AN EXAMINATION OF THE E-GOVERNANCE POSITION OF SELECTED NATIONAL ARCHIVES IN ESARBICA

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Abstract

This article undertakes a critical examination of the role of national archives in the East and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA). Based on a literature review, this article summarises findings and reports from previous studies on e-Governance adoption and capacity building strategies undertaken by various ESARBICA states. The major revelation is that while countries in the region are at different levels in their e-governance strategies, some national archives play a more active role than others. The article highlights efforts individual countries have taken in a bid towards e-governance. It explores the extent to which national archives are involved in the e-governance initiatives. The article concludes that most of the national archives in the region have not been pro-active enough to be involved in their countries' e-governance agenda. This could be attributed various factors including the low status accorded to archival institutions in the region, the absence of a supportive legal and regulatory framework, and a lack of IT skills to effectively contribute to the e-governance initiatives.

Keywords: E-records, E-government, E-governance, E-Governance adoption, E-governance initiatives, national archives

Introduction

E-Government is a buzz word in today's information based economies which the African continent cannot escape. Many African

governments realize and appreciate the contribution of e-Government to the government agenda (Bwalya 2009; Heeks 2002; Ndou 2004). E-Government is a broad, multidimensional and complex term. It goes beyond mere application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools to support good governance. It transforms the entire public service through the application of processes (internal and external) in order to improve government service delivery and citizens' participation, promote citizens' empowerment and improve government efficiency (Farelo and Morris 2009). Although African countries face challenges in the adoption of e-Governance (Heeks 2002; Ndou 2004), Van Wyk and Mostert (2009) advise African governments to contribute towards the global information content in a bid to become part of the information society. In other words, people should be conversant with the information contained in different formats in order to benefit from it. This means that "for people to be information literate, information should be made available and accessible to them in an understandable format" (Ramatlhakwana 2009: 204). For this to happen, there is a need for a paradigm shift among information providers (Van Wyk and Mostert 2009). This article argues that provision of appropriate infrastructure and supportive government policies which recognize national archives as major players in an information based society will go a long way towards the attainment of national goals in the global economy. This is because effective e-records management is a reflection of good governance practice. Hence, e-records should be captured and preserved as e-archives so that they can be accessed by the public (Moloi and Mutula 2007).

The theme of the 40th International Association of Sound and Audio-visual Archives (IASA) Annual Conference in 2009 was "Towards a new kind of archive? The digital philosophy in audiovisual archives". In his welcome address, the President of IASA, Kevin Bradley, alluded to the fact that digital technology is a fundamental part of archival processes, hence, archives and information processes should be aligned to modern technologies. This will require new ways of thinking about these modern technologies. Edwin van Huis reiterated these sentiments in his keynote address when he noted that "the change in technology comes with a change in paradigm; our society and the position of culture has transcended from a professional centred universe to a universe of content, driven by laymen" (IASA

2009). The last part of this statement intrigued me and it prompted some questions. The questions this article seeks to address are: How are national archives in ESARBICA optimizing e-Government initiatives to benefit all users including 'laymen'? The main thrust of discussion in this article seems to stem from digitization of content in archives and how this impacts on e-Government. To what extent were various national archives involved in the development of national ICT policies? What role are national archives currently playing to drive e-Government initiatives?

This article attempts to answer the above questions by taking a critical look at ten national archives in ESARBICA; Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS), Kenya National Archives and Documentation Services (KN&DS), National Archives of Mozambique, National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (NARS), Swaziland National Archives (SNA), Tanzania's Department of Records and Archive Management (TDRAM), National Archives of Zambia, National Archives of Zanzibar and Zimbabwe National Archives. The decision to focus on these archives organizations is based on a survey which was conducted by Wato (2006) to determine the e-readiness status of the above countries. The findings from the survey revealed that the above countries were at different levels on the e-readiness continuum. Nonetheless, they were battling with challenges which include inadequate capacity and skills gaps, lack of ICT legislation, and poor integration of ICT policy frameworks with national archives (IRMT 2004; 2006; 2007; Katuu 2004; Keakopa 2008; Mnjama, Wamukoya and Mutula 2008; Moloi and Mutula 2007; Wamukoya and Mutula 2005; Wato 2006). These problems could hinder effective integration of national archives into the various e-Government drives at national level.

Given the global drive towards e-Government, the article examines the strategies and legislation in place to support e-government in the various ESARBICA countries. The article ends by making suggestions on how national archives can play a more active role in the e-government initiatives of their respective countries.

Infrastructure drive and e-governance

Infrastructure development is a very important aspect of e-government. The Infrastructure embraces an enabling environment that facilitates the development of an information society, hence promotes online content and interactivity through government publications and legislations (Mnjama, Wamukoya, and Mutula, 2008). It encompasses data systems, legal framework, institutional human and technological infrastructure (Mnjama, Wamukoya and Mutula 2008).

While developed countries are at a very high level of infrastructural development (in terms of size and abilities), the same cannot be said of developing countries due to economic and political problems (Farelo and Morris 2006; Kanyengo 2006; Mnjama, Wamukoya and Mutula 2008). The latter noted that African governments were slow to adopt ICT services. This invariably impacts on e-governance. Nonetheless, "policy makers in Africa do understand the need for massive engagement of ICT in their governance paradigms in order to be competitive enough…" (Bwalya 2009) in the global economy. Various countries in the region including Botswana, Tanzania, Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia, Zanzibar and Zimbabwe have ICT policies to drive e-governance strategies but the ICT policies do not directly support proliferation of e-Government. It is anticipated that the more likely success models of e-Government implementation involve an 'e-Government adoption strategy', distinct from general ICT policy. Such a strategic framework can be seen in Tanzania's e-Government strategy. It is to be noted that most of the countries in the SADC region do not necessarily have e-Government adoption strategies in place.

The ICT policies are supported by national vision statements. Tanzania's ICT policy was approved in 2003 (IRMT 2007). Its goal is to transform Tanzania into a knowledge-based society. Tanzania's Development Vision 2025 embraces ICT as it clearly stipulates the digital opportunities that Tanzania can exploit (The United Republic of Tanzania, National Information and Communications Technology Policy 2003). Botswana is said to have "one of the highest tele-densities in the third world and has a highly developed communication infrastructure accessible to a majority of its population" (Report on the development of the Kitsong Centres pilot project in Botswana,

2006:v). The National ICT Policy draft document (Maitlamo) spells out the country's rigorous and novel ICT strategy, but to date, there is no policy in place. Nonetheless, Botswana has undertaken to attain a legal and policy e-readiness infrastructure (National Information and Communications Infrastructure (NICI) Policies and Plans (e-Strategies), 2009). Vision 2026 supports a national ICT policy strategy which coordinates the seemingly fragmented information infrastructure in the country. It states that "information must be harnessed to the best advantage of all citizens". Hence, strategies are in place to make Botswana an informed nation by 2016 (Republic of Botswana Vision 2009). Nonetheless, it is difficult to cover all levels of the community because the population is sparsely distributed. Through a project known as User Information System (UIS), locally known as Kitsong Centres, centres have been developed to bridge the digital divide by enhancing delivery of ICT services to the rural communities. They are linked to the e-Government agenda, just like other projects such as Tele-medicine for health and other projects (Report on the development of the Kitsong Centres pilot project in Botswana 2006). The e-government strategy is at implementation stage (Maitlamo 2009). It is envisaged that by 2012, there will be 150 Kitsong Centres countrywide. The Kitsong Centres are accessed through local post offices. Botswana citizens are able to access business information, government forms, and various kinds of historical information through Kitsong Centres.

A Commission to set up an ICT policy in Mozambique was established by a Presidential Decree in May 1998. The Policy was approved in June 2002, through efforts of the Pan-African Information Initiative (AISI) (Chemane 2009). Mozambique has a well-established e-Government implementation plan. There is a lot to discuss on this one, such the involvement of Italy, World Bank, etc. in developing the e-Government agenda in that country).

South Africa is said to have the required legal framework to promote the sharing of information with the public and across government departments (Farelo and Morris 2006). The policies that support the e-governance strategies include Minimum Information Security Standards (MISS), Handbook on Minimum Interoperability Standards (MIOS), Electronic Communications and Transactions Act of 2002 and the Law Commission Issue Paper on Privacy Public Service Act

(Farelo and Morris 2006). South Africa has had successful projects which include an e-Government information portal, called Batho Pele Gateway which was launched in 2004, 355 Multi Purpose Community centres which extend ICTs to rural areas and approximately 800 Public Information Terminals (PITs). The e-governance projects extend to all universities in the country and about 6000 schools. In its Vision 2014, South Africa aspires to a thriving ICT infrastructure where citizens are appropriately skilled and knowledgeable. South Africa's e-government strategy aims at rendering services to the South African citizens from cradle to grave. This means that ICT services "must be accessible to all citizens anytime, anywhere and through different access devices and media" (Farelo and Morris 2009). The challenge to all information providers including archivists is to meet the expectations of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) whose goal is an information society where "everyone can access, utilize and share information and knowledge" (Farelo and Morris 2006). It is worth noting that South Africa has leap-flogged to implementing Mobile Government (m-Government – the e-Government version where interaction is made possible with the use of mobile technologies). Through its government portal, the Batho Pele (putting people first) in the e-Government strategy, the South Africa Government has come up with e-government policies, laws and regulations which include laws and policies on e-Government planning, freedom of information and open records, digital signatures, e-payments, e-procurement, privacy, security and the overall ICT infrastructure development (South Africa Government Online 2009). This was with a view to reaching out to even the most ordinary members of the society as mobile phone technology penetration is quite high in South Africa.

In the case of Zambia, Bwalya (2009) reports that there is an e-governance model which the government uses as a tool to promote efficiency and transparency in the public service while at the same time empowering citizens. This goal is attained by availing the necessary knowledge and resources. Nonetheless, this e-Government model is only on paper, there are no sensitization campaigns devoted to making citizens buy in to the concept of e-Government. There is a delay in the adopting of e-government because of a lack of local content (the local content here refers to locally authored, generated or local-sense content, content in both local and official

languages), lack of the application of ICT, lack of adequate ICT infrastructure, lack of proper change management procedures, failure to contextualize e-government practices and political will. Bwalya (2009) suggested a paradigm shift in the way the public institutions conduct themselves in an effort to solve the above problems. It should be noted that successful e-governance initiatives are driven by appropriate resources.

Resources

Wamukoya and Mutula (2005) argue that e-records management is under resourced in the ESARBICA region. Without human, financial and appropriate infrastructure to support e-government initiatives, e-government cannot be a reality. Bwalya (2009) realizes a need for a clear understanding of Information Technology (IT) before e-government adoption is effected. This means that the people who drive e-government initiatives must understand the uptake and adoption paradigms and dimensions of e-government systems (Bwalya 2009).

Case studies on various African countries which were conducted by IRMT reveal a deficiency in IT skills. For instance, Lesotho was faced with various challenges in a bid to develop e-governance projects. These included a low level of ICT literacy, a small staff capacity in the ICT department and a high turnover of programmers (IRMT, 2006). “Retention of skilled ICT staff within the Public Service and the country as a whole was a significant issue as many were leaving for better positions in the private sector in South Africa” (IRMT 2006:26). Chen, Chen, Huang and Ching (2006) share these sentiments when they note that many developing countries’ IT departments are low skilled, insufficiently equipped and lack financial resources. Invariably, developing countries end up outsourcing e-government projects (Chen et al, 2006). In the case of Lesotho, problems with ICT systems resulted in the failure of a Central Computer Database (UNIQUE) which was later abandoned due to technical problems experiences by staff. Poor network availability and poor delivery of information from isolated mountainous districts exacerbated the problem (IRMT 2006). In view of the myriad of problems which many countries in the region are faced with, this article examines the role of national archives in driving the e-governance agenda.

Role played by national archives

Writing on e-government initiatives in Malaysia and the role of the National Archives of Malaysia in digital records management, Shafie (2006) gives a clear picture of how the National Archives of Malaysia (NAM) responded to the changes brought about by the e-government drives. NAM took the following measures:

1) In 2001, NAM established a new management system known as the Electronic Records and Information Technology Management (PRETM),
2) NAM's 1966 Archives Act that reflects e-records as public records was amended, and
3) An e-strategy known as 'e-SPARK' was instituted to preserve government records.

It can be seen that NAM responded positively and proactively. The above example sets a pace which ESARBICA countries could emulate in their endeavour to adopt e-government. Nonetheless, this does not seem to be happening in the region.

Despite the fact that the International Council on Archives (ICA) stresses the need to empower and involve archivists in the preservation of archival electronic records (ICA 2005), the national archives in the region do not play an active part in the introduction of e-governance (Mnjama, Wamukoya and Mutula, 2008; Mutiti 2001). The author concludes that most of the national archives in the surveyed countries seem "to have abandoned one of their core functions of preserving all archival records irrespective of their format, including e-records, by not participating in national ICT deliberations that would determine the fate of e-records" (Mutiti 2001:72). However, Mnjama, Wamukoya and Mutula (2008) maintain that the mandate of national archives is to preserve and facilitate access to archival records including e-records. This can be done by ensuring that there is appropriate legislation to facilitate access to e-records by all users in place. Below are some examples:

Botswana

Mutiti (2001) notes that Botswana National Archives and Records Services was not involved in the drafting of the ICT policy. Nonetheless, it was involved at a later stage. The department responded by revising the archival legislation to capture e-records (Botswana Gov-

ernment, 2007). However, the revised National Archives of Botswana Act captures e-records in the definition of records but it does not explain how e-records should be handled. Hence, the department is not in a position to address or comment on issues pertaining e-records.

Zambia

In Zambia, the ICT policy was finalized in 2006. This development led to Internet connectivity countrywide, paving a way to e-government. The country's biggest challenges are ICT skills and hardware (Policy for an increase in Internet usage in Zambia, 2006). With support from ECA, Zambia embarked on projects to sensitize awareness of government policies through ICT. The projects included Local Government Information Centres, Business Information Centre, Distance Learning Centres, and Hospital Information Management System and Water Sanitation System. The Local Government Information Centres focused on policies to drive citizens' awareness of governance issues (National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI), Policies and Plans (e-strategies), 2009).

Kenya

Although National Archives and Documentation Services **(**KNA&DS) was represented in the drafting of the ICT policy, the final draft did not adequately address e-records. This is despite the fact that KNA&DS strongly advocated for e-records. Mutiti (2001:71) notes that "KNA& DS was not even invited to the discussion of the final draft". Nonetheless, the E-government programme was developed in 2004 to facilitate fast and efficient delivery of information to the citizens of Kenya and to promote productivity in the public service. E-government identifies ways of equipping citizens with skills that are required by the public service, using ICT to optimize the benefits derived from e-government (e-Government Kenya 2009).

Swaziland and Tanzania

Although Tanzania and Swaziland have ICT policies, it is not clear if the national archives were well represented in the drafting of the policies. Nonetheless, the revised archival acts clearly articulate e-records.

South Africa

In the case of South Africa, the national archives was not involved in the initial drafting of the ICT policy to ensure that "records management is addressed in a records management, content management and service delivery improvement framework that would feed into the ICT policy" (Mutiti 2001:72). Nonetheless, the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (NARS) can be considered as a model in the region.

NARS has a computerized finding aid system and a back up in hard copy. The National Automated Archival Information Retrieval System (NAAIRS) is an effort to market the services of NARS in South Africa, regionally and internationally. It is a gateway to related websites which provide information on archival services rendered by NARS and the provincial archives. These include services to the public, governmental bodies (Records Management), information on related organizations and links to contact information, National Automated Archival Information Retrieval System (NAAIRS), electronic contacts' website, and Promotion of Access to information (PAIA). NARS has an access policy which guides users to the reference services offered by the archive. Users are introduced to the website through detailed information on the aims, rules, the structure, and the National Archives and Records Service Act. The advocacy programs include information on available services such as a list of publications for sale, exhibitions, and specialized contact information such as military history. The National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act (Act No. 43 of 1996) is accessible electronically (About the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa, 2009). Users are referred to available finding aids in manual and electronic format (NAAIRS).

The website lists what is available in the repositories and how the collections can be accessed. It gives clear rules on how to use the search room. The website offers a link to electronic contacts which lead users to key contacts such as *technical functioning* and *the National Archivis*t. There are buttons at the bottom of the main Web page; Home, About NARS, NAAIRS, which link the user to the required information. The content page on the left side of the main webpage also offers direct links to vital information. To some extent, the website provides reference access links to users. However, since

the rules may differ from repository to repository, users may not be well informed about other repositories (within the country). The DAC Integrated Management system instituted by NARS requires a password. This implies that the above system is only accessed by staff of NARS. Since no mention is made of facilities for disadvantaged potential users, it is assumed that all potential users can read, write and hear. This is not always the case. Nonetheless, the site 'walks' the user through the archives while providing rules on how to use the facilities. A visitor to NARS would have no problem locating the archives.

Keakopa (2008) notes that unlike Botswana and Zambia which do not have policies to manage e-mail, the Electronic Communications and Transactions (ECT) Act of 2002 recognizes electronic communications in South Africa. The Act encourages "the use of electronic records, digital signatures for authentication, and confidentiality of personal information" (Keakopa 2008:77). Additionally, NARS instituted an Integrated Document/Records Management Solution (IDRMS) in a bid to manage e-records. Hence, NARS makes provision to manage e-mails and websites as e-records (Keakopa 2008). From a cursory look, websites of other national archives in the region do not compare well with NARS. This implies that national archives in ESARBICA face challenges in their quest to join the information based economy.

Challenges

Several authors including Bwalya (2009), Keakopa (2008), Mnjama, Wamukoya and Mutula (2008); Wato (2004; 2006); the National Electronic Commerce Coordinating Council (2004) and the International Records Management Trust (2003) identify various challenges that African countries are faced with in their effort to adopt ICTs and e-governance. Wato (2004) forewarned archivists to address the challenges that come with the digital age which he damned as 'a dark age'. He lamented that "this era could become a 'digital dark age' – a part of its collective memories forever lost" (Wato, 2004:108). Since national archives are charged with the responsibility of providing advisory services to government agencies in the way records are created, maintained, used, and disposed of, this responsibility should extend to electronic records. National archives should ensure that

records are created in accordance with archival legislation. Wato (2004) pointed to the fact that e-records in the form of E-mail, word processed documents, spreadsheets, databases, images and the World Wide Web pose a challenge in the way archivists should preserve them. The absence of policies, procedures and regulations to support e-records in most national archives in Africa exacerbates the situation (Mnjama, Wamukoya and Mutula 2008). The authors bemoaned that many Records Administrators in Africa are not aware of "the many issues pertaining to the creation, storage, retrieval and dissemination of e-records" (Mnjama, Wamukoya and Mutula 2008: 169).

While some of the challenges apply to developed countries, most of them are specific to African countries. The challenges include:

i. Poor technological infrastructure,
ii. High access charges,
iii. Lack/inadequate policies to support e-governance,
iv. Lack of appropriate facilities and environmental conditions for the storage and management of e-records,
v. Absence of organizational plans for managing e-records,
vi. Low awareness of the role of record management in supporting organizational efficiency and accountability,
vii. Lack of records retention and disposal policies,
viii. Absence of migration strategies for e-records,
ix. Absence of vital records and disaster preparedness and recovery plans,
x. Failure to integrate ICT legislation with national archival legislation - only a few national ICT policies (such as Kenya National Archives and Documentation Centre and South Africa National Archives and Records Service) address records management issues (Wato 2004).
xi. Shortage of skilled staff,
xii. Unattractive salaries which lead to an exodus of skilled staff to the private sector,
xiii. Skill gaps created by IT adoption,
xiv. Failure to involve national archives in e-governance strategies,
xv. Absence/inadequate stable archival electronic storage media,
xvi. Technological obsolesce – this impact on the authenticity of e-records,

xvii. Financial constraints- which explains why countries are at different levels on the e-governance continuum,
xviii. Failure to contextualize e-governance,
xix. The challenge of maintaining the authenticity and trustworthiness of e-records, and
xx. The absence of regional networks to support e-governance.

The list cannot be exhaustive. What is important is to pave a way forward to address the problems and challenges so that they do not impact on the adoption of e-governance in ESARBICA, and the continent at large. The question this article aims to address is the role national archives could play in addressing the above challenges.

Efforts to address the challenges

Since most of the problems are contextual given the nature of e-records, it is self defeating to leave the solutions to archivists and records management professionals. Hence, various international organizations have taken initiatives to facilitate the adoption of e-government and to bridge the digital divide created by ICTs in Africa. These include the German International Human Capacity Building Foundation – Carl Duisberg Gasellschaft (CDG), which launched a new training capacity building project covering institutions in the SADC region. The project empowers training institutions with local training skills. The United Nations Commission for Africa (UNECA) spearheaded the creation of an enabling environment to facilitate the development of an Information Society in Africa. This is done through an African Information Society Initiative (AISI) (UNECA 1999).

A New Partnership for Africa Economic Development (NEPAD) facilitates utilization of ICT infrastructure to empower African governments with local skills to address economic, social, political and infrastructural problems relevant to the African environment (Government of Canada 2002; Nepad 2002). Other organizations include the Open Society Foundation of Southern Africa (OSISA), which supports SADCC countries to develop regional Information Technology capacity. OSISA is funded by the Community Education Computer Society (Onyacha 2007). The Italian government joined efforts with the UN to assist Mozambique, Nigeria and Tunisia in the development of e-government.

The ‘e-Africa 2002’ initiative is a partnership with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). It aims at improving the governance and management of public services in Africa. Similarly, UNESCO has sponsored projects in Zambia, Zanzibar and Mozambique to foster capacity building for e-government (UNESCO 2002). Other projects are sponsored by the World Bank, DANIDA, Swedish SIDA, the government of Netherlands and the French government (UNESCO 2002). This demonstrated that the future of e-government Africa has a lot of international backing.

Ndou (2004) advises that education, freedom and a desire to access information is a critical aspect of e-government. It is therefore important for ESARBICA countries to identify regional and international organizations that are willing to support national e-government agenda. Once archivists and records managers are empowered with IT skills, most of the problems inherent in the nature of e-records will be resolved. Organizational issues can be handled at managerial level. There is therefore a need for and paradigm shift among archivists, administrators, creators and users of archival records. We should look on the brighter side. To date, the following ESARBICA countries have developed government portals which government departments access in a bid to get onto the e-government superhighway: Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, and Tanzania (Onyacha 2007).

Conclusion and the way forward

From the above discussion, it is evident that ESARBICA countries have come a long way in their efforts to join the information society. All countries realize the need to use ICT as a tool towards e-governance. Although various countries are limited by financial, political and human factors, it appears some national archives in ESARBICA are making an effort to join the information wave, as evidenced by some revised archival legislation such as the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act (No. 43 of 1996) as amended by the Cultural Laws Amendment Act (No. 36 of 2001), which embraces e-records. Other Acts such as the revised National Archives of Botswana Act, the revised Records and Archives Management Act of Tanzania reflect e-records but overlook important information laws

such as FOI. The Swaziland National Archives Act (No. 5 of 1971) does not even mention e-records. This implies that more needs to be done to reawaken archivists from a long slumber before national archives are regarded as museum heritage sites. The National Archives and Records Service of South Africa has set a good example. The country has an e-government policy in place so does Kenya.

Most of the ESARBICA states are silent on e-government policies. In some instances, it is not clear to what extent national archives are involved in the e-government strategies of their respective countries. The question this article poses to the information professionals and archivists in particular, is: Can ESARBICA do something to promote other national archives which are struggling to get there? This can be attained through national and regional training workshops to empower archivists and IT staff with appropriate skills to manage e-records. National archives should make a concerted effort to integrate themselves with rural communities through ongoing projects such as Kitsong Centres as in the case of Botswana or Batho Pele in the case of South Africa. The more national archives get involved in rural community projects, the more relevant the national heritage collections will be in the electronic age.

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