

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT LIBRARIES/RESOURCE CENTRES TO SUPPORT E-GOVERNANCE AND OPEN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN UGANDA

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Abstract

The paper begins by introducing Uganda's location and Uganda government structure of Legislature, Judiciary and Executive and the role of government. The major objectives of government resource centers are to gather, analyze and disseminate information about their parent organizations (IFLA 2011). The strategic direction of resource centers is set by management of the parent government organization; users are defined by the organization. Government resource centers serve the staff of the organization, although the Access to Information Act (2005) directs that the public is free to access government information, these centers are the central point through which the public is able to access government information. The resource center staff/librarians needs information management system for purposes of handling the process of acquisition, technical processing (classification, cataloguing, indexing and abstracting), storage and retrieval of information. Such systems are many and varied; they can be manual or automated. Government has a range of different departments and organizations to carry out its functions, and these should have a library or resource center that supports the needs of their parent body. E-governance was defined to comprise the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support public services, government administration, democratic processes, and relationships among citizens, civil society, the private sector, and the state. National Electronic Government (e-Government) Policy Framework in 2011 designed by government of Uganda as a policy framework for implementation of e-governance. Policy and legal framework for government libraries management in Uganda were examined. These included: Uganda Vision 2040, The National Development Plan (2015/16 – 2019/20), Information Management Services Policy (Draft) 2011, Uganda Library Policy, Constitution, Access to Information Act 2005, National Library Act 2003, Computer misuse act 2010.

Keywords: eGovernance; Government libraries; Uganda

1. Introduction

Republic of Uganda, (the pearl of Africa) is a landlocked country in East Africa. It is bordered to the east by Kenya, to the north by South Sudan, to the west by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to the southwest by Rwanda, and to the south by Tanzania. The government of Uganda operates through the three pillars which are: Legislature, Judiciary and Executive. The executive arm of government functions through Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) and Local Governments. Examples of MDAs in Uganda include Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development, Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), National Planning Authority (NPA) and Uganda Communications Commission (UCC)

2. Government

Government's role includes the making of laws and their implementation, and the provision of defense and security, health, education, social care, cultural support, management of the economy, trade, and relations with other countries. The tasks of any government can be grouped according to the three arms of government which are: Executive, Judiciary and Legislature (Kagoda 2008).

Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) generate and consume information in the process of carrying out their activities and in the process of meeting the needs of their clientele. To do their work, government MDAs need information to keep them abreast of events in their field of specialization and to update their knowledge and skills. Documents where this information can be obtained are kept in resource centers which are the information focal points where the different stakeholders can easily and freely access information. This paper presents facts on resource centers in Uganda government MDAs and their roles and how to support e-governance in Uganda.

3. Government Libraries/Resource Centers

IFLA (2007) defines government resource centers as libraries of government departments that are established to serve government with the primary audience being government employees although the actual audience served may be broader than government employees. Toornstra (2001) and Bolt (2008) states that Resource centers of Government Departments provide information to policy makers, government employees, and sometimes to the general public. It is essential that resource centers of government departments are well managed so as to collect and provide relevant information needed by government employees for decision making.

The major objectives of government resource centers are to gather, analyze and disseminate information about their parent organizations (IFLA 2011). Toornstra (2001) and Bolt (2008) states that more information is becoming available in electronic form, hence able to be accessed online, resource centers therefore no longer have to physically own these resources since they can be accessed online through the Internet.

3.1 Management of Government libraries/resource centers

According to Ikoja-Odongo (2003), administration tasks for government ministry resource centers are not very different from the management tasks for other resource centers. The strategic direction of resource centers is set by management of the parent government organization; users are defined by the organization. Government resource centers serve the staff of the organization, although the Access to Information Act (2005) directs that the public is free to access government information, these centers are the central point through which the public is able to access government information.

The resource center staff/librarians needs information management system for purposes of handling the process of acquisition, technical processing (classification, cataloguing, indexing and abstracting), storage and retrieval of information. Such systems are many and varied; they can be manual or automated. These systems include traditional cataloguing and classification schemes. Information management systems can be manual or automated. The automated selection system are time saving when it comes to going through a task of selecting information that matches users' needs.

All resource centers, however small they are, still need some time spent on management tasks. Philip Kotler (1999) identifies management tasks as planning, reporting, evaluating, staff management, financial management, service delivery, marketing/communications and stakeholder and client relationships. Henri Fayol, an industrialist, in the early parts of the twenty first century wrote that: managers perform five functions: planning; organizing, coordinating, leading and controlling.

3.2 Types of government libraries

Government libraries can be categorized following the three pillars of government which are: legislature, judiciary and the executive. The three categories of government resource centers therefore are: legislative libraries, judicial libraries and executive libraries.

3.3 Legislative Libraries

These are established to support members of the Legislature/Parliament and their officers and staff at national level and are usually for their exclusive use. Parliamentary librarians have their own set of standards issued by IFLA. In some countries there are state or regional legislatures, and each of these will have a library to support members of the legislature or assembly and their officers and staff.

3.4 Executive Libraries

The executive arm of government consists of a number of ministries and other bodies, which are responsible for the administration of government policy. If policies require decentralization, several different departments, attached or subordinate offices, autonomous organizations, statutory bodies, public sector undertakings/agencies and projects may be created. These libraries exist to serve the Ministers, technocrats in different government departments.

3.5 Judiciary Libraries

Black's Law Dictionary defines the judicial branch as: "The branch of state and federal government whose function is to interpret, apply and generally administer and enforce the laws." In Uganda these include libraries of the Supreme Court, high court library and other court libraries.

4. Functions of Government Libraries/ Resource Centers

Government has a range of different departments and organizations to carry out its functions, and these should have a library or resource center that supports the needs of their parent body. These libraries have a key role to play in their organizations and should be at their core. They may also have an important role to play in a country's national information structure.

Governments produce a lot of information resources in the form of books, magazines, reports etc. in the process of carrying out their functions. Examples of these resources are: ministerial policy statements, annual reports, conference reports, travel benchmarking reports, budget framework papers and other document that improves staff performance for the attainment of the mission of the MDA. These documents are kept in the resource center where they are centrally located for easy access by staff from different departments of the government body and other stake holders.

Kagoda (2006), Buhani (nd) and Majumdar (nd) highlights the following as functions of government resource centers in facilitating e-governance:

- To assist the Government and Citizen by making available all new non-commercial publications released by a Ministry / Department online concurrently with other forms of dissemination.
- To provide free access to information by installing 24/7 information kiosks;
- To provide One-Window Information System for all issues concerning the E-Governance
- To provide information on the day to day working of the government agencies.
- To supply relevant literature to the administrators and policy makers in government which they need for taking decisions and necessary action.
- To supply relevant literature to the officers and administrators for their continuing education and advance information in respect of subjects they are concerned with.
- Organizations and individuals need to make informed decisions in order to manage effectively and efficiently.
- To coordinate access to books, journals and magazines
- To coordinate the provision of information through office intranet and internet.
- To coordinate accessibility of online databases and other online information resources.
- To manage the content on the websites
- To provide current awareness services

Government Librarians face a vast array of new electronic resources – e-books, e-journals, e-databases, digital audio, digital video, and a myriad of new digital storage options available via the Internet to complement hard copies. Government Librarians must continue developing their skills and ability to work with technologies to access and use the new e-resources.

Due to information explosion, the quantity of information resources is increasing at a high speed leading to information overflow, government ministries hence need a well-managed resource center to enable access to the much needed information resource. It is sometimes argued that people in least developed countries like Uganda do not have problems of information explosion and that rather there is scarcity of it. It is true that they do not generate as much information as developed countries but equally true that a great deal of information generated is not systematically organized hence not easy to access, which results in many users not using the center on daily basis.

4.1 Role of government resource centers/libraries

The primary function of government libraries is to serve government at different levels by making available all kinds of information published by government, non-bodies and individuals. Their clientele are elected representatives, ministers, administrators, scientists and other specialists, researchers, and, in some cases, the general public. The number of libraries may be considerable, and they can differ widely in size and scope. Libraries have a responsibility to contribute to and support the goals of the parent organization and to support the basic functions of their parent bodies such as: the formulation of programs and policies; administrative and regulatory actions; advisory functions; and research programs.

4.2 Electronic Government Defined

Bannister (2012) states that E-governance comprises the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support public services, government administration, democratic processes, and relationships among citizens, civil society, the private sector, and the state. Electronic Government (e-Government) involves focusing on the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to assist in the transformation of government structures and operations for cooperative and integrated service delivery. If the technology does not result in better outcomes for citizens and agencies it will mean nothing more than an added cost to government – a cost that government is increasingly being asked to account for by its citizens. e-government is not just simply putting government forms on-line, creating static organizational websites or posting simple tax schedules on-line, but rather it is the integration of government operations in the delivery of services to her citizenry and the business sector.

Broadly defined, Electronic Government (e-Government) is the use of ICT to;

- Promote a more efficient and effective government;
- Facilitate accessibility to government services;
- Allow greater public access to information;
- Make government more accountable to citizens.

E-Government involves delivering services via the Internet, telephone, electronic media, community centers (self-service or facilitated by others), wireless devices or other communications systems.

5. E-Governance in Uganda

According to Rwangoga (2006) it is emerging that ICTs in Uganda have been identified as a major tool for achieving socio-economic development by the Government of Uganda. The government of Uganda is implementing the national backbone infrastructure project aimed to connect all government institution to simplify accessibility of government information.

5.1 National Electronic Government (e-Government) Policy Framework

Government of Uganda designed a National Electronic Government (e-Government) Policy Framework in 2011 as a policy framework to implement e-governance. The purpose of the National e-Government Program for Uganda is to efficiently use ICT in public administration in order to improve public service delivery and democratic processes, enhance the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and other international obligations.

The Vision is to ensure online accessibility of all government services and opportunities for community participation in a friendly, transparent and efficient manner for all sections of the society. The Mission is to enhance and promote the efficiency and transparency in the functioning of government through the increased use of ICT for online service delivery to citizens and business. The Strategic e-Government Objective of this program is to continuously improve the efficiency of, and access to government information and services.

5.2 The Principles to be followed during the implementation of the e-Government Program

There are six principles that will guide the e-Government program implementation. These principles shall act as the ‘critical questions’ that will test all decisions made in relation to developing the e-Government initiatives. The principles include:

- Citizen-centric
- Accessibility and choice
- Trust, confidence and Security
- Better governance
- Collaboration and integrity, and
- Accountability

5.3 The Key Pillars for the National e-Government Framework for Uganda

Six pillars have been earmarked for the successful implementation of the e-Government program in Uganda. These include:

- Institutional Framework which stipulates the core ministries, departments and agencies, private sector, academia and NGOs specifying roles and responsibilities for each.
- A Legal and Regulatory Framework meant to provide the requisite environment for the e-Government service delivery between government, citizens, business and non-citizens.
- Identified priority e-Government applications and services
- Common ICT infrastructure and Shared services
- A deliberate e-Government skills development program for civil servants and other key actors
- A deliberate communication and advocacy program will need to be developed to popularize the benefits of the e-Government program across the country.

6. E-Government 2.0

e-Government 2.0 envisages new forms of governance that are bottom up. A good account of this vision is provided by Millard (2010) who describes the use of tools such as social networking, blogs, wikis, mashups and to create not only new forms of governance, but new services generated from within communities themselves rather than being provided by the state. This vision has all the usual good words attached to it, such as open, participative, engaging, empowering, personalized. While there are questions as to how effective this is, it is a genuine form of e-governance because it uses technology to change the way that processes occur in a way that would be impractical with ICT. This is true both in terms of reporting, pressuring the authority to respond, making the authority visibly accountable and engaging potentially all citizens in the maintenance of the fabric of their community. Social networking is creating new forms of governance and has taken e-governance to another level where the community is involved in decision making. The capacity for localized decision making or community action based on these technologies will lead to sustainable development. The issue of e-governance 2.0 faces administrative, professional and political challenges in the case of Uganda. This calls for more skills training for librarians to look for a way on how they can use these facilities to access information.

7. Policy and Legal Framework for Government Libraries Management in Uganda

7.1 Uganda Vision 2040

Uganda's Vision 2040 provides development paths and strategies to operationalize Uganda's Vision statement which is "A Transformed Ugandan Society from a Peasant to a Modern and Prosperous Country within 30 years" from 2007. A transformed Uganda can only happen when Ugandans are informed and are able to access information on and about their country.

7.2 The National Development Plan (2015/16 – 2019/20)

The Uganda five year National Development Plan (2015/16 – 2019/20) succeeded (2010/11 – 2014/15) all under Vision 2040. The goal of this Plan is to attain middle income status by 2020. This could be realized through strengthening the country's competitiveness for sustainable wealth creation, employment and inclusive growth. Information is wealth, for Uganda to reach middle income level libraries which are information focal points cannot be ignored in any way.

7.3 Information Management Services Policy (Draft) 2011

The vision of the draft information management services policy is knowledge based economy where national development and governance are achieved through effective utilization of Information Management services. The Mission is to provide efficient and effective management of information resources to fundamentally transform public service delivery. The policy goal is to guide the effective use of IMS in all Ministries, Departments and Agencies.

7.4 Uganda Library Policy

The National Library Policy seeks to provide a framework within which the country can use library resources in its advancement towards a knowledge society. The policy shall create a coordinated approach to library service provision to ensure that information resources and services are availed to the citizens and that they are effectively and efficiently utilized. It takes cognizance of the need to encourage the reading culture among Ugandans to grow and also to ensure that all citizens can have equal access to these services. This will only be possible if all those in the book sector cooperate with each other.

The vision of the policy is a progressive, information seeking and literate society that uses library and information services for lifelong learning. The mission of the policy is to contribute to the creation of a knowledge based society through the provision of library and information services countrywide. The goal is to ensure that all Ugandans appreciate, seek and effectively utilize library and information services for personal and socio-economic development.

8. Legal Framework

8.1 Constitution

Article 41, close 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda states that "Every Citizen has a right of access to information in the possession of the state or any other organ or agency of the state. This calls for government departments to create a mechanism where the public is able to access information in various government departments, divisions and units. This clearly justifies why there is need for a well-managed resource center in every government department to be a first point of call for any public information that may be wanted by authorized users.

8.2 Access to Information Act 2005

An Act to provide for the right of access to information pursuant to article 41 of the Constitution; to prescribe the classes of information referred to in that article; the procedure for obtaining access to that information, and for related matters. This Act applies to all information and records of Government ministries, departments, local governments, statutory corporations and bodies, commissions and other Government organs and agencies, unless specifically exempted by this Act.

8.3 National Library Act 2003

This is an act to provide for the establishment of the national library of Uganda, the depositing and preservation of publications, the setting up of an information referral service and library coordination and to provide for other related matters.

8.4 Computer misuse act 2010

An act to make provision for the safety and security of electronic transactions and information systems; to prevent unlawful access, abuse or misuse of information systems including computers and to make provision for securing the conduct of electronic transactions in a trustworthy electronic environment and other related matters.

9. Conclusion

Government resource centers, being usually considered under the class of “special libraries”, are established within the bodies of governmental institutions, both at levels of local or central government. Regardless of the nature of the government organization served by a government library, the services provided by the library are essential to the efficient and effective implementation of a government organization’s mandate. With e-government data, documents, images, and services moving online, it is imperative that libraries follow suit providing reference, referral, and organizational services online. Training is a must for use of government information. The issue of e-governance 2.0 faces administrative, professional and political challenges in the case of Uganda.

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