

Managing public records in Zimbabwe: the road to good governance, accountability, transparency and effective service delivery

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Abstract

The ability by government departments to attain effective service delivery, accountability and good governance is largely determined by their records management practices. Delays and failure to access services due to missing or misplaced records from public institutions is a common challenge in Zimbabwe. In organisations where records are not properly managed, business operations are crippled and the rights of citizens will be compromised. As such, this paper examines the status quo in Zimbabwe's government ministries regarding the basic requirements in records management. The basic concepts covered in this paper pertain to the issues of retention and disposal schedules, registry procedures manuals, disaster preparedness, records management training, electronic records management and records inspections by the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ). The underlying principle for this paper is that public records management units require effective records management practices for the attainment of improved public service delivery, good governance, accountability and transparency. A qualitative approach that used interviews, content analysis and questionnaires was used to gather data for the study. The overall results showed that public service delivery is at risk due to inadequate records management practices in the public sector. To that effect, an improved working relationship between NAZ and public departments is encouraged.

KEYWORDS: Accountability, good governance, records management, service delivery, transparency, Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

Public records are important as they help the responsible authorities to uphold the rule of law and to demonstrate good governance through fair and equal treatment of citizens. The availability of records enables the public to hold officials accountable for their actions and it enhances service delivery particularly in such sectors as health, education, pensions, land, and judicial rights. This means that records are critical to the several aspects of the governance process. In this regard, records management can be labeled the road to accountability, transparency, good governance and improved service delivery.

The concept of accountability refers to the legal and reporting framework, organisational structure, strategy, procedures and actions that a government follows to help ensure that a government is held responsible for its actions (Lindberg, 2009). Evans (2008) notes that accountability is the willingness by a government to accept the responsibility of its actions and decisions. As such, accountability can be perceived to be central to the democratic theory as democracy has been attested to necessitate accountability. Blagescu et al. (2005) indicates that accountability is when a government is open to the populace and makes available the relevant information to enable the people to meaningfully contribute to ongoing national dialogues and debates. Accountability therefore refers to the obligation that public officials have of providing information, explanations and justifications for their performance in the execution of their functions (Cendon, 1999).

In this paper, accountability refers to the ability by a government to be answerable and responsible for its actions, decisions, policies and products. The appropriate management of public sector records helps in fostering accountability in that records provide a reliable, legally verifiable source of evidence of decisions and actions. Governments may not be able to justify their actions with little or no reference to past performance or future goals; hence the need for sound records management practices in government departments. Accountability in a government is promoted by transparency.

Transparency is a powerful force that can be applied to fight corruption, improve governance and promote accountability (Lindberg, 2009). It includes the obligation to provide public access to information about the government and the ability by a government to evaluate its performance, policies and practice in consultation with members of the public (Blagescu et al., 2005). Transparency therefore means that decisions taken and their enforcement are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations. It also means that information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement (O'Reilly, 2009). In the same vein, Ginsberg et al (2012) indicates that transparency is the disclosure of government information and its use by the public. The end result of transparency is accountability.

In the context of this paper, transparency is when a government is open about its actions and ready to engage with the citizenry for their views, comments and input. The ability by a government to engage with the populace inculcates in people confidence and a sense of trust towards their government. Amongst the measures that a

government can put in place to bring about this sense of trust is to ensure that public records are available and accessible. Good records management is the tool that can be used to ensure the effective availability and accessibility of public records.

Effective service delivery is when a government recognizes citizens as its clients and strives to provide fast, accessible and good quality services (Eigema, 2007). In this paper, effective service delivery refers to the ability by a public institution to render the services sought by a people on time without delays that are usually a result of missing and or misplaced files. Records represent an important and critical source of information that is needed by public offices to be able to serve the people. The ability by government departments to attain effective service delivery rests on the accessibility and usability of the information contained in records. As such, the failure by a public office to manage its records leads to inefficiency and difficulties in executing their expected duties which include serving the people.

Accountability and transparency are two important elements of good governance in that good governance is based on openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement (Lindberg, 2009, O'Reilly, 2009). Good governance is the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented. It is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development (O'Reilly, 2009). Similarly, Walter et al. (2006) asserts that good governance is the transparent and accountable management of human, natural, economic and financial resources for the purposes of equitable and sustainable development. The characteristics of good governance are participatory,

consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive (O'Reilly, 2009).

Figure 1 demonstrates the relationship of the key concepts that are covered in this study.

Figure 1:

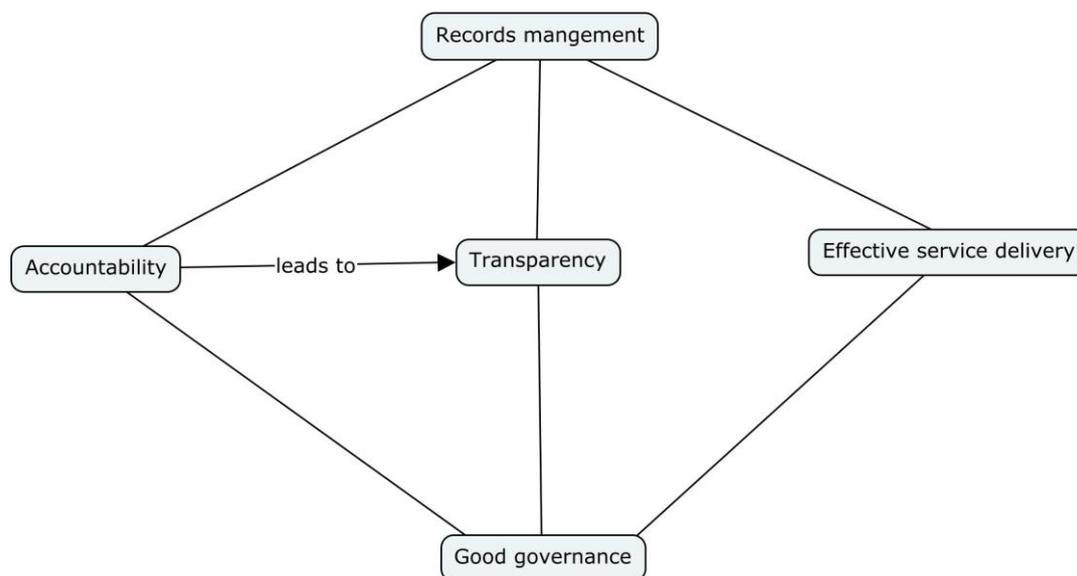


Figure 1 shows that accountability, transparency and service delivery are all aspects of good governance which can be attained through acceptable records management.

In ascertaining the status of records management in Zimbabwe's government departments, the study investigated into some of the fundamental aspects of records management. The issues covered pertain to records procedures manuals, disaster management plans, retention and disposal schedules, electronic records management, records management training and records inspections by the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ).

2. Historical background

With the coming of the colonial administration of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) in the 1890s, Zimbabwe moved from oral record keeping to formal record keeping in the form of written records (Tough and Lihoma, 2012, Tough, 2009). The colonial administration brought a starting point for the country's record keeping system which unfortunately was incompatible with the country's oral record keeping systems. The effects of this challenge have remained lingering in today's record keeping practices as witnessed by so many inadequacies that are seemingly inherent in most government departments. It is however crucial to acknowledge that at least the colonial rule provided a foundation on which Zimbabwe established a formal record keeping system that can be improved

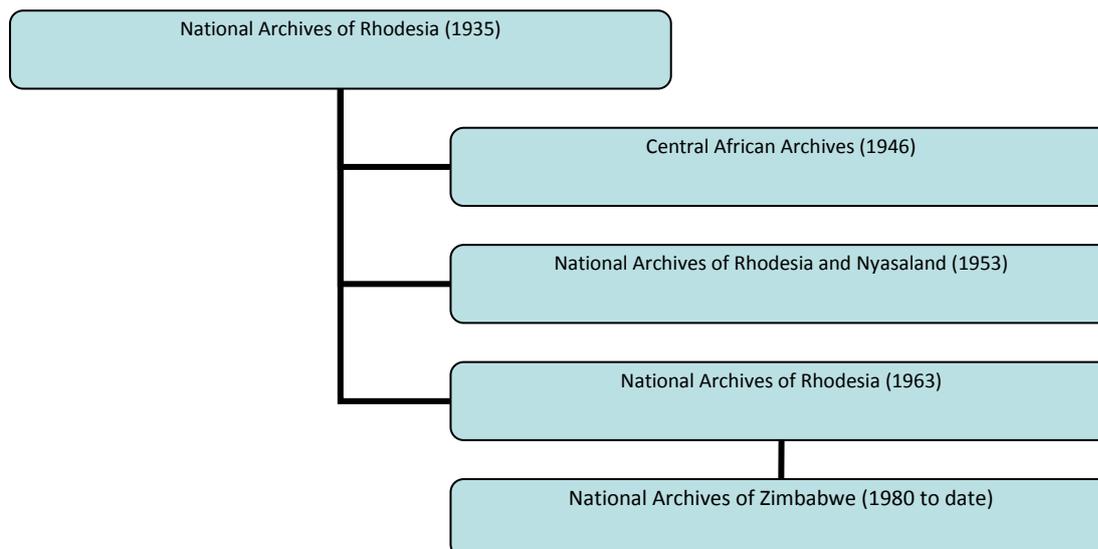
to support accountability, transparency and good governance in the country.

Record keeping in Zimbabwe (then known as Southern Rhodesia) during the colonial period was inadequate compared to that of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and Nyasaland (now Malawi). Public records were inappropriately managed and the records would accumulate to abnormal volumes in different offices. The main challenges were on filing, classification and disposal and the storage facilities were not conducive (Matangira, 2014). The inappropriate records management practices were mainly because Zimbabwe was under the BSAC rule and not a full British colony. As such, critical records to the country's history were sent to the board of directors in London and were never returned as they were considered a private property. Owing to the fact that the BSAC government created records that were meant to be eventually transferred to the Company's headquarters in London, a central registry system had to be designed. Today, the central registry system is the one that still characterizes Zimbabwe's government records management units.

With the establishment of the National Archives of Rhodesia in 1935, a record keeping survey was performed in government departments. The survey revealed poor records management in public offices leading to the issue of a circular in 1936 that forbade destroying government

records before they were inspected by a government archivist (Matangira, 2014, p. 6). The records that were not sent to London and remained in the country were not properly cared for and were haphazardly destroyed. To this effect, Zimbabwe lost some crucial part of its documentary heritage. The increased concern among the citizenry over the management of the nation's records resulted in a serious need for the government's intervention. Consequently a *Government Notice No. 356* of 15 July 1938 was issued to regulate the destruction and transfer of public records. Another major development was witnessed in 1946 when the Southern Rhodesian government archives took responsibility in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland to form what became to be known as the Central African Archives (Matangira, 2014). In 1953, three Southern African territories namely Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Nyasaland (Malawi) came together to form a federation that became to be known as the Central African Federation (CAF). The federation resulted in the Central African Archives changing its name to the National Archives of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and further renamed the National Archives of Rhodesia in 1963 after the federation had dissolved. The name changed to the National Archives of Zimbabwe in 1980 when the country attained independence. Figure 2 illustrates the historical development of the National Archives of Zimbabwe.

Figure 2: The historical development of the National Archives of Zimbabwe.



Record keeping in the colonial era was more focused on records that were no longer in use (Manungo, 2012, Matangira, 2014, Ngulube, 2012). Dube (2011) argues that the National Archives of Zimbabwe's focus on non-current records did not change up to the time of independence. The practice continued for a long period and unfortunately left a mark which the National Archives of Zimbabwe is struggling to erase as the majority of the populace perceives the national archives as a place where old and dusty government records are kept (Ngoepe and Ngulube, 2011). This study seeks to establish the status quo regarding the management of Zimbabwe's government records with the view of establishing how the issues of accountability, transparency, effective service delivery and good governance are promoted and or downplayed.

3. Problem statement

Owing to the country's economic downturn and inadequate financial resources, public records management in Zimbabwe is given a very low priority. The records management unit personnel are not motivated to do their work as they are not treated as key resource persons and they usually find themselves at

the periphery of their organization's plans. That has resulted in the prevalence of poor records management practices in Zimbabwe's government departments thereby leading to haphazard destruction, misplacement, loss and deterioration of records. It has also led to delays and even failure by members of the public to access government services. This has since become a common challenge among the citizenry who have to endure long and winding queues. When an institution is doing well, people hardly recognize the need and importance of appropriate records management practices. It is only after mismanagement and corrupt actions have been detected that people tend to realize the need for proper records management practices in their organizations.

4. Literature review: the influence of records management on accountability, good governance, transparency and effective public service delivery

As demonstrated in Figure 1, the issues of accountability, transparency, effective service delivery and good governance are mutually dependent. For instance, where

accountability is lacking, it will not be possible for good governance to prevail, transparency would be compromised while effective service delivery cannot be attained. The implication for this relationship is that the achievement of one aspect leads to the attainment of the other, while failure to achieve a single aspect hinders the attainment of the other aspects. The prevalence of effective public service delivery and or good governance may not be claimed where there is no transparency and accountability. As such, this section provides a discourse on the place of records management in attaining those interlinked aspects of accountability, transparency, effective service delivery and good governance.

Support to records management practices in Zimbabwe is continuously dwindling due to the harsh economic conditions that are prevailing in the country and the stiff competition for resources from other government operations (Chaterera et al., 2014, Mazikana, 2009). Priority for resources is usually given to those departments that are able to adequately demonstrate their contribution to the socio, economic and political transformation of a people. One of the ways in which records management can assume responsibility and relevance in national development is through emphasising its position in enhancing the issues of accountability, transparency, good governance and effective service delivery. To this effect, Mazikana (2009) and Anderson (2015) argue that records managers and archivists have failed to make a connection between records management and critical societal needs such as poverty eradication, infrastructural development and environmental protection. It is still not clear how records management feeds into good governance and the overall development of a nation. In this regard, records management has suffered the

consequences of irrelevancy by being placed at the periphery of the planning process.

Many opportunities to improve records management in Zimbabwe were missed due to the failure by the information management professionals to establish and demonstrate a clear link between records management and public service reforms. Zimbabwe is currently pursuing an economic agenda dubbed the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET) (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013). It is vital for the information management professionals in the country to be able to communicate and make known their potential contribution in making ZIM-ASSET a success, yet they seem distant to the ongoing endeavour. The starting point would be to make authorities and the larger populace appreciate the fact that public service initiatives thrive on sound records management and archival administration systems (Mazikana, 2009). Government actions, initiatives, programmes, decisions and policies can only be meaningful if they are informed by certain information and that information is held in records. Through recorded information on past decisions, actions and programmes, a government is able to understand an existing situation, perpetuate successful strategies while learning from the previous mistakes, hence the need for appropriate records management in government departments.

Government officers rely on information that is accurate, reliable and timely for them to be able to make informed and viable decisions. Reform programmes have failed to realise their goals of chief amongst them to improve the lives of a people because records management was not made an integral component of the whole process. This is mainly because of the archivists' failure to get themselves involved at the beginning of several reform programmes that have been rolled out in the country. To

try and jump into the process when the ball is already rolling becomes very difficult as the other players are bound to feel that you are imposing yourselves (Mazikana, 2009).

The ability by members of the public to access government information is critical in supporting the social, economic and political development of a people. It also enables the public to engage in government's programmes and activities in transparent and equitable ways (Ngulube, 2010). As such, it is worth reiterating that the need for sound records management practices is indispensable to the functions of a government, yet the aspect has been pushed to the periphery of planning and the margins of support. The fiscal position of a country owes its accuracy and authenticity to good records management practices. Only records, be they paper or electronic are able to prove the financial transactions that transpired in a given period (Mazikana, 2009). Without reliable and authentic records to prove and verify entries of financial transactions, it becomes difficult to detect fraudulent acts. Nevertheless, Mazikana (2009) indicated that most Integrated Financial Management Information Systems (IFMIS) in Zimbabwe were done without the involvement of records management experts and the entire aspect of records management was hardly called into play. Proper records management is one of the pillars to establishing good corporate governance. A major challenge that is being experienced is that records management is not perceived as a significant component of corporate governance. As a result, records management has become a forgotten function without a role in government administration. A related study that was done in South Africa by Ngoepe and Ngulube (2013) found that records managers are not even a part of such crucial governmental committees as the internal audit.

Another critical area that requires good records management is the human resource information systems of a country. Owing to the poor records management practices in Zimbabwe's human resource information systems, the country has lost so much money through the paying of 'civil servants' who are nonexistent. Several reports have been in the newspapers with the most recent article of the 20th of March 2016 indicating that "there are 75 273 ghost workers, 17 088 servants whose designations do not appear and about 1 315 civil servants who are working without designations (WeekendPost, 2016). To this effect, Dewah and Ndlovu (2013) asserted that it is impossible to eliminate ghost workers from the payroll unless it is possible to establish an authoritative list of staff; hence the need for proper records management practices to foster such democratic values of transparency, accountability and good governance. This awkward situation of chaotic, unreliable and incomplete personal files owes its existence to the non involvement of records professionals in human resource information systems (Mazikana, 2009).

The issues of trust, accountability and improved service delivery can only be attained if government records are properly managed and accessible to members of the public (Ngulube, 2010). In his work on lost opportunity to foster e-democracy and service delivery in sub-Saharan Africa, Ngulube (2010) asserts that;

Good governance and accountability are fostered by well-managed records and information systems. Records management empowers citizens to hold government accountable and responsive by ensuring the integrity and availability of government-held information.

A study conducted in Zimbabwe by Mazikana (2009) confirms that most officers are not concerned with what goes on in the records management units until a key

document goes missing. The case of inappropriate records management is not only found in Zimbabwe. Ngulube and Tafor (2006) revealed that many countries in the sub-Saharan Africa have been reported to have poor records keeping systems thereby hindering the possibility of establishing good electronic records management systems.

In Botswana, Chebani (2005), Keakopa (2006), Kenosi (2011) and Tshotlo and Mnjama (2010) revealed poor records storage conditions, lack of retention and disposal schedules, policies and records procedures manuals as well as shortage of personnel trained in records management. A similar study was conducted by Kerapetse and Keakopa (2012) who revealed that proper recordkeeping is not regarded as important in fighting corruption in Botswana. In this respect, Keorapetse and Keakopa (2012) urged governments to recognize and support records management in all public departments indicating that records and information play a critical role in fighting corruption, protecting citizens' rights, fostering transparency, accountability and good governance. A related study was done by Johnson and Hampson (2015) who discovered some serious discrepancies between data disclosures from some Police forces in the United Kingdom. Following the results of their study, Johnson and Hampson (2015) reiterated that openness, transparency, trust and accountability in the public sector is threatened by poor records management practices.

Poor records keeping in Kenya's public service has also been reported in studies conducted by Mnjama (2005) and Nasieku et al. (2011). A similar situation of inappropriate records management in the public sector was also observed in Namibia (Nengomasha, 2013). In South Africa, Chinyemba (2011) revealed that many universities experience records keeping problems while Ngoepe (2013) found that

poor records keeping was the reason why audit reports were inaccurate and incomplete. A further study was done by Ngoepe and Makhubela (2015) who revealed that some cases were withdrawn as a result of missing dockets. To this effect, Ngoepe and Makhubela (2015) underscored that records management plays a significant role in supporting the justice system as they provide evidence in the court of law. They also argued that without reliable and authentic records, citizens are delayed and or denied justice. Inappropriate records management practices were also reported in Swaziland in studies conducted by Tsabedze et al. (2012). In Tanzania, Ndenje-Sichalwe (2011a) revealed that records in the government ministries were not well managed. In this regard, Nengomasha (2013) highlights that the profession needs to do a self-evaluation and come up with practical measures to break this "curse" of persistent poor records keeping.

The government of Zimbabwe is beginning to do business electronically so as to improve service delivery (Chaterera, 2012). Measures and ways to appropriately manage the records generated in the electronic environment are yet to be established. Mazikana (2009) noted that archivists and records managers are not fully involved in managing the electronic records because of limited expertise and knowledge in the area. In South Africa, the national archival system that is charged with the responsibility of managing public records doesn't have the capacity to manage digital records (Katuu, 2015b). Similarly, Anderson (2015) laments the challenges posed by information technologies in records management citing the lack of relevant competence to create information and concept models in order to secure the quality in the information structures as one of the major challenges.

5. Methodology

A qualitative approach that used a methodological triangulation of interviews, content analysis questionnaires was used to gather data for the study. The questionnaires were distributed to head of records management units in Zimbabwe's thirty two government ministries. Face to face interviews were conducted with a total of seven archivists and three records management assistants drawn from the six National Archives of Zimbabwe's Records Centres namely Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru, Masvingo, Chinhoyi and Mutare Records Centres. The interviews were also done with three former NAZ archivists. The total research population therefore stood at 45: 32 head of records management units, 7 current archivists, 3 records management

assistants and 3 former archivists. The study also performed a content analysis of the records survey reports that were produced by NAZ after conducting records and information management surveys in the public registries.

6. Findings

A total of 32 questionnaires were sent to 32 government departments for completion by head of records management units and or registries. The response rate for the questionnaires was 72%, thus 23 out of 32 questionnaires were completed and returned. A total of 13 interviews were held with NAZ's current and former archivists as well as records management assistants as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Interviewees

Name of records centre	Number of archivists interviewed	Number of records management assistants interviewed	Total number of interviewees at a records centre
Gweru Records Centre	1	1	2
Bulawayo Records Centre	1	1	2
Mutare Records Centre	1	-	1
Head Office Records Centre-Harare	2	-	2
Masvingo Records Centre	1	-	1
Chinhoyi Records Centre	1	1	2
Total number of current NAZ personnel interviewed			10
Former NAZ archivists interviewed			3
Total number of interviewees			13

6.1 Records surveys

In recognition of the role played by NAZ's records surveys to foster good record keeping in public institutions; this study sought to establish if government

departments knew the existence of NAZ and if they were visited for record keeping inspections. All the 23 (100%) departments that completed the questionnaire indicated to have knowledge on the existence of NAZ. The interviews that were held with NAZ personnel and the content analysis of the information categories in the records

survey worksheet showed that NAZ records surveys examined records management activities such as records maintenance and use, records disposition, creating retention and disposal schedules, preparing disaster management plans, housekeeping practices and records security.

However, 3 (13%) of these government departments cited that they had never been visited by NAZ officials for record keeping inspections for as long as they have been working for their respective institutions. The interviews held with archivists revealed that record keeping inspections were actually done in these three departments that claimed to have never seen NAZ officials in their offices. Condition survey reports were available at NAZ to prove that the surveys were indeed performed. The explanation provided by the interviewees in this matter was that there is a seemingly high rate of staff turnover in some government departments and the hand over take over process is not done properly. As a result, the new officers usually fail to locate the records survey reports produced for their department(s) leading them to assume that a records survey by NAZ was never performed in their offices.

It is however crucial to also indicate that the records survey reports showed that NAZ had last visited one of the three government departments in question nine years ago, yet their legislation requires that they perform these surveys once in every four years. Of the 20 (87%) departments that indicated to have been visited by NAZ for a record keeping inspection, only 3 (15%) responded that they were able to implement the given recommendations. Out of the remaining 17 ministries, 10 (50%) indicated that they did not manage to implement the recommendations while the other 7 (35%) replied they partly managed to effect some changes. The reasons indicated for partial and non compliance to the given recommendations included financial

constraints, lack of top management support, shortage of manpower and lack of skilled personnel.

6.2 Electronic records management

Amongst the objectives of this study was to establish if government departments created electronic records and how they were managing the records. All the 23 departments that responded to the questionnaire indicated that they created and kept electronic records. Of the 20 departments that had indicated that NAZ once visited their offices for record keeping inspections, only 2 (10%) indicated that they received advice on electronic record keeping during the records and information management surveys that are performed by NAZ. The response of these 2 (10%) departments was contrary to the data that was yielded through the content analysis of the records survey reports and the responses that were supplied by NAZ's records managers and archivists during the interviews. The content analysis of the information categories that are found in a records survey worksheet that is used by NAZ to conduct the surveys is silent on the aspect of electronic records. The interviewed archivists and records management assistants from the Zimbabwe's National Archives Records Centres confirmed the content analysis results by indicating that they do not necessarily offer guidance on electronic record keeping unless on very small issues which they can handle. To this effect, the interviewees cited that they have not received training on how to manage records that are generated in the electronic environment. The interviewed archivists and records management assistants further indicated that the National Archives of Zimbabwe Act Chapter 309 (1986) sections six and seven under which records surveys are done do not mention anything regarding the management of electronic records.

6.3 Records management training in public records management units

On issues of training, data gathered from the questionnaires revealed that 13 out of 23 (57%) heads of public records management units were holders of national certificates. Those who indicated to be in possession of either a national diploma or higher national diploma in records management were 9 out of 23 (39%) while those with an honours degree qualification in records management recorded the least response of 1 (4%). Using the spaces provided in the questionnaires to add any relevant comments pertaining record keeping in their respective departments, the public registry personnel revealed that they are not motivated to pursue further studies in records management as they are only paid up to the national diploma level.

Despite the indications from the questionnaires showing that there was at least a national certificate holder in records management within Zimbabwe's public records management units, the interviewed NAZ personnel revealed that the bulk of records management personnel were people who had only completed ordinary or advanced level. In the words of one interviewee;

"Most registry personnel in public registries do not have formal training in records management. They are people who were once office orderlies, messengers, receptionists...."

6.4 Retention schedules, procedures manuals and disaster management planning

The availability of a retention and disposal schedule is one of the indicators that points to a possible prevalence of proper records management system in a particular record keeping office. As such, this study sought to

establish if government ministries in Zimbabwe had systematic procedures of identifying records that are due for disposal and those that should be retained and or transferred to NAZ Records Centre. Only 6 (26%) out of the 23 Zimbabwe's government departments that returned the questionnaires indicated that they had records retention and disposal schedules. The remaining 17 (74%) responded that they did not have retention and disposal schedules. Data yielded from the interviews conducted with NAZ personnel and the content analysis of records survey reports showed that most government departments were congested with semi and non-current records kept in corridors and on the floor in offices.

Another key indicator of an organized record keeping system in a records management unit is the existence of a registry procedures manual. 8 (35%) out of the 23 surveyed departments indicated that they had registry procedures manuals in place. Of the remaining 15 departments, 12 (52%) indicated that they did not have a registry procedures manual. 3 (13%) did not respond to the question leading the investigator to assume that they also did not have the registry procedures manual in place.

The focus of the study also included ascertaining if governments had measures in place to protect records from both human and natural disasters. The questionnaire responses revealed that only 6 (26%) of the surveyed ministries had disaster management plans while the remaining 17 (74%) indicated that they did not have the important document in place. The components covered in the disaster management plans of the six departments that indicated the availability of the document were mainly limited to the environmental threats.

been conducted. This points to some of the weaknesses of the Zimbabwe's archival legislation. It barely gives the institution authority over the management of the country's public records. As a result, the people are being robbed of potential documentary heritage and a chance to understand the government operations as records management practices in most public offices are pathetic. There are no penalties for those departments that fail to comply with acceptable public records management practices and because of the ever dwindling resources, follow ups are rarely done by NAZ to ensure the implementation of the given recommendations. That has resulted in a very high rate of non compliance to the recommendations that are provided by NAZ. The failure by public registries to implement records management advice given by NAZ during surveys entails that records in public institutions are poorly managed, hence compromising public service delivery, accountability and transparency.

7.2 Electronic records management

In efforts to achieve good governance and improve service delivery, most government departments have adopted the use of information technologies. This has dramatically altered the creation, storage, transmission, preservation and disposal of records. It has virtually changed the way government conducts business and interacts with people (Brown et al., 2009, Loh et al., 2007, Marutha and Ngulube, 2012, Nengomasha, 2009, Wamukoya and Mutula, 2005). In Zimbabwe, it is the mandate of the National Archives of Zimbabwe to ensure that records created in public institutions are properly managed from the time they are created until their ultimate disposition. The Zimbabwe's archival legislation however does not explicitly address the issue of electronic records management. A study

conducted by Bhebhe (2015) revealed that the electronic national heritage of Zimbabwe is being lost mainly due to the archaic legislation which is silent on the management of electronic records. Ndenje-Sichalwe (2011b) indicates that the legal framework(s) governing the management of archives should have explicit provisions for electronic records that define how to handle electronic records on issues such as creation, accessibility and disposal.

The failure by NAZ to provide guidance in the management of electronic records generated in public offices implies that electronic records held in public registries are not managed effectively. This directly compromises the attainment of good governance, transparency and effective service delivery. Electronic records containing vital evidence are not protected against falsification, malicious alteration and loss. It should be appreciated that records held in electronic format are similar to traditional paper records because they also support and document the services that governments provide in their everyday business. The rapid penetration of information technologies is making digital records the basis for validating several connections between the government and the people on issues such as pensions, land claims, citizenship, voting rights, tax collection, audits and evaluations, and many other activities involving the transfer of information.

The lack of professional guidance to government departments on managing electronic records meant that Zimbabwe's government electronic records were at risk of misuse, unauthorised alteration and deletion amongst other consequences. It also implies that the government is in danger of wasting resources and funds on activities that can hardly be traced. The need to support electronic government initiatives by a sound records management programme should not be over-emphasised; hence the

need for NAZ to examine electronic records when they conduct records surveys. Several commentators highlight that the need for records surveys to cover electronic records is an important matter which information management professionals must seriously consider (Goh et al., 2009, Katuu, 2000, Mloi and Mutula, 2007, Mutiti, 2001, Wamukoya, 2000). Electronic records management has been a thorny issue for both the records manager in government office and the national archivist. The use of computers in an organisations' everyday business has become the order of the day, yet the management of the records generated in the electronic environment has hardly been addressed. The information technology specialists are only concerned with making sure that the machine and the system are working properly. The same applies to archivists and records managers as they also concentrate on creating records and building databases without making an effort to acquire even the basic records management software (Mazikana, 2009).

7.3 Records management training in public records management units

Katuu (2009) observed that the quality of a records management programme is directly related to the amount of training received by the personnel that operates it. The presence of at least a holder of a national certificate in records management within most public registries implies that there is an acceptable level of records management in government departments. Kemoni (2007) notes that appropriate records management is dependent upon registry staff receiving education and training in records management. In the same vein, Katuu (2015a), indicate that education, knowledge and skill are an essential element in the continuing development of sound records management practices. The relatively high response indicating national certificate holders in public registries might have been

a result of several institutions that are now offering records management training in Zimbabwe. These institutions include the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), Midlands State University (MSU), Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU), Great Zimbabwe University, Gweru; Harare and Kwekwe Poly-Technical Colleges. The increasing number of tertiary institutions that are now offering records management courses reflects the beginning of a new era in Zimbabwe, where records management is given the professional recognition it deserves. As such, it is envisaged that future research on records management in Zimbabwe will yield positive results.

7.4 Retention schedules, procedures manuals and disaster management planning

The value of a record and the information contained in it can only be appreciated and understood if it is reliable, accessible and usable. The need to appropriately manage public sector records throughout their life cycle is essential. Well prepared retention and disposal schedules provide the basis on which an office can determine how long they should retain their records and when to dispose them (Ngulube and Tafor, 2006). The low response on the availability of the retention and disposal schedules in public registries implies that disposition is rarely practised and when it is done, it would be mostly on an ad-hock basis. Ngulube and Tafor (2006) indicated that where disposal schedules are not available, registries tend to dump records in whatever space available thereby congesting offices. The absence of a retention and disposal schedule in Zimbabwe's public registries implies that important public records are at risk of being destroyed prematurely while ephemeral records are retained longer than necessary. Consequently, members of the public may fail to get the services they need due to missing records and transparency in

government's operations is threatened. The absence of retention and disposal schedules in most government departments reflects poor management of the current and semi current records held in Zimbabwe's public departments.

The records procedures manual enables information management professionals to adopt consistent and coherent strategies in creating, maintaining, protecting and disposing of records. The manual forms the basis for efficient and improved access to government records by members of the public as it guides the operations in the registry (Loh et al., 2007). A registry manual provides registry personnel with guidelines that define departmental records management procedures thereby serving as a model for establishing acceptable and sound records management practices. The National Archives of Scotland (2003) observed that a registry procedures manual should be developed to ensure that records are properly managed through-out their life cycle. The low response obtained by the current study on the availability of registry manuals implied that the registry personnel lacked the necessary guidelines to manage their records. Kemoni (2007) indicated that the lack of records procedures manual compromises the ability of action officers to access and use the records. The low response on the availability of a records procedures manual in Zimbabwe's government ministries is therefore a disturbing indication as the registry manual is critical to the success of registry operations without which service delivery would be threatened.

Records constitute the memory of every government. As such, no government can effectively function without a sound records management system. Access and use of records in any format enable government departments to make informed decisions, it improves legal compliance and accountability (Loh et al., 2007).

Recognising the vital importance of records, it is crucial that public registries be in a position to protect records from both human and natural disasters. A disaster management plan enables efficient, quick and informed response to a crisis. A disaster preparedness plan is crucial to ensuring adequate protection of documentary heritage so that it survives into the future. The lack of a disaster management plan in most of Zimbabwe's public records management units implies that the government records are prone to destruction and absolute loss.

Ndenje-Sichalwe (2011b) noted that preparing how to handle a disaster before it occurs is vital to the preservation and protection of records and archives. It may not be possible to recover items lost in a disaster. To that effect, it is essential that there be arrangements in place to mitigate the consequences of a disaster. Records and archives are prone to a variety of disasters which include but not restricted to pests, floods, explosions, data failure due to viruses, thievery, rodents, mould, humidity, power outages and bomb threats. That means protection of records should not be limited to environmental or natural threats as was the case with the disaster management plans in the six departments that indicated the availability of the crucial document.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

Sound records management practices in public institutions are essential in enhancing service delivery and supporting transparency and accountability. Zimbabwe's road to accountability, good governance, transparency and effective service delivery seem to be blocked as appropriate records management practices are not prevailing in most government departments. That was evidenced by the lack of the fundamental records management requirements such as

the records procedures manual, retention and disposal schedules, disaster management plans. The lack of informed electronic records management in Zimbabwe's government departments is a major cause for concern that certainly creates a barrier towards attaining transparency and effective public service delivery. The effective management of both paper and electronic records will help departments to comply with the legislative and regulatory requirements, protects the rights and interests of citizens, invalidate accusations and it leads to efficient and effective service delivery.

The first area that has to be reviewed and revised in the public sector is the archival legislation. NAZ Act of 1986 should clearly spell out the need by NAZ to include electronic records during records and information management surveys. That will help ensure complete protection for all government records regardless of their format. The study established that some government departments are reluctant to implement the recommendations provided by NAZ because there no penalties for non compliance to NAZ advice. It is therefore recommended that archival authority be equipped with the legal powers and the necessary resources needed to ensure that all public registries have sound records management systems in place. The national archives personnel should continue to professionally grow so that they remain competent and be in a position to ensure proper records management standards prevail in public records management units (Katu, 2016, Ngulube, 2001). Ultimately, effective management of records generated in public institutions should not be a choice, but rather a legal requirement.

The top management in government ministries must prioritize records management by making available sufficient funds to enable the records management units to perform their functions properly.

Ideally, each records management unit in an agency must be allocated its budget. The records created in public institutions during the daily activities need effective management to support service delivery; uphold the rights of citizens and to provide meaningful and accurate information for research and study (Loh et al., 2007). For that noble obligation to be achieved there has to be adequate financial support to execute acceptable records management practices.

Public records management units are encouraged to create disaster management plans, records procedures manual and records retention and disposal schedules as these are basic requirements for a good records management system. Mnjama (1996) noted that the presence of a registry manual is vital to the success of registry operations. It is therefore crucial that registries be in possession of a well defined document that clearly articulates their responsibilities. That is certainly one of the ways of cultivating sound records management practices which subsequently lead to effective service delivery. With the help of a registry procedures manual in public registries, it becomes relatively easy for government departments to make records available to the right person, at the right time and at the least possible cost (National Archives of Scotland, 2003).

Finally, the challenges of managing electronic records in Zimbabwe are immense. For this reason a multi-year research project titled "Enterprise digital records management in Zimbabwe (AF03)" is investigating the implementation of enterprise content management systems within the public sector (InterPARES Trust, 2016). It is under the auspices of the InterPARES Trust research project and aims to develop a policy framework that would guide the management of trustworthy electronic records. Ultimately this should assist records professionals in the country to

address the challenges of managing records in the current digital age.

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