resulted in a backlog of untrained personnel. However it is anticipated that with the introduction of the Masters in Archives and Records Management course (MARM) at the University of Botswana the situation will improve. Apart from lack of training, the majority of professionals are inexperienced in archival practices such as appraisal. Daniels (1984:55) stresses that appraisers should be experienced archivists with in depth understanding of principles and practices of archives administration. They should be aware of research uses of records and current research trends. In addition, the skills level of records personnel in government RMUs have generally been poor in the past. To address these problems, the Department started a process to develop a processing manual, which includes appraisal guidelines (BNARS 1998:12). However, this manual is yet to be completed. Lack of training and experience on appraisal may result in questionable appraisal decisions and thus loss of valuable information. As Ngulube (2001:259) puts it, this might lead to loss of important records as the appraisal procedures are also characterized by a hit and miss approach.

Exodus of professional staff

Another major challenge to the Department is movement of professional staff to parastatal organizations, the private sector and other government departments. After the introduction of Records Manager posts in 2000, there has been a rise and drop in numbers of these professionals which has badly impacted on the quest to achieve organisational goals. As outlined in the Botswana National Archives and Records Services (2007-2008) annual report, the Department's vision is hampered by the brain drain of trained and qualified personnel to greener pastures, leaving the Department operating only with a handful of trained Records Managers. Records professionals leave the Department for better salaries and working conditions. Similar observations have been made in Zimbabwe (Ngulube 2000:149). One of the responsibilities of Records Managers is records appraisal, at the ministries and departments (primary appraisal) where they are posted and at Botswana National Archives and Records Services headquarters (secondary appraisal). Exodus of these experienced Records Managers negatively impacts on the appraisal initiative in ministries and departments. Replacement of these officers is done, even though it takes time for the new Records Managers to get relevant experience and be able to effectively appraise records. The employment of inexperienced staff compromises the pace of the records appraisal programme and impacts negatively on the quality of the appraisal decisions made during the exercise.

Strategies and possible solutions adopted

Monitoring and evaluation of RMUs

The records management portfolio in government was transferred, together with associated staff, to BNARS in 1992 following an organization and methods review (Directorate of Public Service Management, 1992:20). This move not only gave the Department authority over records management policy, but also its implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The Department has developed a monitoring and evaluation mechanism through which all ministries report on implementation of eight pre-determined key result areas (BNARS, 2008:12). The areas are records survey, records management policy, records management programme, records classification scheme, records retention schedule, management briefing/

sensitization, and primary appraisal/ decongestion. These are areas that records management staff must drive and produce results in. Ministries which are not doing well in certain areas are assisted from BNARS. Quarterly briefings are held where progress is discussed and strategies for improvement forged.

Decentralization of records centre functions

Prior to 2005 semi-current records from across the whole public service were transferred to Botswana National Archives and Records Services Headquarters Records Centre in Gaborone. Given this centralized approach, BNARS was overwhelmed by requests for the transfer of records resulting ephemeral materials also being transferred. The Department has initiated the construction of Regional Records Centres in Francistown, Gaborone and Kanye (BNARS 2007:9). The Francistown Records Centre opened its doors for receipt of semi-current records in 2005. Gaborone Records Centre is scheduled for completion in May 2009 while the one in Kanye will be completed in July 2010. The staff of these centres will be responsible for training of records personnel in the regions and inspection of records prior to transfer. Conditions for transfer of records have also been developed and will be enforced by these centres. This will improve the quality of records systems in the government agencies and lead to the transfer of records only after primary appraisal and systematic processing.

Swift and efficient destruction

Most of the appraisal decisions that have been made are yet to be implemented, therefore records are still occupying valuable space. Generating typed lists of the records and implementing appraisal decisions have proved to be a slow process. Records identified for destruction during appraisal should be destroyed in good time to create space. A swift and systematic process of notifying creating agencies and obtaining their cooperation is essential. Therefore initiatives to meet with them and give them a timeframe for response to notifications of disposition decisions have been employed. Creating agencies are now being given two weeks to confirm appraisal decisions in line with the re-engineering of the appraisal process (Directorate of Public Service Management 2008:24) A heavy duty shredder has been procured for environmentally friendly destruction of records.

Records Centre stocktaking

It became apparent that all statistics relating to the Records Centre holdings were estimates, and therefore accurate figures were required. In June 2008 BNARS conducted a Records Centre stocktaking exercise that was aimed at establishing: the total holdings of the Records Centre, records deposited per ministry, department or local authority, the average number of files per box, the number of records due for appraisal based on the 20-year rule and the physical condition of records. Findings indicated that the headquarters Records Centre holds a total of 21 666 boxes of records, with an average of 24 files per box and up to 6 499 of these boxes qualify for secondary appraisal in line with the 20-year rule. (BNARS 2009:2).

Business process re-engineering

With the aim to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, the records appraisal process at BNARS was re-engineered. This involved analysis of the time taken on all the tasks relating to the appraisal process reducing time wasting. Analysis showed that from records evaluation to their transfer to the archives repository took 54 weeks. With re-engineering, this has been reduced to five weeks (Directorate of Public Service Management 2008:25). The delays are caused by ministries and departments in approving disposal decisions made during appraisal. Records marked for destruction occupy valuable space for a very long time. Recommendations made from the analysis continue to be implemented to ensure effective appraisal of records. One such recommendation is the stocktaking referred to above.

Continuous appraisal

The scheduled appraisal periods add up to only six weeks in a year. The process could further be enhanced by continuously appraising throughout the year on a regular basis. The Records Centre manager can continue to work out the most obvious cases for disposal. Such files can be identified through the accessions list and include applications for employment, magazines, newspapers, payment vouchers etc. This would leave only files upon which decisions have to be made through evaluation and thereby reduce the workload. Furthermore records personnel (especially records managers) must spearhead primary records appraisal and decongestion exercises in

their respective Ministries of secondment. The Department notes that intensive primary appraisal exercises must be carried out in these institutions before the transfer of records to the Records Centre (BNARS 2009:7).

Computerized records management systems

As the government of Botswana moves towards e-government by computerizing its records management services, records retention and disposition authorities must form part of the automated system. BNARS is currently involved in a computerization project called the National Archives and Records Management System (NARMS). NARMS will enable the efficient management of information required and produced by government operational functions through three subsystems (Records Management Unit, Records Centre and Archives Administration subsystems) as per the functions of BNARS (BNARS, 2003:1). One of the key mandatory functions of the system is that it must be able to apply retention periods for records and provide a trigger for their implementation (Secure Data Holdings 2008:267). The software, called HP Trim has a trigger assigned to the retention period, which will highlight the records that are due for archiving or destruction on a particular date (Tower Software 2007:3). The onus is therefore upon the officer responsible to review and approve the disposal action on the records highlighted.

Skills development and training

The Department continues to intensify staff training in archives and records management. Short courses are employed as a short term strategy to provide basic archives and records management competencies. In 2007 a group of 18 Records Managers were sent for an eight-week Records Management course at the University of Botswana, and this included practical sessions on records appraisal. Other short courses offered by international organizations such as the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) have also been very useful (BNARS 2008:6). This helps to bridge the knowledge gap as most graduates are employed without the necessary records and archives background and training. Trained and competent staff will not only be able to undertake secondary appraisal of Records Centre material, but will also be able to carry out primary appraisal in Ministries/Departments. This will reduce the flow of ephemeral

material into the Records Centre, and improve the quality of appraisal decisions made.

Recruitment and retention of records managers

The recruitment of Records Managers should continue as per the BNARS Scheme of Service (Directorate of Public Service Management 2005:17). Initially Records Managers provided professional advice from the Botswana National Archives and Records Services Headquarters and this proved insufficient. The first five Records Managers to be seconded to ministries were recruited in 2000 to play a high level strategic role in developing records management programmes (BNARS 2001:10). This endeavour has continued and the total number of Records Managers is now 18. The ultimate aim of the Department is to have at least one Records Manager per ministry and all large departments. This would enhance primary appraisal and hence the quality of records transferred to the Records Centre. To date all Ministries have a post of Records Manager, although a few are yet to be filled. This is a major improvement by the Department. However, the attrition rate of records professionals is a cause for concern for BNARS. Efforts in retaining these officers are being made to avoid their movement to other organizations. Retention and motivation of these Records Managers include accelerated promotion, training and recognition of performance. Accelerated promotion is where officers of outstanding performance are promoted within one year instead of two years or more (Directorate of Public Service Management 2006:1). The Department provides specialized training programmes and professional attachment both internally and externally in relevant institutions.

Development of records retention and disposal schedules

The Records Retention and Disposal Schedule for “records common” across government needs to be reviewed and updated. The Department has set up a task force of Records Managers and Archivists to review the retention and disposal schedule for common record groups such as Administration, Estates, Finance, Human Resource and Supply records. This is the main tool that can guide both primary and secondary appraisal, to ensure disposal of records efficiently. It is also important for ministries and departments to develop retention and disposal schedules for records specific to their functions to guide

them on how long to keep their various records (BNARS 2005:6). Initiatives have started in this regard.

Team approach to appraisal

Instead of leaving records appraisal to one officer, BNARS continues to adopt a team approach to the activity. All professionals team up to undertake the exercise. This is similar to the cooperative workshops approach proposed by Mnjama (2006:51). The appraisal session starts with a briefing on the core functions and mandate of the creating agency by the Records Manager seconded to that agency. This also provides an opportunity to discuss the records that are key for this organisation and how they can be useful for reference and research. An evaluation session is also held at the end of each appraisal session to note challenges faced by the team and provide possible resolution. This cooperative approach is employed by ministries and departments in appraising and decongesting their records rooms though on a smaller scale of about six to eight officers.

Conclusion

Records appraisal is critical for effective management of public records. Backlogs of unappraised records are a sign of an ineffective records management system. Legislation provides for public access to records over 20 years old, and denying public access to such records on account of lack of appraisal denies them the right to information. Unappraised semi-current records which should have been disposed of provide a space management problem for both records centres and RMUs. Space is a valuable resource to any records management facility and should be used in a cost effective manner. Records appraisal is a professional obligation of any archival organization and BNARS is no exception. BNARS recognizes this obligation and its responsibility for effective public archives and records management in Botswana. Initiatives have been made to address the backlog and there are good indications that the strategies employed will improve the situation.

It is recommended that the BNARS explores the possibility of partnership with relevant stakeholders such as the University of Botswana Department of Library and Information Studies and other ESARBICA members to assist in addressing this backlog. The

Department must also speed up the development of relevant instruments such as the records transfer manual, the classification scheme and retention schedule for records common across government and the processing manual. These instruments will guide the inexperienced officers and ensure consistency in appraisal decisions. There have been good lessons from the current appraisal exercise, and BNARS must put these to good use and avoid a repeat of the accumulation of an appraisal backlog.

References

- Boomgaard, J. 1994. Appraisal and destruction. *Janus: Archival Review* 2:88-90.
- Botswana National Archives. 1975. *Report on the National Archives for the period April 1974 to March 1975*. Gaborone: Government Printer.
- Botswana National Archives and Records Services. 1998. *Report on the National Archives and Records Services for the period April 1995 to March 1996*. Gaborone: Government Printer.
- Botswana National Archives and Records Services. 2001. *Report for the period April 1998 to March 1999*. Gaborone: Government Printer.
- Botswana National Archives and Records Services. 2002. *Report for the period April 1999 to March 2001*. Gaborone: OP Design.
- Botswana National Archives and Records Services. 2003. *Records Centre Survey Report*. Gaborone: Unpublished.
- Botswana National Archives and Records Services. 2003. *Statement of user requirements (SOUR) for the computerisation of National Archives and Records Services*. Gaborone: Multimedia Graphix.
- Botswana National Archives and Records Services. 2008. *Report for the period April 2007 to March 2008*. Gaborone: Print City.
- Botswana National Archives and Records Services. 2009. *Records Centre stocktaking exercise report*. Gaborone: Unpublished Report.
- Botswana National Archives and Records Services. 2009. *Records transfer manual: a guide to ministries and departments*. Gaborone: Impression House.
- Chebani, B. B. 2003. The role of reconstructed national archival institutions. MSc Thesis, Aberystwyth: University of Wales.

- City of Victoria. 2009. *City of Victoria Archives - Glossary*. [Online]. Available WWW: http://www.victoria.ca/archives/archives_glo.shtml (Accessed 7 February 2009).
- Daniels, M. F. 1988. Records appraisal and disposition. Bradsher, J. M. (ed.) *Managing archives and archival institutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 53-66.
- Directorate of Public Service Management. 1992. *O and M report on Consolidation of the Archives and Registries Cadres in the Public Service*. Gaborone: Government Printer.
- Directorate of Public Service Management. 2005. *Public Service Management Service Directive No. 9 of 2005: Scheme of service Botswana civil service, Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs: Department of National Archives and Records Services*. Gaborone: Government Printer.
- Directorate of Public Service Management. 2006. *Public Service Management Service Directive No. 4 of 2006: Amendment of General Order 11.7*. Gaborone: Government Printer.
- Garaba, F. 2007. The state of archival appraisal practices in the ESARBICA region. *African Journal of Libraries, Archives and Information Science* 17(1): 59-63.
- Harris, V. 1996. Appraising public records in the 1990s – a South African perspective. *ESARBICA Journal* 16: 5-10.
- ICA, see International Council on Archives.
- International Council on Archives. 1994. *General International Standard Archival Description*. Ottawa: International Council on Archives.
- Katuu, S. 1999. Appraisal of electronic records: the path for African archivists. *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science* 9(1): 69-74.
- Kromnow, A. 1986. The appraisal of contemporary records. In: Walne, P. (ed.) *Modern archives administration and records management: a RAMP reader*. Paris: UNESCO. pp. 241-250.
- Kromnow, A. 1979. The appraisal of contemporary records. *Archivum* 26: 45-54.
- Lamb, W. K. 1985. The fine art of destruction. In: Walne, P. (ed.) *Modern archives administration and records management: a RAMP reader*. Paris: UNESCO. pp. 251-257.
- Menne-Haritz, A. 1997. Framework and aims of appraisal. *Janus : Archival Review* 2: 8-17.

- Mnjama, N. 2006. Dealing with backlog accumulations of archival materials in eastern and southern Africa. *Information Development* 22(1): 48-56.
- Nicol, A. 1992. Ethics of appraisal. *Janus: Archival Review* 2: 58-60.
- Rieger, M. 1979. Modern records retirement and appraisal practice. *UNESCO Journal of Information Science, Librarianship and Archives Administration*, 1(3): 200-209.
- Samuels, H. 1995. Appraising the records of modern science and technology. *Janus: Archival Review* 2: 8-19.
- Schellenberg, T. R. 1956. The appraisal of modern public records. *Bulletins of the National Archives, Number 8*. Washington: US Government Printing Office.
- Secure Data Holdings. 2008. NARMS Functional Specification. Unpublished.
- Tower Software. 2007. Trim Context 6: How to add triggers to retention schedules. Unpublished.