

Records Management Improvement Programme – Sierra Leone

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Consultants working on behalf of the International Records Management Trust (IRMT) have commenced a government records management improvement programme in Sierra Leone. The project is funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) and is in conjunction with the creation of a human resource management office which is being developed by Public Administration International (PAI) and CoEn Consulting.

Sierra Leone is one of the poorest nations in the world (ranked bottom of the UN Development Programme Development Index for which data is available) with 70 to 80% of the population unemployed and its economy and infrastructure still to recover from the war. Corruption remains rife, business opportunities limited and morale in the civil service low.

The records management improvement component of the project aims to address long-standing concerns about the state of records in the Government of Sierra Leone. In August 2003, President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah noted, in a speech:

'The poor storage and retrieval of information slows down work of the public service and impacts negatively on policy formulation, planning and financial control. The improvement of record keeping is absolutely essential for moving the reform process forward.'

The Government is attempting to rebuild a sound infrastructure, enhance economic management capacity and deal firmly with corruption as a basis for providing efficient and effective service delivery and

alleviating poverty. It wants an integrated strategy linked to a sound legal and organisational structure and a capacity-building programme.



In the past there was a good standard of centralized records management and a registry system following traditional British practice. However, record keeping practices deteriorated over time, and many vital records were lost during the civil war, though fortunately the Archives survived. Today chronic records management problems affect every government ministry, department and agency. Recordkeeping on most aspects of government business including financial transactions, resource allocations, policy development and case management is poor. Information is largely uncontrolled; records staff often untrained, registries poorly organized and storage insecure. Where records do exist they have often been altered and/or papers deliberately removed from files. Confidence in the records is almost non-existent. Computerised records and document management systems do not exist and electronic records, although starting to appear, particularly in terms of a government wide integrated financial management system, are still few and far between.



Local Records Management Team

Against this background records management in most instances has to be rebuilt from scratch. Needless to say this is a challenging task. International Records Management Trust consultants, who include individuals based in the UK, Ghana and USA (including a citizen of Sierra Leone) work very closely under the excellent leadership of Albert Moore, the Senior Government Archivist of Sierra Leone. A local team of registry and archives staff has been brought together and have received basic training in appraisal, business processes, functional analysis and file classification schemes. Pilot agencies have been identified, records management capacity assessments conducted and a broad survey of needs undertaken. Establishing a series of model registries is one goal of the project. In addition, identification of semi current records and archival material held in the Archives run records centre has been completed.

One of the key issues facing the Government of Sierra Leone is the necessity to gain control over establishment, personnel and payroll records. 'Ghost workers' (ie those who are on the payroll but who should not be)

are prevalent which has a substantial impact on the personnel budget and remuneration of civil servants. An information mapping exercise of personnel and financial records has been commenced to identify weak or non-existent records controls. Reorganizing human resource records, building secure storage, training staff and developing a manual and guidelines are seen as priorities. Work has also commenced on a new public records and archives act as well as on a scheme of service in order to strengthen the legal, regulatory and organizational frameworks. While it is hoped that there can be some quick wins, in the longer term it will be critical to monitor progress, evaluate results and assess the outcomes of the project.



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