

**Records and Archives as a Cornerstone for Successful Implementation  
of the Malawi Public Sector Reform Programme**

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## **Abstract**

Malawi has been through numerous public sector reforms (PSRs) dating back to the 1960s bringing to a total of about 79 reports. Unfortunately, the results have always been dismal as evidenced by a sluggish public sector, despite numerous attempts to reform it. The significant level of scepticism for the success of new PSR initiative commissioned after the 2014 general elections, especially on whether the reforms will actually be implemented cannot be wished away as mere rhetoric because past PSRs' ineffectiveness and failure to achieve their goals were proven by critics' perpetual doubt even before implementation. Failure to successfully implement any programme in general and the Public Sector Reform Programme (PSRP) in particular for over half a decade is a strong indication that there is a missing link; but what is it? The aim of the paper is to establish the missing link by demonstrating how records and archives have remained neglected areas of PSR and how poorly managed records and archives have adversely affected the broad scope of PSRs. It will also show how the absence of well managed records and archives and the collapse of records and archives systems have contributed to poor implementation and sustainability of effective development projects. It will then emphasise the importance of records and archives without whose existence there can be no rule of law, good governance, transparency and accountability. It will also stress the need for public servants to have information to carry out their work as records and archives represent a particular and crucial source of information. It will highlight the importance of strengthening records and archives systems when planning development programmes and regulatory systems. It will also demonstrate the fundamental aspect of records and archives to the concept of a democratic society and how their availability underpins constitutional arrangements and provide an institutional memory. The paper will finally make an analysis to establish whether records and archives are indeed the missing link to the past PSRs and therefore recommend to government to include the component of records and archives in the implementation of the current ones so that they achieve their purpose of facilitating the creation of an effective and efficient public sector.

***Keywords: Public Sector Reforms; Records Management; Archives Management; Good Governance, Transparency, Democracy; Accountability***

## **1.0 Introduction**

Malawi has not been saved from a horde of public sector reforms (PSRs) which date back to the immediate post-independence period in the 1960s. These started with state-centred reforms, structural adjustment programmes from the 1980s to the 1990s, public management after the year 2000, to the current one commissioned after the 2014 general elections.

Instead of delivering efficiency and effectiveness, we have experienced the worst public sector based on The Failed States Index which scored Malawi's progressive deterioration of public services at 8.2; uneven economic development at 8.0; poverty and severe economic decline at 8.4; and state legitimacy at 7.5 in 2013. This is also based on the World Bank Governance Indicators which show that between 2002 and 2012, government effectiveness, regulatory quality and rule of law in Malawi have persistently been negative. Other evidence also shows plainly that the Malawi public service is defying all attempts to reform it.

Evidence has it that most PSRs have either been poorly implemented, abandoned in mid-gear, or have continued to face monumental challenges. Prospect of achieving their goals over the years has been in perpetual doubt raising significant level of scepticism on the success of the new PSR initiative.

Some experts have tried to identify and establish reasons for failure of the past PSRs, but this paper will attempt to identify and establish records and archives as the missing link. It will achieve this by demonstrating how poor records and archives and the collapse of records and archives systems have affected development projects; emphasizing the importance of records and archives to the rule of law, good governance, transparency and accountability; stressing the importance of information to public servants in carrying out their work efficiently and effectively; highlighting the importance of strengthening records and archives systems to development programmes; and

demonstrating the importance of records and archives to democracy, good governance and accountability. The paper will finally make recommendations to the Government of Malawi to effect sound records and archives management if the current PSRs are to succeed.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Public Sector Reforms**

The Oxford English Dictionary (2010) defines “reform” as make (person, institution procedure), (of persons) become better by removal of faults or errors. Realizing that it was at a crossroads and needed to transform and become a better country, the Government of Malawi has implemented new PSRs whose aim is to facilitate the creation of an effective and efficient public service that will spur economic growth through the nurturing of a market economy that is foreign direct investor friendly, as well as one that will facilitate long-term investments in health, education and other social programmes. To ensure success of the PSRs, the Public Service Reform Commission (PSRC) was established to oversee their implementation in the country. Among other critical areas requiring attention in the public service, the PSRC also noted the importance of good “records management” in the achievement of the goals of reforms, and, therefore, clearly made it known to all establishments undergoing reforms to ensure that with the emergence of the reforms their registries are up graded. This call was made in order to ensure their records are retrievable and accessible. It is, however, sad to note that the importance was merely recognition but measures to achieve good records and archives management have not been attached to the implementation of PSRs. This raises questions as to the success of the current PSRs if past experience is to be used as a yard stick. Chingaipe (2015) paraphrasing Polidano (1988), it could be said that, so far, the practice of PSR in Malawi ‘resembles a landscape dotted with ruined edifices and abandoned skeletal structures’.

In identifying and establishing the missing link in the implementation of PSR in Malawi, the paper hopes to throw light on why previous reform efforts have completely failed or achieved sub-optimal results. The foregoing account points to the effect lack of sound records and archives management has had on failure of the past PSRs.

## **2.2 Records and Archives Management**

When considering records and archives management in light of PSRs, we should first look at what a record is. A document regardless of form or medium created, received, maintained, and used by an organization (public or private) or an individual in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business, of which it forms a part or provides evidence. There is sometimes a lack of clarity about what is meant by 'records' in relation to the more general term 'information' (The World Bank and International Records Management Trust, 2000).

Records include all the documents that institutions create or receive in the course of administrative and executive transactions. The records themselves form a part of or provide evidence of such transactions. As evidence, they are subsequently maintained by or on behalf of those responsible for the transactions. Records arise from actual happenings; they are a 'snapshot' of an action or event. They offer a picture of something that happened. To serve their purpose in providing reliable evidence, records in both paper and electronic form must be accurate, complete, and comprehensive (The World Bank and International Records Management Trust, 2000).

Now we will define what records management is all about, but firstly, what is management? Management is the organization and coordination of the activities of a business in order to achieve defined objectives. According to the management guru Peter Drucker (1909-2005), the basic task of management includes both marketing and innovation.

Practice of modern management originates from the 16th century study of low-efficiency and failures of certain enterprises, conducted by the English statesman Sir Thomas More (1478-1535). Management consists of the interlocking functions of creating corporate policy and organizing, planning, controlling, and directing an organization's resources in order to achieve the objectives of that policy. Management is the process of using an organization's resources to achieve specific goals through the functions of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. Records management is, therefore, the systematic control of all records from their creation or receipt, through their processing, distribution, organization, storage, and retrieval, to their ultimate disposition.

In view of the above, records management is, therefore, the task of ensuring that recorded information, paper and electronic, is managed economically and efficiently. Records management controls the creation, maintenance, use, and disposal of records so that the right records are provided to the right person at the right time (The World Bank and International Records Management Trust, 2000). Because information is such an important resource to organizations, the records management function also includes information management. To this end, records management is also known as records and information management (RIM).

Factors such as changing communications technologies, government restructuring, and civil service reform have contributed to the redefinition of records and archives work. Records management, archives management, librarianship and data management used to be perceived as separate tasks (The World Bank and International Records Management Trust, 2000).

These activities still retain their unique qualities, but increasingly they are seen as part of a larger, integrated system of information management. When a records management system works well, the information contained in records can be readily retrieved. The disposal of unneeded records and the retention of valuable information can be managed effectively, and space, facilities, and resources can be used efficiently and economically (The World Bank and International Records Management Trust, 2000).

Finally, we will define archives and archives management. While most records do not need to be kept permanently, a small but significant portion has enduring value. It is this portion of a government's records that are preserved within a private or public archival institutions. A national archival institution is an essential institution of a modern state. It has a key role to play in the overall management of records and information created by the government administration.

The archival institution serves government by protecting public records and making them available for use; it serves the public by ensuring that citizens' rights and responsibilities are documented clearly and accurately. It is thus a cornerstone of a democratic society. It is also one of the central cultural institutions in a nation, serving as a centre for research and a guardian of the nation's memory. Archives management is, therefore, the area of management concerned with the maintenance and use of archives (The World Bank and International Records Management Trust, 2000).

### **2.3 Rule of Law and Good Governance**

Governance can be viewed as the collective policies and oversight mechanisms in place to establish and maintain sustainable and accountable organisations that achieve their missions while demonstrating stewardship over resources.



Today, corporate governance is of central importance as members of the public are more concerned about issues of transparency and accountability following the high profile corporate failures in the third quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Organisations, both public and private, must comply with domestic and international regulations in order to remain sustainable.

Governance is derived from a Latin term 'gubernare' which means to steer (OECD, 1999). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1997) defines governance as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all level. Governance can also be viewed as the collective policies and oversight mechanisms in place to establish and maintain sustainable and accountable organisations that achieve their missions while demonstrating stewardship over resources (Government Accountability Office, 2005).

There is a fundamental tension between freedom and governance, which has existed ever since individuals found the need to relate to others, and recognized that workable relationships require ground rules to be successful (Davies, 1999). The primitive rules which evolved to shape early tribal relationships seem to have moved with the passage of time into two main categories – customs (which are means of working together effectively), and moral codes (which are ends in themselves). Therefore, governance is seen as a process for reconciling the ambitions of the individual with the need to preserve and develop a 'common weal' which binds through shared interests. Davies (1999) agrees with Muller (1981) who defines governance as constrained in the intrinsic nature, purpose, integrity and identity of an institution with a primary focus on an entity's relevance, continuity, and fiduciary aspects.

## **2.4 Transparency and Accountability**

Accountability is intimately linked to responsibility (Giri, 2000). He argues that it is not only about being accountable for what one is expected to do or perform, but to one's responsibility beyond the legal minimal, to the growth of oneself and the other and thus contributing to society. It is important for an organization to demonstrate accountability not only to its shareholders and stakeholders, but also to the public as a part evident of social responsibility. Day and Klein (1987) elaborate six (6) general elements of accountability processes that can be distinguished, namely trigger, accountable person, situation, forum, criteria and sanctions. Looking at all the six (6) elements, it is vital to avoid the first element that triggers the accountability processes. Triggers for accountability can range from failure to deliver a promise to dissatisfaction of one party against the other. Records management has a pivotal role in responding to such triggers by capturing all evidence of a decision or action that has been taken. A trusted government is one that can demonstrate its accountability and transparency and is continually striving to improve value delivery and increase cost-effectiveness.

## **2.5 Democracy**

Collins Advanced Learners English Dictionary defines 'Democracy as a system in which people choose their rulers by voting for them in elections'. The e-dictionary also defines 'Democracy as a system of government in which power is vested in the people, who rule either directly or through freely elected representatives'. Therefore, these definitions implies that man must take the responsibility for choosing his rulers and representatives, and for the maintenance of his own rights' against the possible and probable encroachments of the government which he had sanctioned to act for him in public matters. In a democracy, citizens are generally allowed to have the right to access information about the activities carried out by organisations.

For example, Government records or other public bodies are vital for democratic accountability. Without records and archives that document the decisions of Government and how those decisions were made, there could be no public scrutiny of Government activities. Without records and archives public officials would not be able to account for public resources and Government would become bankrupt.

### **3.0 Records and Archives as Neglected Areas of PSR**

Although PSRs are difficult and complex, making a good record of performance hard to establish (Collier and Gunning 1999), they are important for the promotion of an efficient and effective civil service in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Schacter (2000) has argued that it is almost impossible to find an African government that is more efficient in policy implementation in the new millennium than it was in the 1980s. There are a number of reasons for the poor outcomes including lack of a holistic approach to public sector reform in most African countries; poor domestic co-ordination of public sector reforms; and secrecy surrounding their implementation in many countries leaving the electorate in the dark (Duravell, 2001).

The very first efforts at PSR in Malawi were embarked on immediately after the attainment of independence in the early 1960s with the major concern to manage the transition from an expatriate-based civil service to one dominated by Africans. These failed because very little effort was allotted to the more important task of creating incentives in the public sector (Duravell, 2001).

Early post independence PSRs were aimed at increasing public sector efficiency and improving administrative capacities in state institutions but failed because they lacked implementation capacities in government (Msosa 1998).

During the 1990s a number of policy reviews and programmes directed at reforming the public sector were attempted, often simultaneously. Since the earlier problems of paucity of human resources and managerial capacities persisted, the implementation of this new crop of programmes was slow and unsatisfactory (Msosa 1998, Malawi Government and World Bank 2000).

The current PSR, launched soon after the 2014 general elections aims to institute an efficient and effective public sector which will be key to sustainable development and provide a strong and enabling capacity and foundation to achieve national development goals. Though still in their implementation stages, there is a lot of scepticism to their success. This is true more or so considering that records and archives have remained a neglected area of PSR; they face numerous challenges including lack of skills in their management, poor registries due to space and staffing levels, lack of modern records management equipment, lack of records management policies, lack of incentives to the human ware and bad legislation or bad laws. We will prove this in the preceding sections.

#### **4.0 Effect of Poorly Managed Records and Archives on the Broad Scope of PSRs**

Poorly managed records and archives contribute negatively to the achievement of efficiency in the public service and the public suffers when inadequate information systems affect the delivery of programs. Administrators find it ever more difficult to retrieve the information they need to formulate, implement, and monitor policy and to manage key personnel and financial resources. This situation impedes the capacity to carry out economic and administrative reform programs aimed at achieving efficiency, accountability, and enhanced services to citizens.

## **5.0 Records and Archives Systems Versus Implementation and Sustainability of Effective Development Projects**

Badly managed records and archives adversely affect the broad scope of PSRs, and development projects are often difficult to implement and sustain effectively in the absence of well managed records and archives. Records and archives management has deteriorated so gradually that it has gone largely unnoticed as a development issue. When development programs and regulatory systems are planned, it is essential that records and archives systems should be strengthened. However, despite the evidence to the contrary, the availability of records and archives is taken for granted.

## **6.0 Records and Archives; Democracy, the Rule of Law and Good Governance; Transparency and Accountability**

The ability of governments to protect the rights of its citizens and to improve citizen-government interaction is a critical issue. In light of this, Malawi adopted a pluralist type of government in 1993 which promulgated a comprehensive Bill of Rights.

The country also made sure that its pluralist type of government should be nurtured by establishing constitutional institutions like Malawi Human Rights Commission, Malawi Electoral Commission, Office of the Ombudsman, Law Commission, a Commercial Court, Anti-Corruption Bureau among others. Establishing constitutional bodies in itself is not enough because the rights and entitlements of citizens are based on records [and archives]. Thus the ability of a government to continue to respect these rights and entitlements is based on the quality of the policies, standards, and practices employed for the care of those records [and archives].

In an increasingly electronic environment, where information is held in a fragile format, this is much more difficult to achieve than is usually realized. For this reason governments are being asked to be transparent, open, and engaged with their citizens. And citizens are becoming more concerned about their roles in the governance of the country. They want to be able to trust in their government, and they expect it to function in a manner that engenders this sense of trust. The loss of control of records and archives has consequences for all citizens, especially for the poorest who are least able to defend themselves. Relevant and accurate public records [and archives] are essential to preserving the rule of law and demonstrating fair, equal, and consistent treatment of citizens. Records [and archives], and the evidence they contain, are the instruments by which governments can promote a climate of trust and demonstrate an overall commitment to good government.

A government, particularly in a truly democratic country, is accountable to its people for its administration and governance. Public records [and archives], which are the by-products of public organizations, provide evidence of the governance of the country. Meijer (2001) argues that the records [and archives] management community claims that records [and archives] have to be preserved for accountability purposes, but they rarely explore what accountability is and what role records [and archives] play.

In addition, the contribution of records [and archives] management to good governance and accountability is not recognised by other professions and management. Records [and archives] are the indispensable foundation of the accountability process (Ndenje, Sicalwe and Ngulube2008). Cox and Wallace (2002) express the same by stating that accountability and transparency cannot be achieved in an environment where information is not available.

According to Shepherd (2006) one of the reasons for keeping records [and archives] is that organizations use records to support accountability when they want to prove that they have met their obligations or complied with best practices according to the established policies.

Without reliable and authentic documentary evidence underpinning all essential accountability processes, government, civil society and the private sector cannot ensure transparency, guarantee accountability or allow for the exercising of good governance (Schenkelaars and Ahmad, 2004). There is a direct link between internal regulation and the more complete and accurate recording of organizations or government decisions and actions.

Records and information provide the compliance with regulations; RIM provides the guarantees that the evidence is captured in a system and is readily available (Baraga et al, 1999). It is, therefore, essential to ease out the nature or ontology of records [archives] and records [archives] management in order to fully understand their role in ensuring accountability of an organization. The accountability of a government can arguably only be achieved when it demonstrates considerable transparency, which in turn can only happen when trust is supported by authentic and reliable records [and archives]. In an age where corporate governance and transparency are key goals in a global agenda, it is imperative for the records [and archives] management community to investigate the way in which records [and archives] management practice can fulfil this role.

## **7.0 Records and Archives as Sources of Information to an Effective and Efficient Public Service**

Records provide a reliable, legally verifiable source of evidence of decisions and actions. They document compliance or non-compliance with laws, rules, and procedures.

Governments can no longer justify taking action with little or no reference to past performance or future goals. Nor can they justify parallel or duplicate services when they can combine services and reduce costs. Client service, quality performance of tasks, and measurable outcomes are increasingly important responsibilities, and these aspirations all depend on accessible and usable records (The World Bank and International Records Management Trust, 2000).

All aspects of public service, including health, education, pensions, land, and judicial rights, depend upon well-kept and well-managed records. Records are vital to virtually every aspect of the governance process. The effectiveness and efficiency of the public service across the range of government functions depends upon the availability of and access to information held in records (The World Bank and International Records Management Trust, 2000).

However, it is assumed that the management of records is not a professional function when in fact given the size of government and the volume of paper and electronic information generated, it is essential to have specialists to manage structures and systems for controlling records as part of the wider regulatory framework. As well there is an assumption that keeping records is not a significant problem because people will automatically want to keep records that document their actions and decisions, but the truth is that public servants who are involved in corruption and fraud or who fear for the security of their jobs are unlikely to want to keep records. Furthermore, in many institutions there are no structures in place to keep records efficiently.

It is also assumed that public servants know what information they need when in reality they are unlikely to be aware of all of the information that could and should be available to support their work and even if they are, it may be difficult to access.



Another assumption is that people use records for decision making, but unfortunately, as record systems have broken down, public servants have ceased to depend upon them as a reliable basis for decision making (The World Bank and International Records Management Trust, 2000).

Improved human resource management is central to good policy management in government. Yet, in Malawi paper-based personnel files are incomplete and difficult to access. Although PSR Programs (PSRPs) typically include a significant reduction in the size of the public service, governments are unable to find the basic information needed to accomplish this task, such as accurate staff numbers, details of their grades, and location or dates of appointment. Moreover, as governments focus attention on improving the incentive structure of the civil service, the need for accurate and complete records becomes more critical (The World Bank and International Records Management Trust, 2000).

For example, performance-related human resource management – designed to reward the most competent staff and penalize poor performers – is dependent upon information about the present and past performance of individuals. This information is not accessible if the relevant records cannot be located. Computerization will undoubtedly facilitate the retrieval of personnel information. At the same time, unless there is a very well developed capacity to manage electronic records as legally verifiable evidence of entitlements, contractual obligations, policies, or transactions for the period required, a mixed media, paper/electronic, human resource information system is essential (The World Bank and International Records Management Trust, 2000).

In Malawi, the government payrolls are inflated with 'ghost workers': non-existent employees who draw a salary, taken by someone else. The personnel file should be the primary source of evidence that a person actually exists, that the grade is appropriate to the salary paid, and that any additional benefits are appropriate and have been authorized. In the absence of complete personnel files, the 'ghost workers' problem cannot be addressed in a sustainable manner. Entries on the payroll database cannot be checked against an authoritative source to ensure that the person actually exists and that payments have been authorized. Head counts and questionnaires provide a temporary solution, but records are an essential aspect of the long term solution (The World Bank and International Records Management Trust, 2000).

## **8.0 Importance of Records and Archives Management to the Successful Implementation of PSRs**

Records and archives must be well managed in order to ensure that they are protected for both administrative purposes and to serve as evidence of an organization's work. Records and archives management provides a professional approach to caring for records and archives. The care of records and archives is governed by three key concepts; their provenance, life-cycle and their continuum. The effective management of records throughout this life-cycle is a key issue in civil service reform.

The continuum concept places actions that continue or recur throughout the life of a record. It is the management of this continuum of actions that provides the basis for a strategic approach to records and archives management. This strategic approach is a key component of civil service reform (The World Bank and International Records Management Trust, 2000).

## **9.0 Importance of Strengthening Records and Archive Systems in Planning Development Programmes and Regulatory Systems**

Records and archives management is essential to virtually all development objectives. Records are so fundamental to the concept of a democratic society that governments and donor organizations have tended to assume that records will be available to underpin constitutional arrangements and provide an institutional memory. The difficulties become apparent when the collapse of records systems directly affects development objectives. At this stage development planners tend to assume that the problem is so prevalent, ingrained, and thankless that little can be done to improve the situation. Then there is an assumption that computers will resolve record management problem. These and other false assumptions about the nature and scope of the problem and its causes are in themselves obstacles to the effective implementation of sustainable solutions.

## **10.0 Fundamental Aspects of Records and Archives to Democratic Society and Institutional Memory**

Relevant and accurate public records and archives must exist if governments are to preserve the rule of law and to demonstrate fair and equal treatment of citizens. Good governance explicitly delegates responsibility to officials as the best way to hold individuals accountable. Accountability processes occur self-evidentially after activities have been executed or decisions have been taken. Records and archives must possess adequate content, contextual and structural metadata to be self-evident and to facilitate understanding of a particular transaction. Organizations are able to anticipate the information that may be required. Understanding business processes is certainly essential in helping to identify key records and archives.

In comparison to private organizations, public organisations are more exposed to the risks of being held to account, as they are answerable directly to the members of the public. Bearman (1993) argues that government organizations should not focus on structures but on business processes. Understanding the notions of evidence from the legal perspective is crucial to prevent and avoid any legal consequences. Uglow (1997) defines evidence as those items of information which are presented to the court by the parties as a means of persuading the court that their argument is correct – in other words, information advanced to prove their case. He further explains that, the court does not permit all information to be placed before it – it must be relevant, have probative weight, be non-prejudicial and not subject to any rule of exclusion. If the information possesses these characteristics, it is admissible evidence, often known as judicial evidence. The information placed before the court can be of different types: oral testimony by witnesses, normally their perceptions, especially what they have seen or heard, but perhaps also the opinions of expert witnesses; documents, often written but now frequently containing visual or sound recording or electronic data; real evidence, namely material objects such as fingerprints, automatic recording or a witness's demeanour (Uglow, 1997:14-15). From the accountability perspectives, government organizations have to provide 'evidence of business transactions'. They will put more efforts into creating, capturing and preserving documents concerning their decisions and activities.

In a democratic nation, it is essential for the government to deliver corporate governance as it promotes values which are important in gaining and retaining the people's trust. Records and archives, and the evidence they contain, are the instruments by which governments can promote a climate of trust and demonstrate an overall commitment to good government.

Hence, accountability and transparency can only be demonstrated if records and archives, which are the foundation of accountability, are well-managed. Ironically, good record and archives management is not only for demonstrating good governance but also for hiding mismanagement.

Well managed documentary is evidenced by the basis for formulating and evaluating policy, preserving the rule of law, managing finance and personnel and protecting the rights of individuals (Palmer 2010); the duties any government must observe. The Australian Council of Archives (1996) notes that “records are an indispensable ingredient in both internal and external organizational accountability”. In other words, records and information can be viewed as the lifeblood of business operations. Records and information show whether the organization or enterprise or persons in it have met defined legal, enterprise, social or moral obligations in specific cases. In all accountability forums, records and information are consulted as proof of activity by auditors or senior managers regarding the performance of an organization or an individual (Australian Council of Archives 1996)

## **11.0 Analysis of Records and Archives as a Missing Link to PSRs**

Information is the defining resource of an effective and efficient civil service. Good records and archives management is a core component of PSR especially in an increasingly information and technology-intensive environment because authentic and trustworthy records and archives and convenient access to them provide the fundamental means by which effectiveness and efficiency of a public service can be accomplished, demonstrated and measured. When records and archives management systems are inadequate, such as is generally the case within the Malawi public service, records and archives cannot be readily accessed or trusted as sources of evidence, informality prevails (National Archives of Malawi, 2014)

Malawi does not have a sound legal and regulatory infrastructure for records and archives management. Such a records and archives management system would enable the government identify the goals and objectives for a records and archives management program and then restructure existing services to support such a program. This restructuring would include review and revision of records legislation and organizational policies, procedures, and systems; considering implications for resource management, including staffing; and developing strategic plans. Our analysis has therefore established that the absence of a sound legal and regulatory infrastructure for records and archives management is the missing link to the success of the past PSRs as well as an impediment to the successful implementation of the current ones.

## **12.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **12.1 Conclusion**

The paper has attempted to demonstrate how poorly managed records and archives have adversely affected the broad scope of PSRs. It has also shown how collapsed records and archives systems have contributed to poor implementation and sustainability of effective development projects. It has also demonstrated how poor records and archives management has affected democracy, the rule of law, good governance, transparency and accountability. It has also stressed the importance of information for public servants to perform their duties efficiently and effectively. It has highlighted the importance of strengthening records and archives systems when planning development programmes and regulatory systems. It has also demonstrated the importance of records and archives to democracy, good governance, accountability and rule of law. Finally, the paper has established that records and archives are indeed the missing link to the success of the past PSRs and how their proper management would ensure success to the current ones.

### **12.2 Recommendations**

As a best practice, there is need to develop a legal and regulatory infrastructure for records and archives management. In developing such a system, it is very important to identify the goals and objectives for the program and restructure existing services to support the program. The paper, therefore, recommends the following to the Government of Malawi.

#### **12.2.1 Reviewing and Revising Records Legislation**

The first area to be reviewed and revised in the public sector is legislation. Comprehensive and up-to-date legislation is essential to ensure complete protection for all government and parastatal records and give the archival administration wide powers for securing and

protecting records. Within the records law itself, definitions, responsibility, and authority; the life-cycle concept of records and the continuum concept of records care; care of local government records and nongovernmental records; identification of places of deposit and provisions for public access; and financial management and related legal provisions should be clearly delineated to ensure that the legislation is comprehensive and usable.

### **12.2.2 Reviewing and Revising National Policies**

The country also needs to examine the policies affected by and affecting records and archives management. For example, the country's records legislation requires that public records must be preserved in such a manner that they will be legally admissible as evidence in a court of law. In this case, a policy should be developed to ensure that all government departments recognize the role of the records and archives institution in the protection of records as evidence.

### **12.2.3 Organizational Policies and Structures**

The country also needs to consider organizational structures and more specific policies required to conform to the developed legislative and larger policy changes. The organizational policy should provide specific policy information and should be accompanied by procedural information, explaining the specific steps involved in executing the process in question. The three documents – the national policy, organizational policy, and procedural information – should work together to guide the direction of the government with regard to records care.

The quality of any records and archives management program is directly related to the quality of the staff who operate it. Records and archives work must be seen as a worthwhile career, not as the posting of last resort for those who are unqualified, incompetent, or idle as is the current practice in Malawi.



When planning a restructured records and archives institution, it is necessary to consider the number of staff needed, the tasks they will undertake, their particular qualifications, and the requirements for their promotion through the civil service.

Adequate accommodation is essential to the proper functioning of the records and archives service. Three particular types of accommodation required are the records offices for the storage and use of current records; records centres for the storage and retrieval of semi-current records; and archival repositories for the preservation and use of archival records.

Sufficient and appropriate equipment and materials should be provided for the handling, storage, and preservation of records throughout their life-cycle. One of the benefits of such a records management program is that it encourages the efficient use of equipment and supplies, which reduces both costs and waste.

It is imperative that provision be made in the annual estimates of capital and running costs for sufficient funds to enable the records and archives institution and its departmental units to perform their functions properly.

Once the national and organizational policy requirements have been considered and the available resources assessed, it is necessary to restructure existing systems and plan for current and future activities on the basis of a strategic plan which identifies the goals and objectives of the organization, determines the best mechanisms for achieving those goals and puts into action the information gathered from a review of existing systems.

The success of any records and archives management program will depend upon the professional capacity and status of the staff responsible for records and archives management.

The head of any records and archives institution should ultimately be responsible for ensuring that records and archives staff throughout the organization are adequately trained for the work they are expected to undertake. All staff appointed to posts involving records and archives care, whether or not they already possess a professional, paraprofessional, or specialist qualification, must be trained in the specific policies and procedures of the institution. Training programs should be part of the overall management strategy, and they should contain elements to support professional or career development.

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