The National Archives and Records Center in Uganda: Why is operationalization so slow?

Overview

The management of records and archives is a critical aspect of the public service reforms because it enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery. Reforms cannot succeed without proper, reliable and readily available records. As part of the Public Service Reform programme, the National and Archives Records Centre was constructed. This was to promote efficient, economic and effective records and information management systems in the public service and oversee the preservation of the documented heritage archives for Uganda posterity.

The responsibility of National Archives and Records Centre (NARC) is under the Ministry of Public Service (MoPS) and the mandate is derived from the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, the National Archives and Records Act, 2001, the Access to Information Act, 2005, the Uganda Communication Act, 2000, the Public Finance and Accountability Act, 2003; and the Local Government Act, 1997 (with Amendment, 2001).

Despite the hefty investment by the World Bank and Government of Uganda, the facility (NARC) is not fully operational. The major roles of the facility are to: decongest registries in Ministries, Departments, Agencies (MDAs) and Local Governments, streamline records management in the public service and manage documented heritage of the country. So far, only two ministries have made use of the facility and these are; Ministry of Education and Sports, and Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.

The Budget Monitoring and Accountability Unit (BMAU) semi-annual report FY 2017/18 revealed a number of constraints hindering full operationalisation of NARC. This policy brief explores the key constraints affecting performance of the facility and proposes recommendations.

Key Issues

- Inadequate funding that has resulted in deficiency in terms of technical human resource and archival equipment and supplies.
- Non-compliance to the National Records and Archive Act, 2001 to establish NARC as an Agency and delayed recruitment of a director has affected the smooth administrative and financial operations of the facility.
- Lack of training of staff in digital and archival management in MDAs and LGs, hence they lack the skills and knowledge to manage the records and archives effectively and efficiently.
- Minimal use of retention and disposal schedules in MDAs and LGs by registry staff, and lack of serious follows up by MoPS and the Ministry of Local Government.

- Ambiguous and unrealistic annual work plans and that have no clear performance targets, measures and priorities.

Introduction

The mandate of records information management in MDAs and Local Governments is with the Ministry of Public Service. NARC currently is a section under Records and Information Department in MoPS.

The construction of the NARC was done in phases. Phase one began in 2013 and was completed in 2015 using Ug shs 20.3 billion (USD 5.7 million loan from the International Development Association (IDA) through the World Bank). The first phase was constructed by China Railway Jianchang Engineering Company (T) Ltd and handed over to MoPS on the 14th August, 2015. It comprises of standard repositories, a strong room for storage of classified information, search room for researchers, a library, an exhibition room and an incinerator for destruction of valueless records.

Phase two of the facility is expected to comprise of three levels of the records and archives, four levels of administration block and two levels of kitchen and the cafeteria. This is expected to cost Ug shs 28.6 billion but has not commenced due to inadequate funding.

With regard to the usage of the facility, all people intending to carry out research at the NARC are required to seek clearance from the National Council for Science and Technology. Foreign researchers intending to carry out research are required to pay USD 300; nationals who intend to carry out non-academic research are requested to pay USD300 dollars; Ugandan students pursuing masters' degrees and PhDs are required to pay 50USD. To date, only 50 researchers have so far visited the facility - 12 international and 38 locals.

Financial Performance

Table 1: Budget Allocations for NARC FY2014/15-2016/17

F/Y	Budget (Ug shs)	Release	Expenditure
14/ 15	4,411,981,137	4,161,599,468	4,161,597,799
15 /16	1,000,000,000	1,000,000,000	999,999,613
16/ 17	3,000,000,000	577,000,000	577,000,000
Total	**8,411,981,137**	**5,738,599,468**	**5,738,597,412**

Source: IFMS

NARC is currently funded under GoU development budget in the Ministry of Public Service. The World Bank stopped funding upon the closure of Uganda Public Service Enhancement Project (UPSPEP). The releases against the budget tremendously decreased in FY 2016/17 as shown in **Table 1** and this affected its operations. For instance, there is an outstanding bill worth Ug shs 1,159,462,354 billion for civil works and supervising consultants that was carried forward to FY2017/8.

Challenges

Non-Compliance to the National Records and Archives Act, 2001: For instance, Section 4(1) states that a *National Records and Archives Agency will be established;* however, the National Records and Archives Agency has never been established. Section 4(2) states that, *the facility will be managed by a Director* who has never been recruited. Section 6 (1) states *that, there shall be a National Records and Archives Agency Advisory Committee;* but this has never been constituted. The law also requires a number of regulations, manuals, schedules and records and an archives policy framework to be in place, however the existing ones are outdated and have never been reviewed. Lack of administrative and financial autonomy has affected the smooth operations of NARC to achieve its intended objectives.

Ambiguous Annual Work Plans: The annual planned outputs for FY 2017/8 under the Records Information Management Department for NARC are too ambiguous and unrealistic, with no clear quarterly work plans, performance targets and priorities compared to the current resource envelope. For instance, to date, a few mobile shelves have been purchased and most boxes and records are kept on the floor. Additionally, MoPS development budget is now for training staff which is recurrent in nature and unplanned for. The ministry's priority is equipping phase one to ensure effective utilization of the facility, however this is not the case.

Inadequate Technical Staff: There is   only one trained acting Government Archivist, one Principal Records Officer, two Senior Records Officers out of a total of 34 staff required in the staffing structure of NARC. These are managing huge stocks of unsorted semi current and archival records; the problem of inadequate technical staff has resulted in work overload, stress and slowed down work productivity at the facility. Compared to neighbouring Kenya National Archives that has more than 100 trained archivists and Tanzania with 30.

Lack of Archival Equipment and Supplies: Researchers have failed to read over 2 million micro files containing Uganda's history following the breakdown of micro filming reading machines in 2004. These have never been replaced and as a result the Government of Uganda is losing a lot of revenue from researchers.

Additionally, the facility lacks adequate mobile shelves, reprographic equipment for reproducing maps, photos, slides, films and microphotography, dust suckers and sprinkles, lighting, security systems and the laboratory lacks equipment. All these issues affect the smooth operations of the facility.

Archival records kept on the floor inside the NARC building

Minimal Use of Retention and Disposal Schedules: Despite the presence of retention and disposal schedules in MDAs and LGs, the use of these manuals by most officers in administration, human resource, finance and medical is very minimal resulting in semi records being kept for a longer periods and congestion

in registries instead of transferring the records to NARC for custody.

Lack of Records Centers in Most Local Governments: Section 5(b) of the NARC Act requires establishment of records centres for the maintenance of semi current records that eventually are transferred from MDAs and LGs to NARC for custody. However in most LGs, there are no records centers and personnel to handle the semi current records resulting in disorganized and congested registries which has affected service delivery. For instance, delayed and nonpayment of pension and gratuity releases from the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) is due to lack of archival records in LGs. The few existing record centers in some LGs are in a sorry state and non-functional e.g. in Mukono and Soroti District Local Governments.

Lack of Staff Training in Digital and Archival Management: In most MDAs and LGs, registry staff have not been trained in digital and archival management and as a result officers lack knowledge and skills of managing archival records in registries and departments. These have been poorly managed and remained congested with manual systems being used yet they are time consuming. This in itself defeats the objective of the National Archives and Records Centre whose role is to train staff.

Disorganized Records Centre at Mukono District LG

Conclusion

The modern constructed state of art facility in Uganda is widely revered by researchers and academicians in East Africa. However, the facility has challenges of inadequate funding, lack of appropriate institutional structure, and limited training of staff in digital and archival management. The problems faced by the NARC if well addressed by both Government, and other major stake holders would enable the facility perform much better in the preservation of information in Uganda.

Recommendations

1) The ministries of Public Service, Finance and Local Government should coordinate and establish NARC as an agency with its own semi-autonomous staffing structure and budget for smooth financial and administrative operations.

2) The MoPS, MoLG and NARC should create awareness on the role of the facility in magazines, intranets for wider coverage and publicity, organize workshops, networks. Awareness raising is very critical in the success of any archival activity especially in ministries, LGs and the general public.

3) The MoPS, MoLG and MFPED should develop and implement good records and archives management policies, set up standards and guidelines to be adhered to by MDAs and LGs. These should be incorporated as performance benchmarks in the performance agreements and appraisal of all accounting officers, human resource officers and records managers. Non-compliance should attract disciplinary action.

4) The MoPS through NARC staff should develop realistic annual work plans and budgets with clear performance targets, measures and priorities if the intended objectives of the facility have to be achieved.

5) The MoLG through the Department of Human Resource Planning and Development in MoPS together with the Civil Service College should comprehensively carry out a training needs analysis in MDAs and LGs and develop a comprehensive capacity building plan to address the skills gaps of staff in MDAs and LGs.

6) The MoPS and the Ministry of Local Government should have constant serious follow ups on the implementation of retention and disposal schedules, construction and rehabilitation of record centers in LGs.

7) This is a digital era, the Ministries of Public Service and that of Information and Communication Technology should coordinate and develop policies and systems to digitalize the archival function in MDAs, LGS and NARC for smooth operations.

References

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