Utilisation of ICTs by SMEs in records and information management in Uganda: a baseline study

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Abstract
Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), in virtually all countries, play a key role in national economic development strategies by facilitating flows of information, capital, ideas, people and products. Equally, the potential benefits of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are well known. ICTs enhance SME efficiency, reduce costs, and broaden market reach, both locally and globally. Based on this understanding, a study was designed to examine the utilisation of ICTs by SMEs for records and information management in Uganda. A baseline study was carried out in Tororo district in eastern Uganda before a full scale study is conducted to determine the ICTs knowledge and skills of the SMEs managers and ICTs used for managing records and information in Uganda. Secondly the study sought to determine the level to which different ICTs are useful to the SMEs in management of records and information and assess in particular e-mail records management among the SMEs. The study elicited data using the questionnaire and a follow up interview to validate or clarify on emerging issues. The findings of the study indicate that the SMEs managers lack skills in most of the ICTs and their applications in records and information management. The study concludes that there is a need to sensitize and train SMEs managers in ICTs application in records and information management. This is imperative because SMEs are pillars of economic growth.
Keywords: Records and information management, Small and medium enterprises, ICTs utilisation, E-mail management

1 Background

Uganda's economy has great potential for growth and development. Endowed with significant natural resources, including ample fertile land, regular rainfall, and mineral deposits, it appeared poised for rapid economic growth and development at the time of political independence in the early 1960's. However, chronic political instability and erratic economic mismanagement produced a record of persistent economic decline that left Uganda among the world's poorest and least-developed countries (United States, Bureau of African Affairs 2007). As a strategy to revive the non-functional economy, the Government of Uganda has been implementing an ambitious and successful programme of macro-economic adjustment and structural reform since 1987 – with strong support from multilateral and bilateral creditors and donors (Okello-Obura, Minishi-Majanja, Cloete & Ikoja-Odonzo 2007, 2009).

The continued implementation of appropriate fiscal and monetary policies by the Uganda Government – and its programme of substantial economic liberalisation – has maintained high growth, low inflation, a steadily improving balance of payments and an increasingly vibrant and diversified private sector (Uganda Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development 2008). During the 2003/04 financial year, Uganda's economy registered strong growth of 6 % compared to a growth rate of 5.2 % in 2002/03 (Central Intelligence Agency 2004). Solid growth in 2003 reflected an upturn in Uganda's export markets. In 2007, Uganda's growth rate reached 8.9% (Uganda, Ministry of Finance,

Planning and Economic Development 2008). According to the Uganda Budget 2011/12, despite the slow recovery in the global economy and increasing domestic prices, economic activity remained robust during the past year. The total National Output of goods and services, commonly referred to as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rebounded, growing at 6.3 per cent during the year 2010/2011, compared to 5.5 percent in Financial Year 2009/10. Consequently, National Output is projected to total Shs 38,800 billion, an increase from Shs 34,810 billion in the Financial Year 2009/10.

The rebound in economic activity is largely attributed to the recovery in construction and increased trade activities (Kiwanuka 2011). These developments have created a vibrant private sector and active government departments. Key in the development terrain in Uganda is the Small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Although Beyene (2002), Mutula and Van Brakel (2006) argue that there is no universally accepted definition for small- and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) in Africa, this study adopts the government of Uganda's classification of SMEs as business firms employing 5-50 people (small scale) and 51-500 people (medium scale) (Kasekende & Opondo 2003; Schiffer & Weder 2001:13; Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2003). It is estimated that SMEs in Uganda constitute 90 percent of the private sector, with 80 percent being located in urban areas and, are largely involved in trade, agro-processing, and small manufacturing (Hategа 2007), SMEs contribute approximately 75 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and employ approximately 2.5 million people, signifying their importance in the economic development of Uganda (Okello-Obura, Minishi-Majanja, Cloete & Ikoja-Odonzo 2008). Ultimately there are a lot of business documents being generated by SMEs today than ever before. This therefore calls for efficient and effective records management. Accurate and reliable records form the documentary evidence needed to provide a foundation for all decision and development strategies for any organization or enterprise. The loss of control of those records and information systems, particularly in electronic environments, is a highly significant challenge to enterprises (Wamukoya & Mutula 2005). In the electronic age, sound records management systems are critical so as to be accountable and transparent as well as to improve services to customers (Wamukoya & Mutula 2005). Well-managed e-records systems provide a strong foundation for enhancing accountability, transparency, democratic governance, poverty eradication, elimination of corruption, and efficient use of donor-funded resources (IRMT 2003). Efficient and effective records management by induction requires the adoption of ICTs utilization by the SMEs. It is on this note that the cornerstone of this study lies on the adoption of ICTs SMEs for records and information management.

2 Statement of the problem

Today's intense competition requires that business firms excel simultaneously in several areas without trade-off, including innovativeness and responsiveness to their customers. Rise in global competition has compelled the business enterprises to increase performance standards in many dimensions such as decision making, quality, cost, productivity, product introduction time, and smooth flowing operations (Singh, Garg & Deshmukh 2010). The contribution of SMEs to employment and the countries' gross domestic product (GDP) are by no means trivial (UNDP 2007). Equally, the potential benefits of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to small- and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) are well known. ICTs enhance SME efficiency, reduce costs, and broaden market reach, both locally and globally. Despite the recognized fact that efficient records and information management is crucial for efficient decision making (Hase & Galt 2011) and that ICTs play significant role in the

management processes of records and information, little seems to be done to adopt ICTs applications among the SMEs especially for records and information management. Records and information management is not being given the attention it requires in the transition to the electronic environment among many enterprises. "In too many cases, ICT systems are introduced without the essential processes and controls for the capture, long-term safeguarding and accessibility of electronic records" (IRMT 2009). Organisations or enterprises need to act to ensure that ICT systems provide trusted information that is reliable, complete, unaltered and useable. "This requires records management solutions to be integrated in ICT systems during their planning and design, rather than be added on during or after implementation" (IRMT 2009). It is against this background that this study therefore investigates the ICTs utilisation in records and information management by the SMEs in Tororo district.

3 Objectives of the study

The study sought to establish the extent to which SMEs have adopted ICTs applications in records and information management. The specific objectives of the study were:

- To establish the ICTs used in records and information management by SMEs
- To determine specifically how e-mail records and information are managed by the SMEs
- To propose strategic measures to improve on application of ICTs in records and information management by the SMEs

4 Literature review

It should be noted that the SME, in virtually all countries, plays a key role in national economic development strategies by facilitating flows of information, capital, ideas, people and products. The contributions of SMEs to employment and the countries' gross domestic product (GDP) are by no means trivial (UNDP 2007). Equally, the potential benefits of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are well known. ICTs enhance SME efficiency, reduce costs, and broaden market reach, both locally and globally. Since the SME plays a major role in national economies, these benefits to individual SMEs collectively translate into positive results in the form of job creation, revenue generation and overall country competitiveness (UNDP 2007). The application of these ICTs in records and information management as well is pertinent in the efficient functioning of SMEs. In reality, Governments, therefore, should have interest in the promotion of access to, and use of, ICTs by SMEs especially in management of records and information. Unfortunately, a number of factors hinder or discourage SMEs from fully realizing the benefits of ICTs, including, among others, lack of knowledge, resources and trust. Governments, using public policy as a tool, can play a critical role in addressing these concerns. Lack of ICT skills and business skills are widespread impediments to effective uptake once adoption decisions are made. There should be policy considerations that focus on issues related to a healthy business environment, network infrastructure and broadband deployment, human capital and skills development among SMEs, access to information, good e-governance, and public-private-civil society partnerships (UNDP 2007). Generally, the ability for ICTs to rapidly respond to a litigation and investigation pertaining to the firm cannot be doubted any more. SMEs need to comprehensively adopt ICTs applications in business transactions, records and information management for efficient operations. In the adoption of ICTs, business enterprises should ensure that there are ICTs or e-records policies

in place. In support of the policies, IRMT (2009) observes that "records management in ICT systems must be governed by the same organizational policies and accountabilities as records management in all other forms, including paper filing systems and records created and held by office systems (email, correspondence, memoranda, reports, spreadsheets, etc)". The good policies or policy statements can be used for an enterprise assessment of the legal, policy and accountability framework that supports all forms of records management and business operations. As IRMT (2009) notes the adoption of ICTs in whatever form or category should considers what the system must do to support the creation, organisation, use, retention and final disposition of records. The sub-categories that are important when adopting ICTs to support records and information management include: creating and capturing records; managing and maintaining records; managing hybrid records; searching, accessing and retrieving records and retaining and disposing of records (IRMT 2009). All in all, the ICTs adoption by SMEs in records and information management creates a better and efficient means of operation not only in faster decision making but the customers' satisfaction.

4.1 The e-mail communication: a factor in records and information management among the SMEs

An electronic mail message or "e-mail" consists of a digitally stored message and any attached digital documents transferred between computer users. Because of the high speed of adoption of e-mail communication in business operations today, this study found it prudent to specifically give attention to it. Business enterprises can use e-mail for a variety of tasks such as sending and receiving internal and external correspondence, distributing memos, circulating drafts, disseminating directives, transferring official documents, and supporting various business processes of the enterprise. The sheer volume of incoming and outgoing e-mail is often a challenge to those entrusted with the duty to manage records and information of the enterprise. ARMA (2011) agrees to this by observing that E-mail continues to challenge organizations. "With the growth of e-mail, voice-mail, and instant messaging – as well as other electronic records – the capacity for discoverable information has increased" (ARMA 2011). This dilemma will continue to escalate as the proliferation of e-mail-enabled devices grows exponentially. According to research analysts, in the year 2000, e-mail volume reached 9.7 billion per day worldwide, and has been increasing at a rate of approximately 19%, reaching a volume of 16.2 billion e-mail messages in 2002 (Winkler 2004; TOWER Software North America 2004). Wireless cards in laptops, Blackberry devices, smart phones and other PDAs are moving into the hands of mobile knowledge workers at an accelerating pace and are being used to keep on top of business issues 24/hours and 7 days while away from the office. But e-mail is only the first wave in facilitating business in a distributed environment. New communication platforms are being adopted across public and private-sector organizations at an increasing rate. Instant messaging, on-line collaboration and threaded discussions, access to corporate portals and intranets from mobile devices are the technology shifts we see today. The end result is that all email systems create records and the challenge at hand is that there is a danger that important enterprise records may be lost if they are not properly managed. The capture and registration of business email records in the enterprise's official record management system is crucial to the business enterprise's accountability and future decision-making process (IRMT 2009; Department of Culture and the Arts, State Records Office of the Western Australia, 2009).

E-mail continues to be an area of weakness for many business enterprises. Although it is noted that E-mail is not a new communication platform, the compliance culture (and

recognition that e-mails can have legal standing as records) in today's business is putting increased pressure on enterprise staff to ensure that appropriate capture, control and disposal rules are reviewed. IRMT (2009) notes that just like physical records, electronic records need to be managed consistently. "Effective management includes: setting up classification structures (to aid in filing records), establishing retention and disposal rules (to determine how long to keep records and how to dispose of them), assigning access permissions or security rights (to clarify who may use records), determining whether a record is official (and so must be managed as part of a formal records management scheme) or transitory (and so should be removed from use as soon as it is no longer needed)" (IRMT 2009). Unfortunately with most enterprises even where they have structured approaches to the management of electronic office documents, e-mail often is ignored or left exclusively to the realm of Information Technology (IT) control with little regard to the need for professional management required from records management specialists. Organisations can face legal exposure, embarrassment and other forms of risk if e-mail is not managed according to context and content (Winkler 2004; TOWER Software North America 2004). Many IT departments, when left without guidance, will formulate disposition policies based purely on storage capacity or age of the message.

If it is an acceptable principle that records management systems provide total frameworks for capturing, maintaining and providing access to evidence of transactions over time, what then should the business enterprises do? The Department of Culture and the Arts, State Records Office of the Western Australia, (2009) and IRMT (2009) note that for email records to be maintained over time, a number of specific management requirements must be implemented to ensure the integrity and functionality of the record. Enterprises must ensure that policies and procedures are in place to control the creation, editing, capture, maintenance, storage and authorised disposal of business email records and information. It is important also to note that the management of e-mail records and information should not be done in isolation of other records and information within the enterprises. The challenges therefore, how can SMEs be supported to ensure that e-mail communication are not only adopted for efficient business transaction but the communication are well managed?

4.2 Goals for successful e-mail management

Enterprises need to develop unique procedures that meet specific operational and legal requirements and should bear in mind the following goals for an e-mail record. An e-mail record as observed by South Carolina Department of Archives & History (2005) should be:

- **Complete**. E-mail records should completely document the transaction. For example, you cannot save the text without the sender information. Complete e-mail records must include all of the following elements, as applicable: Recipient(s), Sender, Time sent, Text, Date sent, Subject lines should clearly describe the contents of the message (eg, the subject line "Supply" is inadequate. "Supply for Beans to Ministry of Education As in Minutes June 13, 20112011" provides a better description). Attachments should be included in full (not just indicated by file name). List members e-mailed using distribution lists. If an e-mail record simply lists the group name in the recipient field, the recipients must be identifiable. For example, the distribution list "FD" (a distribution list for all the members of the Finance Department) should be documented so that each member of the list is named. These are issues that managers sometimes take for granted when they are very key in contextualising e-mail records and information.

- **Accurate**. The contents of the e-mail record should accurately reflect the transaction.
- **Accessible**. Some e-mail records must be accessible to the public and some should not, depending on the content of the record and the policy of the enterprise. All e-mail records, like other electronic records, should be reasonably accessible for the purposes of legal discovery.
- **Manageable**. E-mail records should be easy for staff members to manage as part of the daily workflow and records management practices. Because staff members will implement and use the e-mail records management policy, procedures should be straightforward.
- **Secure**. The e-mail record should reside in a secure system that controls access, storage, retrieval, alteration, and deletion.

All these can be supported by comprehensive e-mail policy. E-mail policy should be established to guide users on questions of acceptable use, the management and retention of official copies, privacy, and access. As well, electronic records need to be organised in order to facilitate managing them as a group, rather than as discrete items (IRMT 2009). All users should understand these policies and be able to apply them. The components of an e-mail retention policy should include information on: acceptable use, access, privacy, staff roles and responsibilities, management and retention, filing and maintenance and document policy among others (South Carolina Department of Archives & History, 2005).

5 Methodology

The study used quantitative research approach in which questionnaire was used as the main data collection method and was structured into four main parts, namely: background information of the respondents; utilisation of ICTs by SMEs in records and information management; e-mail management among the SMEs and strategies to improve on ICTs application in records and information management among SMEs. Since there were no authoritative sources for the number of SMEs in Tororo District, snowball sampling strategy was applied. The research assistant who is a Bachelor of Library and Information Science graduate specialising in records and archives management was trained before data collection. Using snowball strategy to get the respondents, each SMEs manager would direct the research assistant to one after another until there were no more enterprises to be included. In order to validate the findings where necessary, respondents were interviewed/contacted using telephone. This was possible because all the respondents' details were already captured in the questionnaire under background information of the respondents and details on the number of employees. The number of employees given gave a check point to ensure that only those who qualify as SMEs as per the government of Uganda's definition were included. Data were analysed using Excel computer program to generate frequencies, percentages and graphs. A total of 61 SMEs were identified. Out of the 61, only 42 (69%) participated in the study. Other SMEs declined despite assurance that the findings of the study would be used only for academic purposes but not for taxation purposes.

6 Findings and discussions

This section reports on the findings and discusses the emerging issues.

6.1 Background Information

Of the 61 SMEs identified to participate in the district, 42 (69%) participated in the study. The 42 SMEs who participated employ 332 (64%) male and 185 (36%) female. Of the

respondents, there were 33% male and 67% female in the age brackets and education levels as indicated in Figures 1 and 2.

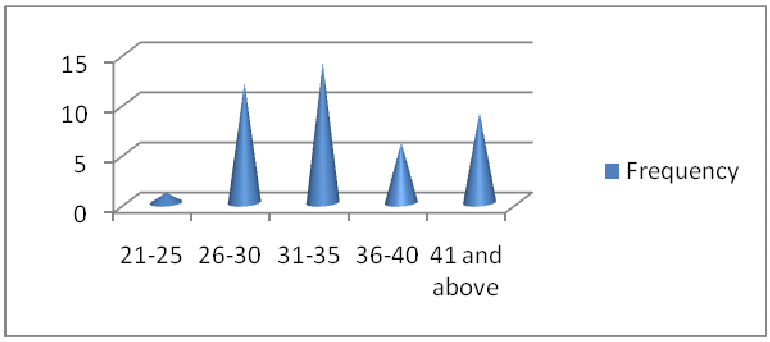

Figure 1: Age brackets of the respondents in years

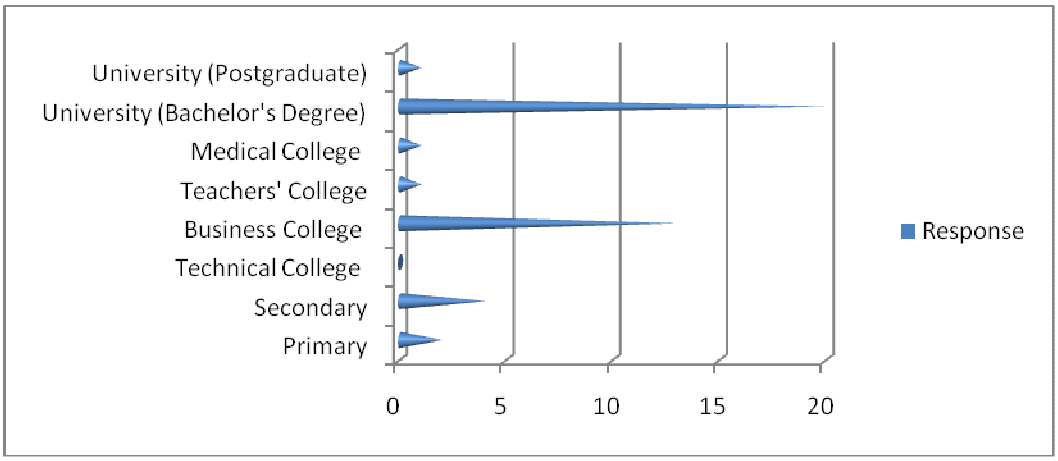

Figure 2: Level of education of respondents

According to Figure 3, a good percentage of the respondents deal in different catergories of businesses with the majority trading in household goods. Although the results of this study concur with the result of a study conducted in northern Uganda that the SMEs deal in different business activities, it differs in that the highest percentage of the SMEs in Tororo district (eastern Uganda) deal in mainly household while in northern Uganda in transport services, constructions and lodging services (Okello-Obura *et al* 2007).

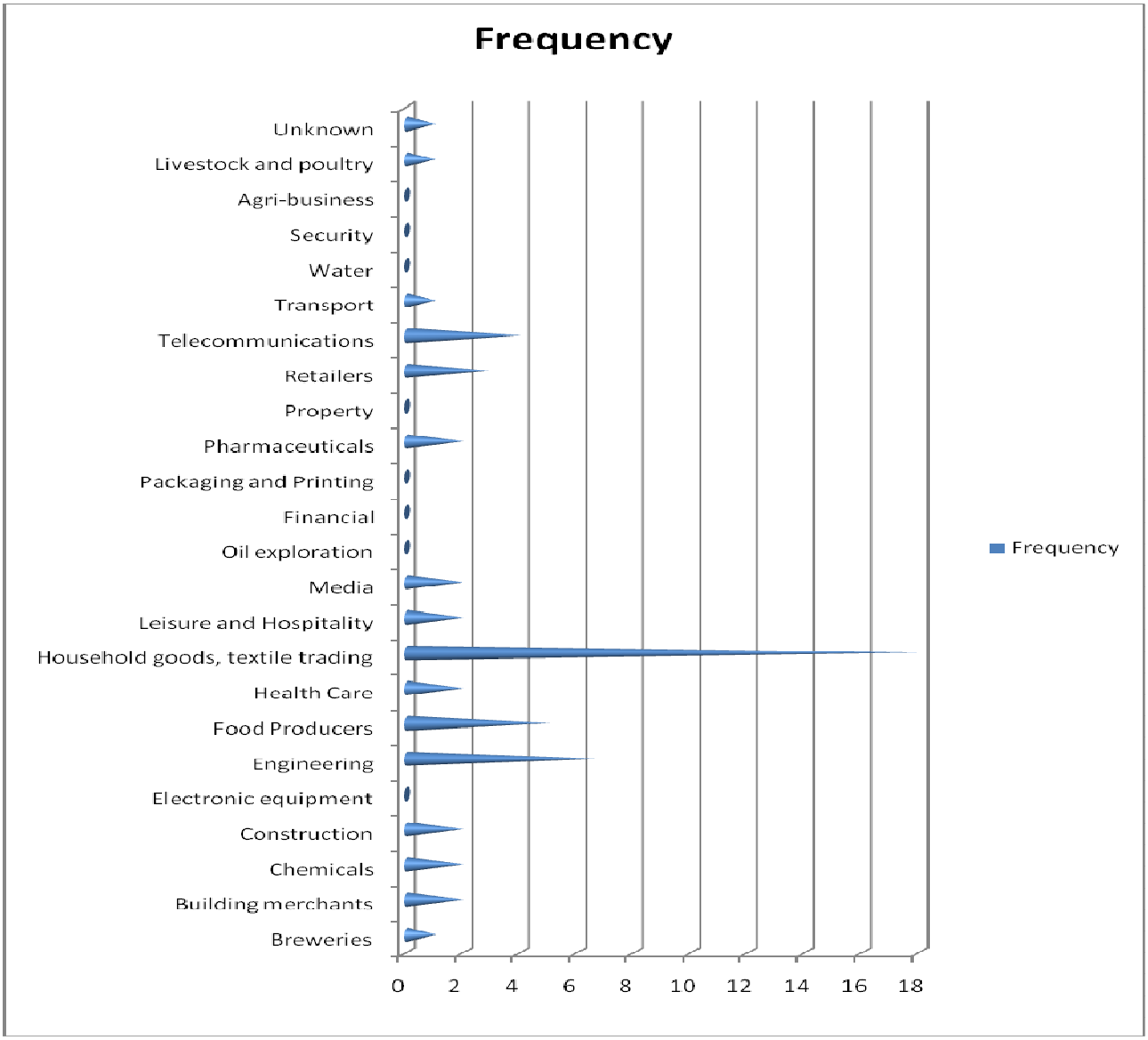

Figure 3: Industrial business sector classification/categorisation

According to the results as shown in Figure 4, most business enterprises in in Tororo district are sole propriatorship owned and this agrees with the situation Okello-Obura *et al* (2008) established among the business enterprises in northern Uganda in which the majority of the SMEs were found to be sole propriatorship owned. Although the Government of Uganda is promoting Cooperative Savings and Credit business/schemes in Uganda, still very few business enterprises are owned as Cooperatives.

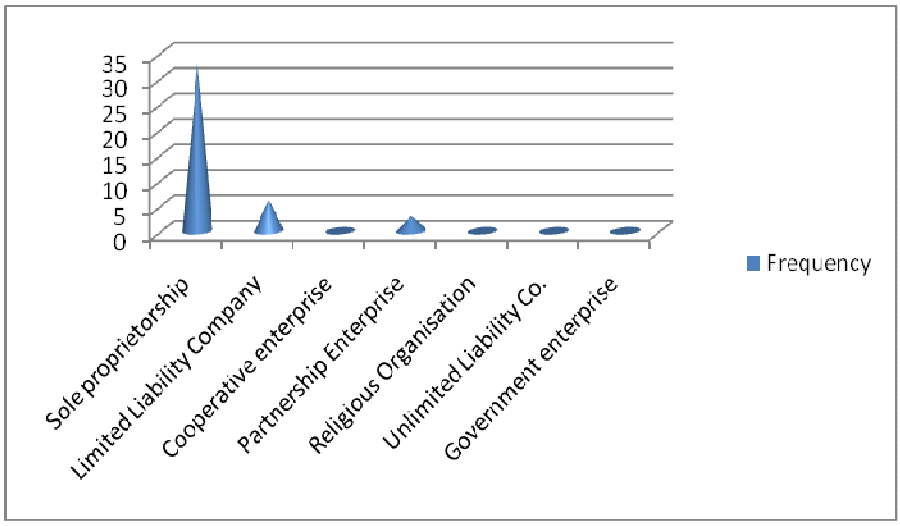

Figure 4: Response on classification of business enterprises based on ownership

Regarding business experiences, the results indicate that most business managers have business experiences. The majority have business experiences of 6-10 years.

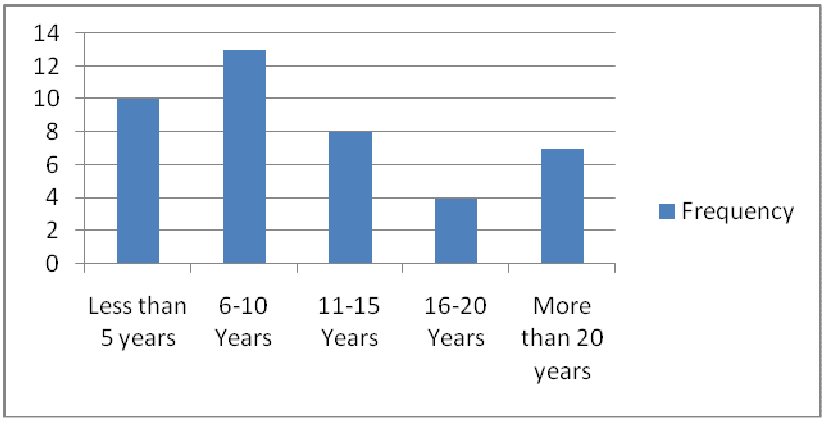

Figure 5: Years of business experiences of the respondents

6.2 Utilisation of ICTs by SMEs in Records and Information Management

An observation of Figure 6 indicates that the majority of the SMEs managers do not have skills in ICTs. For those who have the ICTs skills, there is quite a noticeable variation in the kind of ICTs skills.

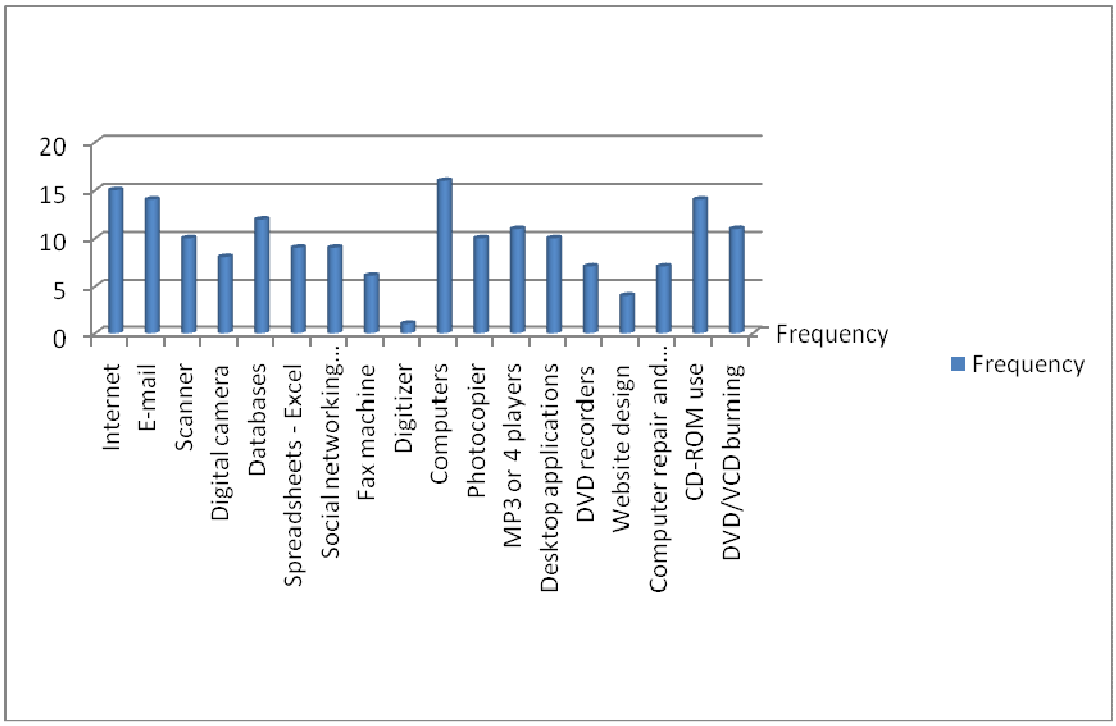

Figure 6: ICTs skills of SMEs managers

Further analysis of Figure 6 shows that majority of SMEs managers do not have skills in ICTs. However, it is also worth noting that some of the managers have skills in Internet, e-mail, computers, databases, CD-ROM usage and DVD/VCD burning. The limited skills in ICT could be attributed to the lack of some of these ICTs among the SMEs. And to a large extent the lack of skills could be a contributing factor in the inadequate application of ICTs in records and information management as indicated in Table 2. It is the mobile phone that is utilized by most of the SMEs for records and Information management and Internet to a smaller extent. The use of mobile phone is also reflected in the findings in Table 3 where the SMEs rated mobile phones as the most useful ICT in the management of records and information. The popularity of mobile phone is highly noticeable today among SMEs. This confirms what Esselaar *et al* (2007) noted that mobile phones are used more often for keeping in contact with customers and clients compared to any other form of communication and in the end generating a lot of records and information. The issue of lack of ICTs skills among SMEs seems to be a wide spread issue. A study conducted by Duan, Mullins, Hamblin, Stanek, Sroka, Machado and Araujo (2002) notes that one of the challenges among SMEs is the demand for ICTs skills and expertise in adopting and implementing the emerging technologies. Coping with skills shortage poses a serious challenge not only in African Countries but also in all European countries (Duan *et al* 2002). Lack of ICTs skills and knowledge is more evident in small- and medium-sized enterprises (Cragg & King 1993; Corbitt, 2000; Duan *et al* 2002). Whatever the situation, it remains a fact that in the contemporary business world, ICTs enhance the competitiveness of business enterprises and have enormously contributed to improved knowledge management, access to robust business information, efficient administration, control and accountability, access to markets and growth of SMEs in both developed and developing economies (Ongori & Migiro 2010). It is imperative that the skills gap among SMEs in Uganda is addressed and SMEs motivated to

adopt ICTs application in records and information management. Table 1 reports on the response on the ICTs used by SMEs in records and information management.

Table 1: Response on ICTs used for records/information management in enterprises (N=42)

Types of ICTs	**Application in Records and Information Management**	**Response (%)**
Mobile Phone	Communication purposes; Records delivery	67%
Internet/E-mail	For purposes of communication; Accessing/ enabling Email communications; For electronic / digital records delivery	57%
Websites	For marketing, public relations, reaching records users	12%
Electronic records management software e.g. HP TRIM, SharePoint, Open EMR, Medical Indexing System,	Managing paper, electronic and digital records	7%
Spreadsheets eg Excel	For capturing numeric records i.e. financial records	26%
Information security software/ anti-viruses such as Norton, MacAfee, Kaspasky, Avira etc	For protecting ICT systems and cleaning viruses	29%
Teleconferencing/Video conferencing	E-governance, Conducting online meetings	2.4%
Digital television	Displaying digital video electronic records	10%
MP3	Playing audio records	19%
Social networking technologies such as twitter, facebook,	Connecting and networking with colleagues and users	24%
Fax/Scanner	Send and receiving records Scanning paper based records, documents, images/ pictures into digital/ electronic form	24%
Digitizers	Digitizing paper based records, documents, images/ pictures into digital/ electronic form	7%
Desktop applications	For producing newsletter and communication	21%
Databases/ Accounting software	Capture, store, manipulate, retrieve, search records, Producing accounting records/information	29%
Surveillance systems eg Close circuit television (CCTV)	For security purposes; CCTV cameras are used to monitor records storage facilities and users	5%
Recorders/ Barcode readers	Capturing audio records, For security purposes, tracking purposes; Enable check in and checkout of files	2.4%
Digital Video camera, Webcams	Capturing pictures, recording records, videos, digitizing purposes Record / capture videos, text, audio, pictures,	22%
Storage devices such as Floppy Discs, CD-ROMs, DVDs, VCDs, Hard disks, DVD recorders	Storage and backup of data, Recording information/records	33%

Servers	For centralized storage of records and information	0%
Biometrics eg Fingerprint Scanner, Eye Scanners,	For capturing records/information	19%
Photocopying	Making multiple copies of records	29%
Radio	Communicating information, advertising services	19%
Personal Computers and printers	Data capture, processing, output, information dissemination, communication, storage etc , Electronic records management	31%
Laptop computers and printers	Data capture, processing, output, information dissemination, communication, storage etc ; Electronic records management	29%
Notebook computers	Data capture, processing, output, information dissemination, communication, storage etc ; Electronic records management	26%
Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), also known as a Palmtop Computer	Data capture, processing, output, information dissemination, communication, storage etc ; Electronic records management	26%

An analysis of Table 2 shows dismal usage of ICTs in records and information management. This is reflected in the findings in Table 3 where very few SMEs indicated the ICTs most useful in records and information management. However an analysis of Table 4 shows that a fair percentage of the SMEs have interest in having technologies and systems in managing their records.

Table 2: Rating the usefulness of different ICTs in management of records and information in the enterprises

Types of ICTs	**Most Useful**	**Useful**	**Least Useful**	**Not useful at all**
Mobile Phone	62%	7%	2.4%	0%
Internet/E-mail	40%	5%	0%	-
Websites	7%	10%	2.4%	
Electronic records management software eg HP TRIM, SharePoint, Open EMR, Medical Indexing System,	10%	0	0	12%
Spreadsheets eg Excel	24%	2.4%	2.4%	
Information security software/ anti-viruses such as Norton, MacAfee, Kaspasky, Avira etc	21%	7%		
Teleconferencing/ Video conferencing	2.4%		5%	10%
Digital television	7%	2.4%		10%
MP3 or 4 players	10%	2.4%	7%	5%
Social networking technologies such as twitter, face book, my space, etc.	10%	7%	5%	2.4%
Fax and scanner	14%	10%	7%	2.4%
Digitizers	2.4%	5%	5%	7%

Desktop applications	10%	7%	5%	
Databases and Accounting software	32%	7%		
Surveillance systems eg Close circuit television (CCTV)	2.4%	5%	2.4%	7%
Recorders and Barcode readers	2.4%			5%
Digital Video cameras and webcams	7.4%	7%		7%
Storage devices such as Floppy Discs, CD-ROMs, DVDs, VCDs, Hard disks, DVD recorders	26%	7%	5%	
Servers	5%	2.4%	7%	
Biometrics eg Fingerprint Scanner, Eye Scanners,	2.4%	5%	2.4%	5%
Photocopying	10%	5%	5%	2.4%
Radio	2.4%	7%	2.4%	5%
Personal Computers and printers	30%	5%	2.4%	
Laptop computers and printers	31%	2.4%		
Notebook computers	10%	2.4%		5%
Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), also known as a Palmtop Computer	12%	7%		5%

Table 3: Technologies/systems respondents would wish to have in their enterprises to help in records and information management (N=42)

Technologies respondents wished to have in their enterprises	**Response**
Specialized filing equipment to improve the storage and retrieval of records	55%
E-mail services to facilitate communication and sharing of information for business operations	41%
Document conversion technology such as optical imaging and microform to reduce the volume of paper on site and allow more efficient workflow	38%
Document indexing software to allow for retrieval of documents in multiple ways	43%
Document tracking and control systems to enable you to track documents or folders from creation to final disposition	41%
Special purpose programs that allow you to automate specific aspects of records management	48%
Software to allow for storage and retrieval of electronic documents	41%
Electronic forms programs to improve workflow and increase the usability of information contained on the forms	26%
Use CD-ROM for distribution of records/information to officers.	50%
A records management application (RMA). This is software which can manage records throughout their lifecycle. It can be used to categorise and locate records as well as dispose off the electronic records maintained in its systems	55%

6.3 E-mail Management by the SMEs

The contribution of e-mail in facilitating faster business decision making is crucial and it was prudent to establish the availability of e-mail services among the SMEs. The results indicate that 10% only of the respondents have e-mail services and 90% do not have. The extents to which e-mail services are put to use are as indicated in Figure 8. Sending any document that initiates, authorises or completes a business transaction, sending personal information and marketing dominates the use of e-mail.

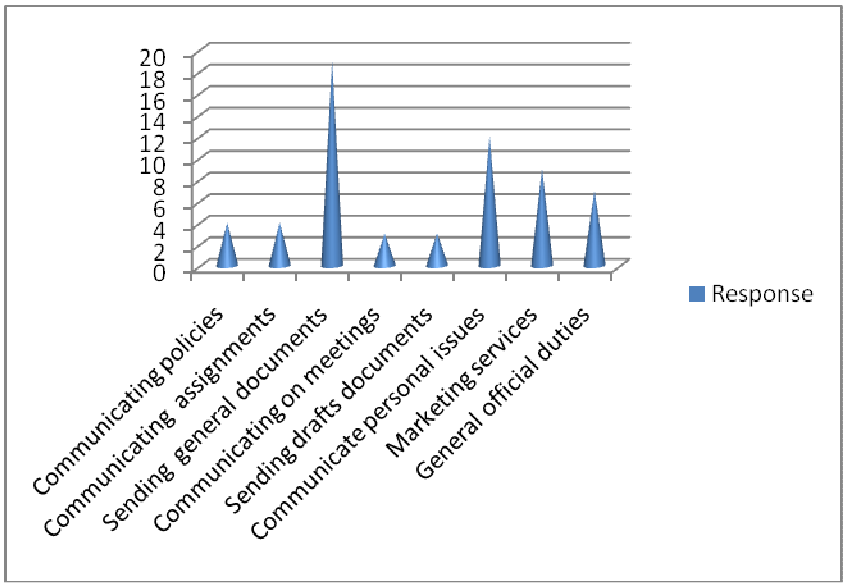

Figure 8: Use of e-mail

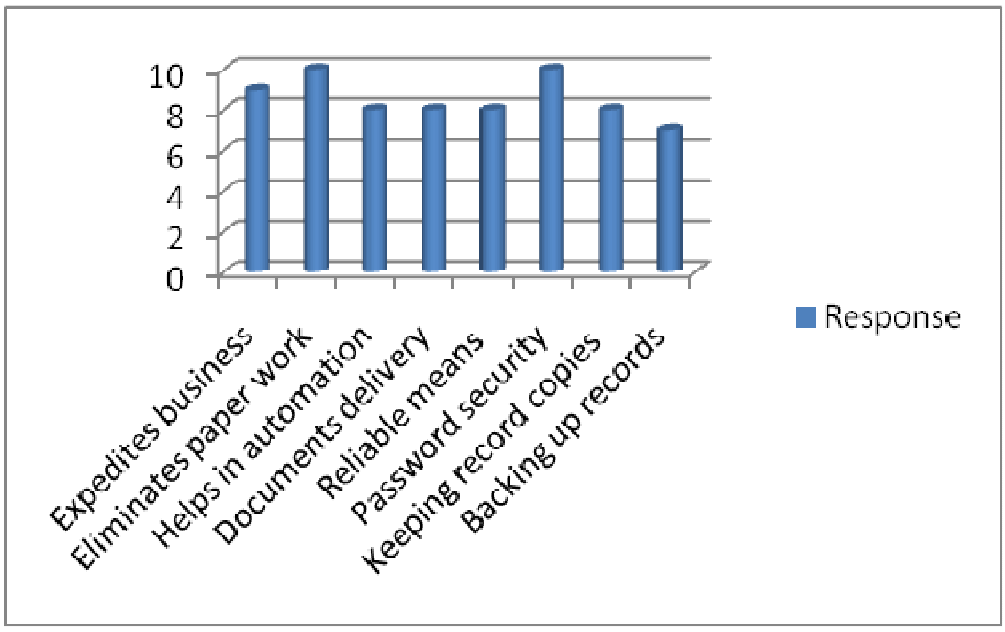

Figure 9: Benefits enterprises derive from using e-mail as a medium of communication

For value to be attached to something there must be significant benefits derived from it. An analysis of Figure 9 indicates that there are wide spread benefits SMEs derive from using e-mail as medium of communication. This indicates that a lot of records are generated as a result of this communication and what seems not to be answered is how these records and information are managed. An effort to enhance business enterprises managers' skills and competencies in records and information management is required.

Regarding the availability of e-mail policy among the SMEs, the result indicates that 10% have and 90% do not have e-mail policy and only 20% of the SMEs consider e-mail as records while 80% do not consider e-mail as records. As earlier established, SMEs considered e-mail communication to be beneficial in many ways but unfortunately they do

not consider e-mail communication as records. This confirms the earlier position that SMEs managers need to be sensitised and trained in e-mail records and information management. Of those who use e-mail, 40% attribute the kinds of e-mail information common in their enterprises to be personal and 60% consider it to be official and regretably only 23% of the SMEs archive their e-mail communication while 77% do not archive e-mail.

Gregory (2005) notes that E-mail is a very interesting and emotive issue for the records manager and more than any other system, people feel that e-mail systems belong to them. Even if their e-mail folders are full of work-related documents, decisions etc, getting them to move e-mail into the Electronic Records Management system is a big issue. This in essence requires adoption of the best and authoritative e-mail records management practices. However, an analysis of Table 5 shows that very few SMEs have good practices of e-mail management. For instance, only 2.4% of the SMEs capture incoming and outgoing e-mail communication of the enterprises. Murphy (2005) warns that the costs of e-mail storage, the impact on overwhelmed e-mail servers, and the legal and credibility risks from not being able to find e-mails when required can make complacency costly and damaging. The damage can go beyond fines and settlements to a loss in corporate credibility that drives down a company's stock price. It is important the business enterprises establish e-mail policy that includes legal and operational needs, train employees and provide ongoing e-mail policy communications and education, give employees the tools by which appropriate e-mail can be archived and among others establish that e-mail messages are to be saved only for legitimate business or legal reasons (Murphy 2005). Table 4 indicates that only 12% of the SMEs have e-mail retention policy which is highly doubted as to whether is actually a documented policy or just a recognised practice.

Table 4: Responses on what regarding e-mail applies to enterprises (N=30)

E-mail issues applicable in enterprises	**Response**
Not managing e-mail properly in enterprise has ever led the enterprise to massive fines	2.4%
The enterprise leaves the management of e-mail communication for business purpose in the hands of employees	7%
All business e-mail communication in our enterprise are backed –up in tapes	7%
All business e-mail communication in our enterprise are printed and filed	14%
Our company treats e-mail communication differently with other records	7%
All incoming e-mail and outgoing e-mail communication are captured by our enterprise	2.4%
The enterprise has ever trained staff in e-mail communication and records management	10%
The enterprise allows users to easily transfer e-mail into the records management system and provides various levels of security	2.4%
The enterprise manages the retention period of all e-mail records in the company	5%
The enterprise catalogs e-mail communication and provides easy and flexible search methods to retrieve e-mail records	2.4%
The enterprise does have retention policy for e-mail records	12%
Our enterprise treats E-mail communication as a Source of Business-Critical Information.	19%
In our enterprise we accept e-mail as written confirmation of transactions	21%

7 Conclusion and recommendations

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a key role in the economic growth of any country. As well, electronic technologies are a reality of life in the 21st century (IRMT 2009).

The application of modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can improve the performance of SMEs by reducing communication costs. Quite often, the application of ICTs in records and information management are ignored and more especially the e-mail records and information management component. Generally, SMEs have been slower than larger firms to adopt for instance the e-business strategies despite the potential benefits. This study concludes that the ICTs skills of SMEs in Tororo district are far inadequate and the management of e-mail records and information requires a proactive approach to help the SMEs. It therefore, recommends the following interventions:

- Lack of ICT skills and business skills are widespread impediments to effective business performance. SMEs managers should be trained in basic ICTs utilisation skills and especially in their applications in managing records and information by the Government of Uganda. This will enhance the adoption of the technology systems for proper management of records and information.
- A healthy business environment is fundamental for SMEs to thrive and benefit from ICTs. As OECD (2004) observes, small firms may lack objective information regarding the benefits and costs of adoption of ICT. The private sector (*e.g.* business associations) and government have a role, and can provide information about service available and when necessary improve coordination of government information on the benefits of adoption and use of ICTs. The government of Uganda through the Private Sector Foundation should sensitise the SMEs managers on the business environment in Uganda and the East African region that need efficient and fast decision-making. Uganda's joining of the East African Community has brought and created irrevocable business competitive environment that SMEs must accept to embrace. SMEs therefore need to be sensitised on this business environment and the need for the adoption of ICTs in their business operations and especially in records and information management.
- There should be improved ICTs infrastructure network among the SMEs community. The government of Uganda should encourage rollout and use of quality infrastructure at affordable prices. Website creation and connectivity is a key component in ICT development, adoption and use. It accelerates the contribution of ICTs to economic growth, facilitates innovation, and promotes efficiency, network effects and positive externalities. A professional Web site can help to improve a firm's image for large-scale business transactions. SMEs should be supported to create Web site that can help in the management of business information especially for the consumption of the public and customers.
- All SMEs should be encouraged to put in place e-mail records and information management policy that include among others the capturing, processing, storage, archiving strategy and retention of e-mail communication.
- The government of Uganda should design a proactive strategy to provide ICTs at subsidized costs to registered SMEs to improve on ICTs adoption in business operations.

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