

Chapter 57

Librarians, Records Managers, and E-Government

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ABSTRACT

Governments have turned to the use of information and communication technologies with the aim of improving service delivery, encouraging citizens in the decision making process, and enhancing accountability, transparency, and effectiveness. Effective inclusive participation of citizens in the government of their country requires access to information through modern technologies. Access to information is vital for transparency, accountability, participation, and the rule of law – all hallmarks of democratic governance. This chapter looks at the role of librarians and records managers in promoting e-government. Their traditional role of collecting, organizing, preserving, and disseminating information places them in a very significant position in e-governance implementation. However, in an electronic environment, they face a number of challenges which include economic, technological, and information literacy. The role played by these professionals, and the challenges each meet are discussed. Some recommendations are provided to enhance the role of these professionals in e-government implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technology capabilities can enhance the use of information and knowledge or its transfer from one person or place to another as well as its storage in a compact and convenient way. However, the same capabilities can accelerate its loss, putting vast amounts of

information at risk... (Bernbom, 2001, xiii). This has presented a lot of challenges to records managers and librarians in their business of managing information. These challenges are discussed in this chapter. The chapter draws mostly on findings of two studies conducted in Namibia, one on electronic records management in the context of e-government (Nengomasha, 2009) and other on hybrid libraries and e-government (Uutoni, Yule & Nengomasha, 2010).

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The objectives of this chapter are to:

- sensitize the libraries and records management professionals on their new role in an ICT driven world.
- highlight the challenges that the new role bring.
- make recommendations on how to address the challenges.
- suggest areas for further research in promoting the role of libraries and records management services in e-government.

BACKGROUND

Electronic-government (e-government) refers to the way in which governments use information and communication technologies to enhance transparency and accountability, and provide opportunities for people to participate in the democratic process by providing citizens and businesses with more convenient access to government information and services (Center for Technology in Government, 2004; World Fang, as cited in Rose, 2004; Lipchack & McDonald, 2003; OECD, as cited in Stork & Aochamub, 2003; UNESCO, 210; World Bank, 2004).

E-government encompasses the following key functions:

- **E-services:** the electronic delivery of government information, programmes and services over the internet;
- **E-democracy:** the use of electronic communications to increase citizen participation in the public decision-making process;
- **E-commerce:** the electronic exchange of money for goods and services...; and
- **E-management:** the use of information technology to improve the management of government, from streamlining business processes to maintaining e-records, to improving the flow and integration of

information (Center for Technology in Government, 2004, p.1).

E-government systems fall into three major types namely, inter-departmental use, intra-governmental use, and government-to-citizen use. As Steemson (2004, p.5) explains:

government-to-citizen use is the most difficult to manage because it comprises the delivery of information and services to and from astronomical numbers of people, few of whom can easily be trained beforehand to use the systems well

The importance of reliable, easily accessible information for e-governance is acknowledged by various authors (Economic Commission for Africa, 2008; Mnjama and Wamukoya, 2007; Steemson, 2004; UNDP, 2010). Better information management can help government officials to identify barriers to more efficient government. An information management framework is necessary for policy makers to derive useful analysis from the massive data available quickly enough to react to social and economic developments (Center for Democracy and Technology, 2002, p.19). Librarians and records managers as information service providers have a role to play not only in collecting, organising and managing information, but in making the information easily accessible. Approaches of records management, data management and information management have emerged as “an inter-disciplinary framework (see Figure 1) to assist organizations to engage in the wider information /knowledge economy” (Australian Government, Department of Finance and Administration, 2004, p. 2).

Records management is defined as: “...that area of general administration concerned with achieving economy and efficiency in the creation, maintenance, use and disposal of records of an organization throughout their entire life cycle and in making the information they contain available in support of the business of that organization”

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