Chapter 18

Librarians, Records Managers, and E-Government

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ABSTRACT

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

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technology capabilities can enhance the use of information and knowledge or its transfer from one person or place to another as well as its storage in a compact and convenient way. However, the same capabilities can accelerate its loss, putting vast amounts of information at risk... (Bernbom, 2001, xiii). This has presented a lot of challenges to records managers and librarians in their business of managing information. These challenges are discussed in this chapter. The chapter draws mostly on findings of two studies conducted in Namibia, one on
electronic records management in the context of
e-government (Nengomasha, 2009) and other on
hybrid libraries and e-government (Uutoni, Yule
& Nengomasha, 2010).

The objectives of this chapter are to:

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

BACKGROUND

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

E-government encompasses the following
key functions:

• **E-services:** the electronic delivery of gov-
ernment information, programmes and ser-
vices over the internet;
• **E-democracy:** the use of electronic com-
munications to increase citizen participa-
tion in the public decision-making process;
• **E-commerce:** the electronic exchange of
money for goods and services…; and

• **E-management:** the use of information
technology to improve the management of
government, from streamlining busi-
ness processes to maintaining e-records,
to improving the flow and integration of
information (Center for Technology in

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

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

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

Records management is defined as: “…that
area of general administration concerned with
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