

Management of inactive records by cooperatives in Lake Zone, Tanzania

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Received: 28 March 2023

Revised: 17 August 2023

Accepted: 06 September 2023

Abstract

Cooperatives in Tanzania's Lake Zone generate many records that have archival value, but they face challenges in managing them when they become inactive. This study aimed to assess the status and experiences of managing inactive records by cooperatives in Lake Zone and the prospects for improving their management. A mixed methods approach with cross-sectional research design were employed in which data were collected from board members of eight cooperatives through focus group discussions, face-to-face interviews, observation, and document review. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data. The study revealed that Tanzania has a rich collection of inactive cooperative records, but they are scattered in various cooperative societies across the country without proper management. Consequently, most of inactive records were dumped in rooms and wet places with insects that were inaccessible to users. The board members did not recognise the importance of the generated records in the cooperative movement. In addition, they were unaware of the availability of Records and Archives Management Policy as a guiding tool to ensure proper management of the generated cooperative records. This study established that the Records and Archives Management Policy was silent about managing cooperative records. The study concluded that cooperatives need to develop legal frameworks for cooperative records keeping, provide resources and training for records management, and create awareness of the value of archival records among cooperative members.

Keywords: Cooperatives, cooperative archives, inactive records, records, records management, Tanzania's Lake Zone

1. Introduction

Cooperatives are essential institutions for socio-economic development, especially in the agricultural sector, where they help farmers to access markets, inputs, credit, and information (Mgumia, Mbwambo & Kapinga. 2018). Furthermore, cooperatives contribute to employment, income generation, and poverty reduction. In Tanzania, cooperatives have a long history that dates back to the colonial period, when they were used to control and manage the production and marketing of cash crops such as cotton, coffee, and sisal (Nnko & Kakoko 2018). After independence of Tanganyika (Tanzania Mainland) in 1961, cooperatives became an important tool for promoting rural development and social justice, and their numbers grew rapidly. Hence, by 2017, there were over 10,000 registered cooperatives in Tanzania, with over 7 million members (Seimu 2022). Other authors, including Seimu (2015)

and Chambo (2009), are of the view that soon after independence, cooperatives were regarded as a machine for all developmental initiatives. However, cooperatives have also faced several challenges, such as political interference, mismanagement, corruption, and dissolution by the government decree in 1976. a year after the enactment of Villages and Ujamaa Act. In 1984, cooperatives in the country were declared legal, and means were revived and reformed to operate under a market-oriented economy and a democratic system (Seimu 2022; Mgumia et al. 2018).

As cooperatives perform their activities, they generate a significant amount of records that document their operational and business processes. These records indicate that in Tanzania, cooperatives have helped the independent government improve the living standards of its people through building children centres, schools, hospitals, and construction of roads. Normally, some of these records become inactive after time, but they have archival value, meaning that they provide valuable information for ensuring transparency, accountability, and continuity in the operations of cooperatives. Therefore, the management of inactive records, which are records that are no longer needed for current operations, is critical for preserving the history of cooperative movements, documenting their contributions to the development of Tanzania, particularly in the Lake Zone region and for future reference (Adungo & Kemoni 2019). According to Kimambo (1984:10), “historically human experience is cumulative and cannot just be erased from memory. And that, knowing what happened in the past is necessary ingredient in being able to evaluate the present and plan for the future.” Hence, inactive cooperative records have to be preserved for contemporary and future generations. Therefore, in 1961, the government of Tanzania (GoT) established the Records and Archives Management Division (RAMD), with the authority to manage all records with archival value and oversee all activities on records and archives management in the country. Furthermore, in 2002, the GoT enacted the Records and Archives Management Act of 2002, followed by the National Records and Archives Management Policy of 2011, to provide legal framework for the establishment and management of records in the country. In 2013, the GoT enacted Cooperative Societies Act (CSA), which requires cooperatives to maintain proper books of accounts and records, and to submit annual reports to the relevant government authorities.

Experience shows that inactive records are scattered with improper organisation throughout cooperatives in Tanzania, making it difficult to access and vulnerable to being lost to future generations. There, management of inactive cooperative records in many cooperatives has been inadequate, leading to loss, destruction, or mismanagement. This problem is particularly acute among cooperatives in the Lake Zone region, which has a long history of cooperative movements in the country. The Lake Zone region comprises regions around Lake Victoria, such as Kagera and Mwanza. The region is home to many cooperatives that deal with various agricultural products, such as cotton, coffee, sunflower, rice, and maize (Mwakisole, Kavishe & Kauzeni 2017). This inadequate management of inactive cooperative records with archival value among cooperatives in the Lake Zone region is attributed to several factors, such as lack of awareness of the importance of such records among cooperative members, lack of expertise in records management, lack of resources for preservation, lack of legal frameworks for cooperative records-keeping, and lack of proper record-keeping systems (Mosweu & Rakemane 2020; Mwakisole et al. 2017). These factors hinder the accessibility and usability of inactive cooperative records with archival value for various purposes, such as research, education, consultancy, decision-making, planning, and reporting. They also pose a risk of losing valuable historical information on the growth and development of cooperatives and the overall economic development of the region. A report by the African Union (2019) indicates that it also hinders accountability, transparency, and development.

Irrespective of the stated challenges, the management of such records has been a global concern for the preservation of the history and consistent decision-making (Baregu & Mwageni 2015). Therefore, in 2010, the Moshi Co-operative University (MoCU), a government institution of higher education in Tanzania observed the need to establish the University Cooperative Archives Centre at Moshi, Kilimanjaro, to facilitate storage for teaching, research, and consultancy. The university implemented the objective by identifying and collecting cooperative records with archival values in cooperatives in Lake Zone region. The assumption was that the archival collection at MoCU was the only place where cooperative records with educational, cultural, and historic value could be found for various purposes. During this process, questions were designed and asked for measuring co-operators' (specifically board members) understanding of the amount of generated cooperative records and the importance of preserving and disseminating such records. This helped determine perceptions of the status of cooperative records management. More importantly, the interest was to predict the future of cooperative movement in the right of the current practice of managing cooperative records (Kimambo, 1984). Hence, this study aimed to assess the status and experiences of managing inactive records by cooperatives in Lake Zone and the prospects for improving their management.

1.1 Problem statement

Despite the day-to-day creation of records among cooperatives, the created records are at risk of being lost or neglected. The management of these records has been inadequate, leading to their loss, destruction, or mismanagement. The inadequate management of inactive records has been identified as a major challenge facing cooperatives in Tanzania. Specifically, inactive records among cooperatives in Lake Zone are at risk of being lost, destroyed, or mismanaged due to various factors, including lack of awareness of their importance among cooperative members, expertise in records management, resources for preservation, legal frameworks for cooperative records-keeping, and lack of proper record-keeping systems. The inadequate management of inactive records not only hinders accountability and transparency in cooperatives' operations and businesses, but also leads to the loss of critical information on the growth and development of cooperatives and the overall economic development of the region. This, in turn, affects the operations of cooperatives and the wider socio-economic development of Tanzania.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to assess the status and experiences of managing inactive records by cooperatives in Lake Zone and the prospects for improving their management. The specific objectives are to:

- identify the types of cooperative records among cooperatives in Lake Zone
- establish the inactive records-keeping systems for cooperatives in Lake Zone
- determine factors constraining the effective management of inactive records for cooperatives in Lake Zone
- examine the prospects of inactive records' keeping for cooperatives in Lake Zone.

2. Literature review

This section presents the literature review for the study.

2.1 Types of cooperative records

Cooperative records encompass documents that meticulously capture the activities, transactions, and decisions of cooperative organisations, which are owned and controlled by cooperative members for their mutual benefit (ICA 2020). Within this realm, inactive cooperative records with archival value hold a unique position, offering valuable insights into enhancing transparency, accountability, and continuity within cooperative operations. These records, while no longer essential for current operational activities, serve as the custodians of historical information regarding cooperatives. They also act as the chroniclers of their contributions to the development of their members and communities (Adungo & Kemoni 2019).

2.2 Inactive records keeping systems

The management of these inactive cooperative records with archival importance is a pivotal facet of cooperative governance and administration. Records management, as delineated, involves the systematic control of records throughout their lifecycle, encompassing their creation, maintenance, utilisation, and disposition (ISO 2016). The primary objective of records management is to ensure that records remain available, accessible, reliable, authentic, and utilisable for various purposes, including research, education, consultancy, decision-making, planning, and reporting. Simultaneously, good management safeguards the rights and interests of record creators and users while adhering to legal and regulatory requirements (ISO 2016). It is important to establish the systems in place for keeping these inactive records within cooperatives in the Lake Zone.

2.3 Factors constraining effective management

The effective management of cooperative records, especially those of archival significance, has encountered significant inadequacies in numerous countries, particularly developing countries like Tanzania. Inactive records, characteristically defined as records no longer indispensable for current operational activities but deemed essential for preservation due to their archival value, frequently fall victim to neglect or mishandling by cooperatives. This situation is often attributed to a range of factors, including lack of awareness among cooperative members regarding the significance of these records, insufficient expertise in records management, scarce resources earmarked for preservation efforts, absence of legal frameworks governing cooperative records, and the presence of inadequate record-keeping systems (Mosweu & Rakemane 2020; Mwakisole et al. 2017; Pazi & Mwaluko 2017).

2.4 Prospects of inactive records keeping

Cooperatives' deficient management of inactive records leads to the erosion of critical information concerning the pivotal role and contributions of cooperatives to the socio-economic development of their members and communities. It obstructs transparency and accountability in cooperative operations, posing challenges for tasks such as financial statement auditing, dispute resolution, and performance evaluation (Mwakisole et al. 2017). Additionally, it results in the forfeiture of invaluable historical insights into the growth and

development of cooperatives over time. These insights, if preserved effectively, could serve as instrumental tools for learning from past experiences, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and devising future strategies (Adungo & Kemoni 2019). On a broader societal scale, cooperatives' deficient inactive records management leads to the erosion of critical information concerning the pivotal role and contributions of cooperatives to the socio-economic development of their members and communities. Cooperatives hold an important position in various countries, especially in rural areas, where they provide indispensable access to markets, inputs, credit facilities, information, and social services for small-scale farmers and marginalised demographics (Mgumia et al. 2018). Additionally, they propagate democratic values, encompassing participation, solidarity, equality, and social responsibility among their members and stakeholders (ICA, 2020). Hence, the preservation of historical information about cooperatives is testament to their achievements and challenges in advancing social justice and economic empowerment for their members and communities (Adungo & Kemoni 2019).

2.5 Existing gaps in the literature

The literature examining cooperative records management remains constrained and fragmented. Numerous studies delved into specific facets or instances of cooperative records management, failing to offer a comprehensive overview or a profound analysis of the subject. Some studies focused on the challenges or best practices of cooperative records management in particular countries or regions, while others concentrated on distinct types or formats of cooperative records, such as financial records or digital records (Mosweu & Rakemane 2020; Adungo & Kemoni 2019; Nnko & Kakoko 2018; Mwakisole et al. 2017). Furthermore, many studies adopted a descriptive or prescriptive approach, refraining from engaging in critical or theoretical analyses. Some merely portrayed the current circumstances or issues without clarifying the root causes or implications, while others propose solutions or recommendations without evaluating their feasibility or effectiveness (Mosweu & Rakemane 2020; Mwakisole et al. 2017; Adungo & Kemoni 2019; Nnko & Kakoko 2018). Consequently, a compelling imperative exists for an all-encompassing critical exploration of cooperative records management. This study sought to assess the status quo and experiences of managing inactive records by cooperatives in Lake Zone of Tanzania while simultaneously investigating opportunities for enhancing their management. Lake Zone comprises regions bordering Lake Victoria, including Kagera and Mwanza, and has a history of cooperative movements, hosting numerous cooperatives engaged in various agricultural products such as cotton, coffee, sunflower, rice, and maize (Mwakisole et al. 2017).

3. Methodology

This study was conducted in the Lake Zone region of Tanzania, specifically the Kagera and Mwanza regions. The selection of this geographical area was underpinned by its historical significance in the cooperative movement and development within Tanzania (Seimu 2022). The study involved eight cooperatives, encompassing six agricultural marketing cooperative societies, one consumers' cooperative society, and one SACCOS. The cooperatives examined in the Kagera region were: Kagera Co-operative Union (KCU), Karagwe District Co-operative Union (KDCU), Rwagati Agricultural Cooperative Society, Maruku Agricultural Cooperative Society, Kamahungu Agricultural Marketing Cooperative Society, and Bukoba PWD SACCOS. In the Mwanza Region, the study included the following societies: Nyanza Co-operative Union (NCU), Mwalogwabagole Agricultural Marketing Cooperative Society, and the Office of the Regional Cooperative Officer in Mwanza. To corroborate the insights

provided by participants, the Directorate of Cooperative Development of the Ministry of Agriculture in Dodoma was also engaged in this study.

The selection of these cooperatives adhered to specific criteria: (a) engagement in agricultural product trading, including cotton, coffee, sunflower, rice, and maize; (b) track record of more than 10 years' operation; and (c) generation of inactive records with archival value. Ninety-six board members from the selected cooperatives were anticipated as study participants. According to Tanzania's Cooperative Act of 2013, the number of board members should range from a minimum of five to a maximum of nine. Thus, considering the highest number of board members, multiplied by the eight cooperatives participating in this study, the total expected participants were 96.

Data were collected through focus group discussions, face-to-face interviews, observations, and documentary reviews. The focus group discussions involved a group of participants sharing their perspectives and experiences on the study's topics, guided by a moderator. Face-to-face interviews involved one-on-one interactions between the researcher and participants responding to open-ended questions. Observations consisted of collecting data by observing and recording the behaviour and activities of individuals or phenomena in their natural settings. Documentary reviews entailed an examination of policies and other legal documents to evaluate institutional commitment to managing inactive cooperative records. The data collected underwent analysis employing thematic content analysis, a method designed to identify, code, and interpret patterns or themes within qualitative data. The analytical process comprised six steps: (a) familiarising oneself with the data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) identifying themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, (f) compiling the report.

Ethical principles and procedures guided the study to ensure protection of the rights and interests of both participants and researchers. These principles and procedures encompassed: (a) obtaining informed consent from participants, (b) safeguarding the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, (c) avoiding harm or deception during data collection, (d) upholding honesty and integrity throughout data collection and analysis, and (e) properly attributing sources of information and preventing plagiarism. The study recognised its limitations and delimitations, including: (a) a relatively small sample size and purposive sampling, which may constrain the generalisability of findings, (b) inherent subjectivity and potential bias associated with qualitative research, and (c) the cross-sectional study design's limitations in capturing changes or trends over time. Furthermore, the study was delimited by its focus on cooperatives primarily involved in agricultural products in the Lake Zone of Tanzania, the investigation of only inactive records with archival value, and the utilisation of four data collection methods.

4. Results

This study aimed to assess the status and experiences of managing inactive records among cooperatives in Lake Zone. A mixed methods approach together with qualitative research methods was used. These methods involved 88 respondents, comprising 29 (19%) females and 71 (81%) males. The predominance of male respondents can be attributed to historical societal norms that limited women's involvement in economic activities and property ownership, aligning them with men's roles. Consequently, traditionally, mostly men engaged in such activities.

4.1 The status of inactive records among cooperatives

The first objective was to establish the status of inactive records among cooperative societies. Two crucial aspects, namely the availability and the state of inactive records, were examined. Respondents were asked to report whether their cooperative societies generated and maintained dedicated storage spaces for inactive records. Responses obtained during focus group discussions revealed a range of perspectives. Some participants believed their societies generated no records, while others acknowledged generating significant records, albeit with poor management. One participant from Society 7 asserted their cooperative produced no records, stating: "Our society does not generate cooperative records; we only have ledgers and passbooks for daily operations." This prompted a follow-up question regarding how their societies conducted daily operations without generating records, revealing a misunderstanding among respondents about what constituted records. This misunderstanding was widespread, highlighting the need for improved awareness. Another respondent clarified that they generated numerous records, including meeting minutes, financial statements, cooperative rules, and guidelines. He clarified as follows:

"I think, my colleague did not understand that as per the definition of 'records' provided by our experts, we normally generate a pile of records from daily operations of our society. We actually generate a lot of records, including minutes of the meeting, our business transactions financial statements, cooperatives rules and guidelines."

Focus group discussions and observations unveiled that most cooperatives generated substantial records during daily operations. Unfortunately, inadequate records management practices were prevalent. Even the chairperson of a cooperative society board from Society 4 admitted that, "We produce a lot of records, but the challenge lies in storing the inactive ones, which are currently stored in an inadequate room nearby." A critical observation revealed the unsuitable storage conditions for generated inactive records, often found in dirty, congested rooms exposed to dust, pests, and insects harmful to the records' preservation as indicated in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Photos of inactive records in storage rooms from six different cooperatives

4.1.1 Identified cooperative records with archival value

Direct observations in eight cooperatives across Kagera and Mwanza identified various types of inactive records with archival value, as indicated in Table 1. Some records dated back to pre-independence Tanganyika (now Tanzania mainland), with examples such as the Bye-Laws of the Native Farmers' Cooperative Society LTD from 1932, written in the Haya language, and the Co-operative Societies Ordinance and Rules from 1948. Other records included minutes of meetings, financial reports, membership registers, loan application forms, cooperative bylaws, special reports, circulars, government documents. These records are crucial for ensuring transparency, accountability, continuity in cooperative operations, and documenting their historical development.

Table 1: Examples of records with archival value identified in different cooperatives

S/N	Location	Identified records with archival value
1	Nyanza Cooperative Union (Mwanza)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History of the relationship between the Cooperative Union and marketing boards • Government documents such as circulars (from colonial and independence government) • Reports on International Cotton Aid Programmes in the 1980s/1990s • Minutes of General Meeting of Victoria Federation of Co-operatives, 1961 • Minutes of Annual General Meetings of Nyanza Co-operative Union • Memorandum and articles of association of Nyanza Transport Company
	Office of the Regional Cooperative Officer (Mwanza)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All registered co-operatives in the region since 1974-2012 • Government circulars • Co-operative College exam papers from first year of opening • Staff ID cards (inspectors from Co-operative Department, 1977)
	Bukumbi Ginnery (Mwanza)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handing over notices dated 1999 and 2001 • Committee meeting minutes for the period 1961 to 1964 • Bukumbi economic analysis documents
	Mwalogwabagole Agricultural Marketing Cooperative Society (Mwanza)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orders and directives from Registrar of Cooperative Societies • Registration certificates • By-laws • Minutes of the meetings • Audited financial reports
2	Kagera Cooperative Union (Kagera)	<p>Minutes of the meetings and reports covering the periods when co-operatives were under colonial rule and independent government, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minutes of BNCU General Meeting 1950-1954 • Bank reconciliation statement for 1964 / 1965 within Minute book 1964/5 • Development subcommittee minutes from November 1963 (Committee responsible to formulate development activities of the union) • BNCU Reports 1961-64 • Valuation of Coffee factories in Bukoba (1955)
	Karagwe District Cooperative Union, (Kagera)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribution of assets between KCU and KDCU at the time of the split • Registration Certificate, 1990 • Meeting Minutes, 1999 • List of debtors and creditors, for the year ended 30 April 2001
	Rwagati Agricultural Cooperative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter written in 1989 by Bukoba Cooperative Union asking the primary societies to make their contribution and annual subscription to political party – CCM. At the time, all co-ops

	Society, (Kagera)	<p>resorted under a Washirika, which was affiliated to CCM.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tanganyika Territory Certificate of Registration for Rwagati Co-operative Society 1950 • Artefacts from 1950s, including scales, stamps, huller, and calculator • Colonial document: The Co-operative Societies Ordinance and Rules 1948 <p>Visitors' book recording visitors since 1954 (shows inspection frequencies, etc.)</p>
	Maruku Agricultural Cooperative Society (Kagera)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An invitation to the society to attend celebration of 10 years of the CCM and 20 years since the Arusha Declaration (1987) • Loan application letter of 1978 by Maruku AMCOS to the Butairuku SACCO • Passbook for members • Photograph of delegates at a meeting of the BCU (between 1960 and 1972)
	Kamahungu Agricultural Marketing Cooperative Society (Kagera)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loan contracts • Audited reports • Annual general meeting minutes • Registration certificates, etc. • Bye-Laws of the Native Farmers' Cooperative Society LTD. of 1932 in Haya language
	Bukoba PWD SACCOS (Kagera)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The book on the history of Bukoba PWD SACCOS from 1964 to 1994
3	Directorate of Cooperative Development (Dodoma)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-operative Societies Acts of 1966, 1975, 1982, 1991, 2003 • Lists of cooperative unions in the country and their primary members since 1933 to 1979 • An act to give statutory effect of Jumuiya ya Muungano wa Vyama vya Ushirika and to dissolve Cooperative Union of Tanganyika of 1979 • Inspection reports of Cooperative societies, Cooperative Union Register for the period of 1933 to 1970 • Cooperative societies model By Law and other documents. • Registers of o-operatives registered from 1933 to 1971

4.2 Records management resources and infrastructure

Effectively managing the records generated daily by cooperatives necessitates adequate resources and infrastructure, including qualified personnel and suitable physical facilities for storing inactive records securely. The research enquired about the responsibility for managing cooperative records and whether cooperatives planned to employ professional records management officers. Surprisingly, none of the societies had employed staff dedicated to cooperative records management. Instead, any office member could decide to remove or discard inactive records without a standardised process. One respondent from Society 2 stated, "Anyone in the office is responsible for records management and can decide which records should be removed based on use." Regarding hiring professional records management

officers, most respondents expressed that their societies had no plans for such an addition, citing financial constraints. A respondent from Society 3 said:

“Our society has not planned of having a professional officer in records management. We normally weed the inactive records from the offices after some period to create space in the society’s offices. I think hiring a professional records manager won’t be easy; it is expensive for most of our societies as we cannot afford.”

This staffing issue emerged as a significant challenge for many cooperatives, as most lacked qualified personnel in records management. Thus, untrained staff in records management cannot fairly treat the created records for the contemporary and future generations.

In terms of the infrastructural availability and the places where inactive cooperative records were stored, a member of the board in Society 2 said the status was not encouraging, as there were no facilities (including furniture and other equipment), instead there were just a room in the building near the cooperative society’s office without even a single shelf. This board member of the Society 2 stated:

“Strictly speaking, we do have a room where we can properly store the inactive records; instead, we having a place which is not friendly when it comes to the issues of re-locating, retrieving and using such records except for active records only which are stored in the offices”.

When participants were asked to state if efforts were made to ensure that the required resources were in place, during a focus group discussion, one respondent in Society 7 commented:

“There are no decisive efforts to improve the poor conditions of managing records in our cooperative society specifically about the infrastructural development and equipment. This is attributed to our ignorance on the importance of proper records management programme and lack of trained staff as records managers. On other hand, declining financial capability of our society influences inadequate infrastructure and insufficient equipment.”

Regarding the availability of infrastructure and storage space for inactive cooperative records, a board member from Society 1 stated that the status was unsatisfactory as there were no facilities (furniture and equipment). Instead, there was only a room in a nearby building without shelves. A board member from Society 2 during focus group discussion said:

“We do not have a proper room for storing the inactive records; we only have a place that is not conducive for relocating, retrieving, and using such records. The active records are stored in the offices”.

When asked if there was a plan to improve the situation, another respondent in the Society 5 commented:

"There are no concrete efforts to improve the poor conditions of records management in our cooperative society, especially regarding the infrastructure and equipment. This is due to our lack of awareness of the importance of proper records management programme and the absence of trained staff as records

managers. Moreover, our society's financial constraints limit our ability to acquire adequate infrastructure and equipment."

4.3 Factors constraining the management of cooperative records

A primary objective of this study was to identify the factors impeding the effective management of inactive records within cooperatives in Lake Zone. The insights gathered were intended to pave the way for the establishment, maintenance, preservation, and conservation of cooperative records, making them accessible for study, research, and consultancy. Additionally, the study aimed to shed light on the future of cooperative records in Tanzania's cooperative movement, considering the current practices and challenges faced in managing these records (Kimambo 1984). The challenges encountered by cooperatives in managing their records were diverse and varied among societies. Some of the key impediments included:

4.3.1 Lack of budget for staffing and resources

Many cooperatives struggled with insufficient budgetary allocations for staffing and acquiring essential resources. This financial constraint often hampers their ability to hire qualified staff or procure necessary equipment and materials for the preservation of records. Moreover, records management activities, such as filing, storage, retrieval, disposal, or digitisation, are often overlooked, as cooperatives do not allocate dedicated funds for these purposes. This issue was succinctly summarised by a respondent from Society 3:

"We had not previously thought of having a budget for the aspect of records management. This is attributed to the fact that no one among us knew the importance of managing our inactive cooperative records before today."

A respondent from Society 5 noted:

"We also face infrastructural challenges such as building and facilities. We have heard that there should be a dedicated building with appropriate facilities to manage records which our society has not contemplated before. Consequently, our inactive records disorganised in just a room there outside of this main building."

4.3.2 Lack of awareness and training

Low awareness among cooperative members and board members regarding the importance of records management and the necessary skills involved is a prevalent challenge. Many within cooperatives were unaware of which records hold enduring value and deserve permanent management. The absence of adequate training compounds this issue, as individuals were unaware of the methodologies, challenges, and strategies required for effective records management. A respondent from Society 8 stated:

"Honestly, the primary challenge facing our society in managing records with archival value is low awareness among us (members of the society) on the significance and management skills of records we produce daily, and scarce infrastructural resources for that purpose."

Another respondent expressed similar views:

"Records management by our cooperative societies is relatively new, and as such employing a records management staff who is responsible for records management is a novel concept. Therefore, we (the office bearers) may not have had enough time to recognize the challenges and devise strategies to overcome them. However, based on what we have learned today, I think it is reasonable to say that we lacked understanding of the importance of managing our records."

4.3.3 Infrastructural challenges

Cooperatives often lacked the necessary infrastructure, such as dedicated buildings and facilities, for proper records management. Proper storage facilities, including shelves, cabinets, and rooms, are essential for preserving records with archival value. However, the absence of these facilities results in inadequate protection and organisation of records. A respondent from Society 5 noted:

"For sure, from today I have come to know that every cooperative society is supposed to build a collection of records managed by professional records staff even at the certificate level of education. However, the budget, in terms of finance, is at the heart of all these, and when funds are lacking, it is difficult to organise cooperative records, but I'm sure this year we will try to have a budget for records management."

4.3.4 Absence of legal frameworks, standards, and procedures

Cooperatives often lack standardised guidelines and procedures for effective records management. This absence makes it challenging to establish consistent practices in records keeping across different cooperatives. Without these standards, managing and preserving records become ad hoc and inconsistent. In anticipation that there might be related legal documents stating something about the management of cooperative records, two policy documents and an Act were reviewed. The focus of the review was to extract and reveal whether the cooperative records management issues were featured in the two important legal documents. This was to help in understand the country's level of commitment to the management of cooperative records. The review indicated that there were neither policies nor strategies that specifically dealt with the management of cooperative records. Although the CSA mandates cooperatives to maintain proper books of accounts and records, it lacks specific guidelines and standards for managing records with archival value. It does not address critical issues related to the preservation of digital records, posing additional challenges in maintaining the authenticity, reliability, and long-term preservation of records. The absence of a clear legal framework compounds the complexities of records management within cooperatives.

During face-to-face interviews, most respondents expressed lack of awareness regarding existence of legal frameworks specifically addressing the management of cooperative records. However, very few respondents stated that they were unsure about whether the Cooperative Policy dealt with the management of cooperative records or not. A respondent from Society 7 said:

“We are only familiar with Cooperative Policy of which is silence on management of cooperative records. However, based on the today’s discussion, I think this policy needs to be amended to include the issue of managing generated cooperative records. The policy also needs to have guidelines on what kind of the generated cooperative records have permanent valued and should be kept for contemporary and future use.”

This was supported by a board member in the same society who said:

According to my understanding, I don’t think if we have a policy or strategy which focuses on management of cooperative records. I think even the Cooperative Policy is silent on the issued that is why we have not heard about it earlier. I have read several times from the Cooperative Policy but can remember if I encountered something about records management.

These views were also confirmed by another board member in another Society 8 who said:

“I only know that we are guided by Cooperative Policy in our business operations. That we do not have a written policy or strategy about how cooperative records should be managed but I guess there might be some other policies in the country in speaking about records management.”

This indicated that policies and frameworks were often enacted without effective communication to stakeholders, resulting in key players being unaware of the policies’ existence or content. The absence of awareness hindered the collective effort required for effective cooperative records management. This suggests a lack of awareness of the existence of a legal framework on the management of cooperative records and highlights the need for improved communication and awareness building among cooperatives. Effective records management should be a collaborative effort, and clear policies and guidelines are essential for its success.

4.4 The future of cooperative records management

The final objective of this study was to explore prospects for improving inactive records-keeping practices among cooperatives in Lake Zone. The findings from this objective served as the foundation for actionable recommendations aimed at enhancing the preservation and accessibility of inactive cooperative records for study, research, and consultancy purposes. Addressing the challenges in cooperative records management necessitates a multifaceted approach encompassing training, legal frameworks, awareness campaigns, resource allocation, and collaboration. These measures will not only enhance the preservation and accessibility of cooperative records, but also contribute to the overall success and sustainability of cooperative societies in Tanzania. Furthermore, the aim was to project the future of cooperative records for the country’s cooperative movement in relation to the current practices and challenges of managing cooperative records (Kimambo 1984). Several potential avenues for improving inactive records-keeping practices in cooperatives include the following:

4.4.1 Empirical suggestions for addressing the raised challenges

In addressing the challenges of managing cooperative records, respondents proposed that cooperative societies could initiate training initiatives to equip their current workforce with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively manage cooperative records, especially the inactive records. While employing professional records staff may not be immediately feasible, basic training can raise awareness of methodologies, challenges, and strategies in managing cooperative records. In-house training would help cooperative members and staff understand the importance of records management and equip them with the skills needed to identify records with enduring value. One respondent from Society 4 suggested training as a way of addressing the challenges of managing cooperative records, stating:

“While cooperative societies and unions may not be ready to employ staff trained in records management, I believe our societies (cooperative societies) need basic training for their current workforce on this topic. This would make them aware of the methodologies, challenges, and strategies in managing cooperative records. Since most of our societies do not have trained personnel employed as records managers, I think it is high time to employ such individuals to ensure that cooperative records are effectively preserved and made accessible to researchers and other users.”

It was revealed that as technology advances, cooperative societies can benefit from training in leveraging available technological gadgets, such as smartphones and computers, for records management. This knowledge can enhance the utilisation of existing resources for effective record keeping. Another respondent emphasised the importance of adapting to contemporary changes in science and technology:

“I believe that given the way the world is evolving, we should also receive training on how to use the available technological gadgets in our hands for the purpose of managing cooperative records. While we have few computers in our offices, nearly everyone has a smartphone. These smartphones are smart, and someone should come and train us on how we can make proper use of these gadgets for managing cooperative records.”

Records management, as the field responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the generation, receipt, maintenance, use, and disposition of records, is vital for the smooth operation of cooperatives. Hence, records management skills are essential for all co-operators to enable them to identify records with enduring value. This knowledge is currently lacking among cooperative staff and poses a significant threat to the management of cooperative records. Moreover, the lack of knowledge and skills in records appraisal underpins the establishment of cooperative records centres at cooperative societies. Staff of the cooperatives and unions often lack adequate knowledge and skills in archival appraisal, leading to the indiscriminate removal and disposal of inactive records without proper documentation.

4.4.2 Development of legal frameworks and policies

Cooperatives can advocate for the development of clear legal frameworks and policies for cooperative records keeping. These guidelines should encompass record retention periods, storage standards, disposal procedures, and access protocols. They should also address the unique challenges posed by digital records, which present new challenges related to

authenticity, reliability, and preservation. Therefore, cooperatives would benefit from having a clear and consistent legal framework to guide their records management practices in any format.

4.4.3 Establishment of training programmes and awareness campaigns

The establishment of awareness campaigns and training programmes would enhance knowledge and skills related to records management among cooperative members and staff. These initiatives would foster a culture of records management among cooperatives and increase appreciation of the value of inactive records for accountability, transparency, continuity, and historical preservation. Initiating campaigns to create awareness about the significance of records management within cooperatives is vital. These campaigns can inform cooperative members and staff about the benefits of proper records management and motivate their active participation.

4.4.4 Provision of adequate resources and infrastructure

Ensuring the availability and accessibility of resources and infrastructure for records preservation would safeguard records from deterioration, damage, or loss. This includes budget allocation for records management activities. The resources and infrastructure would enable cooperatives to adopt digital technologies for records keeping and preservation, enhancing the accessibility and management of their records. Adequate funding ensures that records are maintained securely.

4.4.5 Creation of partnerships and networks

Facilitating partnerships and networks among cooperatives and stakeholders such as government agencies, academic institutions, professional associations, and civil society organisations would encourage the sharing of best practices, experiences, and challenges in managing cooperative records, especially the inactive ones. Moreover, collaboration could lead to the development of strategies, policies, and programmes to enhance inactive records-keeping practices in cooperatives. In other words, these partnerships can result in the development of strategies, policies, standards, and programmes for improving records-keeping practices in cooperatives.

All these comprehensive measures offer a promising path forward for cooperative societies in Tanzania to effectively manage and preserve their records, ultimately contributing to their long-term success and the development of a robust cooperative movement within the country.

5. Discussion of the results

This section delves into the results of the study, providing insights into the research questions, aligning the findings with the literature review and theoretical framework, and highlighting their implications. It also acknowledges the limitations of the study and suggests avenues for addressing them in future research.

The results of this study underscore the critical issue of inactive records management among cooperatives in Tanzania's Lake Zone. The study revealed that cooperatives in Tanzania's Lake Zone generate a substantial volume of inactive records with archival value, including minutes of board meetings, financial reports, cooperative bylaws, special reports, circulars,

government documents, and historical records dating back to pre-independence periods. However, the organisation and management of these records are inadequate and inconsistent across various cooperative societies. The scattered and disorganised nature of these records makes them challenging to access and utilise for reference and decision-making purposes. This is in line to the literature, including Baregu and Mwageni (2015), which highlights that the preservation of such inactive records is a global concern for preserving history and facilitating informed decision-making.

The study findings also identified several substantial challenges in managing inactive records among cooperatives, including no dedicated budgets, standardised procedures, adequate training, proper record-keeping systems, expertise, resources, and infrastructure. Additionally, there is lack of awareness among cooperative members and staff regarding the importance of archival records for preserving the history and development of cooperative movements. One of the prominent challenges identified in this study is the lack of qualified records management staff in most cooperatives. Instead, unqualified staff members often determine which records should be retained or disposed of without adhering to proper criteria. This situation results in improper handling and preservation of records, hindering their accessibility and usability for future reference. The importance of having trained personnel for effective records management within cooperatives cannot be overstated. Adequate staffing in this area enables cooperatives to access pertinent information for decision-making and planning, ultimately contributing to the consistency and soundness of cooperative governance.

Moreover, this study revealed how contextual factors, including individual preferences, organisational culture, social norms, and archival standards, influence cooperative record-keeping practices. Consequently, the study highlighted that cooperatives have limited prospects for enhancing their record-keeping practices without external support and guidance from relevant authorities and institutions.

From a practical standpoint, this underscores the urgent need to prioritise cooperative records management. Neglecting the management of these records poses a significant risk, as it could lead to their deterioration and loss, ultimately undermining the foundations of the cooperative movement. Establishing a robust records management programme that includes trained staff, adequate infrastructure, and budget allocation is essential for fostering transparency, accountability, and informed decision-making within cooperatives. Additionally, the study recognised the potential of technology in addressing records management challenges, highlighting the possibilities of electronic records management, especially as ICT access expands in the region. This is in line to Mosweu and Rakemane's (2020) and Mnjama et al.s' (2019) studies which emphasised the inadequate management of inactive records as a major challenge facing cooperatives in Tanzania. This challenge is the result of inadequate resources, skills, infrastructure, awareness, and legal frameworks. Furthermore, the findings reinforce the importance of addressing these challenges to ensure the effective management of cooperative records.

While not explicitly mentioned as an objective, the study investigated the role of records management staff within cooperatives. The findings indicated a significant gap in this area, with most cooperatives relying on unqualified staff to decide which records to keep or dispose of. This deficiency in qualified records management staff compromises the proper handling and preservation of records, hindering their accessibility and usability for future reference. Adungo and Kemoni (2019) suggest that addressing records management challenges includes

providing training for staff. Thus, urgency of addressing this gap to enhance records management practices within cooperatives is of paramount importance.

Furthermore, in exploring the prospects for enhancing record-keeping practices, the findings revealed that cooperatives have limited prospects for improving their record-keeping practices without external support and guidance from relevant authorities and institutions. Additionally, the potential of technology in addressing records management challenges was recognised, especially with expanding ICT access in the region. Although literature review did not explicitly mention prospects for enhancing record-keeping practices, the findings align with the broader discussions on improving records management within cooperatives. Adungo and Kemoni (2019) emphasise the potential of using digital technologies to enhance record-keeping practices, which resonates with this study's recognition of technology's role.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

Cooperative societies in Lake Zone possess a wealth of valuable materials in the form of inactive records, but, regrettably, these resources often remain inaccessible and poorly managed. The systematic effort required for collecting and preserving these records is lacking, rendering them disorganised and difficult to retrieve when needed. This study aimed to evaluate the state of managing inactive records among cooperatives in Lake Zone, employing a mixed methods approach encompassing focus group discussions, interviews, observations, and document review. Central to this study was the inquiry into how the management of inactive records among cooperatives in this region could be improved. The study revealed that cooperatives in Lake Zone generate a significant volume of records with archival value, yet their management is fraught with inadequacies and inconsistencies. Many of these inactive records in the cooperatives' possession are inaccessible due to the absence of deliberate and systematic preservation efforts. Moreover, they are disorganised and challenging to retrieve. Various types of inactive cooperative records were identified during the course of this study.

The findings further unveiled that cooperatives lack proper record-keeping systems, expertise, resources, and awareness of the importance of archival records for preserving the history and development of cooperative movements. Responsibility for the control and management of generated cooperative records remains absent, with individual officers arbitrarily deciding the fate of inactive records. This lack of oversight is compounded by a dearth of expertise in records management. Cooperatives face additional hurdles in managing inactive records, including the absence of budgets, standards, procedures, training, and infrastructure. Notably, cooperatives' prospects for improving their record-keeping practices are limited, necessitating external support and guidance from relevant authorities and institutions. This context also highlights the dire need for custodians of inactive cooperative records to receive training and for resources and infrastructure to be provided to facilitate effective records management. Inadequate training of these custodians, coupled with the absence of proper records management policies and procedures, exacerbates the problem, ultimately hindering effective cooperative records management.

Based on the findings, discussions, and conclusion of the study's results, the following recommendations are proposed for future research and action:

- (i) Cooperatives should develop and implement legal frameworks for cooperative records keeping that align with national and international standards and best practices. These

frameworks should clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of cooperative members and staff in creating, capturing, organising, and pluralising records with archival value. Furthermore, they should establish criteria and procedures for selecting, preserving, accessing, and disposing of records with archival value. Cooperatives should establish training programmes in records management targeting cooperative members and staff at different organisational levels. These programmes should aim to enhance the skills and knowledge of cooperative members and staff in records management principles, methods, tools, and technologies. They should also raise awareness among cooperative members and staff regarding the significance and value of records with archival value for preserving the history and development of cooperative movements.

- (ii) Cooperatives should allocate adequate resources for the preservation of records with archival value. This includes physical facilities such as shelves, folders, boxes, cabinets, rooms, or buildings suitable for storing records with archival value. Financial resources should be allocated to cover the costs of preservation activities such as cleaning, repairing, digitising, or migrating records with archival value. Human resources should also be designated to perform preservation tasks such as identifying, labelling, arranging, cataloguing, or indexing records with archival value.
- (iii) Cooperatives should actively create awareness among cooperative members and other stakeholders about the importance and value of records with archival value. Various means of dissemination, such as newsletters, brochures, exhibitions, workshops, seminars, or conferences showcasing the types, contents, and uses of such records, should be utilised. Additionally, various media channels, including radio, television, newspapers, magazines, or social media, should be employed to disseminate information and stories about records with archival value.
- (iv) Cooperatives should leverage digital technologies for record keeping and preservation wherever feasible and appropriate. These technologies encompass computers, scanners, printers, cameras, software, or cloud services that facilitate the creation, capture, organisation, and pluralisation of records with archival value. They also enhance the access, security, quality, and durability of such records. Future research could employ a mixed methods approach and longitudinal designs to enhance the comprehensiveness and reliability of results. In addition, it should aim to triangulate data sources and methods for verification and complementation.

Declaration

I, the author of this manuscript solemnly declare that:

- The manuscript is my original work, and it has been conducted in accordance with ethical research practices and principles. And it has not been previously published rather is not under consideration for publication with any other journal or copyrighted publishing platform of any kind.
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- Manuscript and study meet all the ethical requirements of the journal and that of my institution or company, as well as legal requirements of the study country.

- There is no any potential conflict of interest for the research.
- The author takes responsibility to keep participants information confidential as required by legislations including protection of personal information Act.
- Author gives consent to the Journal of South African Society of Archivist to publish the manuscript.

Acknowledgements

- I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who have contributed to the successful completion of this research study on the management of records with archival value in the Lake Zone, Tanzania.
- I am deeply indebted to my co-researchers (Mr Saleh Sama, Mr Mruma, and Ms Rogathe Silayo) for their unwavering support and invaluable insights throughout this research journey. Their expertise and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping the direction and quality of this study.
- Last but not least, I want to acknowledge the cooperatives and individuals who allowed me access to their archival records and shared their knowledge. Without their cooperation and willingness to participate, this study would not have been possible.

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