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FUNDING MEMORY INSTITUTIONS IN GHANA: THE CASE OF PUBLIC RECORDS AND ARCHIVES ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT (PRAAD)

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Abstract

Information is the beacon of organizations globally. The need to properly manage information to serve as evidence of every activity to ensure accountability, transparency and probity is an essential but often ignored practice in most memory institutions worldwide and especially in Africa. Studies have shown that more focus is directed towards media, civil society, human rights and parliamentary democracy to the neglect of memory institutions when it comes to governance issues.

Charged with the responsibility to 'preserve Ghana's collective memory by facilitating and overseeing the efficient management of records of all MDAs, PRAAD's mandate has been limited as a result of the department been starved financially. Support to PRAAD over the years has basically come from donor agencies like IRMT, DFID, and IDA of the World Bank, Danish government, National Archives of Netherlands among others.

Consequently, this paper explores ways through which PRAAD is funded and attempts to identify ways in which PRAAD can strengthen its funding capacity through nationwide advocacy, publicity and other grant seeking activities. The study was guided by the qualitative paradigm. The Director of PRAAD, together with the heads of all the three departments (records centre, preservation service branch (PSB) and the archives unit) were interviewed. A major finding was that lack of funding and logistics had undermined the role of PRAAD. The paper further emphasized on the need for government to intensify support for PRAAD to enable the department to effectively and competently perform its mandate for the development of Ghana through safeguarding the nation's collective memory for informed decision making.

Keywords: Memory Institutions, Public Records, Funding, National Archives, Ghana

Background

Libraries, archives, museums and galleries are the memory institutions of all economies. Information be it scientific, cultural, historical, evidential, demographic, sociological or pictographic among others are kept and managed by such institutions for research, informational value or in pursuance of legal obligations. These institutions play a vital role in the heritage and cultural well-being of individuals and nations, yet the support they receive from government especially in Africa is very little.

The Public Records and Archives Administration (PRAAD) formerly known as the National Archives of Ghana is one of the key memory institutions in Ghana. It is mandated to manage public records under PRAAD Act 535 of 1997. PRAAD is structured into three major divisions which are: Records Management, Training and Research (Preservation Service Branch) and the National Archives. According to Act 535 of 1997: Section 1, PRAAD is responsible for the proper and effective management of records in public institutions. In Section 26 of the Act, public records have been defined as records that belong to the Republic of Ghana, created, received, and maintained by any public official or employee of a public office, a court with jurisdiction within Ghana or any judge or court official, or by any individual so designated by regulation made under section 26 of the Act. Among the responsibilities of PRAAD according to Act 535 of 1997 is to "establish effective records management systems in Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) throughout Ghana and to exercise custodial responsibility for all public records of permanent value and making them physically and intellectually accessible to government officials, researchers and individuals within the regulatory framework". As a department under the head of civil service which is under the Office of the President, it is expected of PRAAD to have adequate budgetary allocation to enable them operate effectively and thus exercise their mandate.

Problem statement

About 70% of funds for the operations of public institutions come from the government especially with memory institutions of which PRAAD is no exception. These institutions mostly compete with equally essential public sectors like education, health, security services, and energy and water sectors among others which operate from public limited funds. Most governments prefer to direct their budgets to institutions and sectors that will have immediate impact on citizens' social needs and thus spending funds on memory institutions is considered a luxury. Opara (2012) stated that Nigerian political leaders often prefer to spend available financial resources on projects which have immediate impact on the people and which in their calculation could translate into votes during election. He added that even improved library services and high demand for services are unlikely to earn the public library the sympathy of the funding authorities (government).

Although PRAAD also operate on internally generated funds, it is not enough to cater for most of their expenses. A preliminary investigation showed that PRAAD lacks innovative ways to raise funds to support their operations. The problem is that there is over-reliance on government support to sustain PRAAD. However, total dependence on public funding to run public sector institutions according to Coffman (2004) has a disadvantage in the sense that when the economy is in crisis and with no other source of funding, there is a cut in the budget and thus it affect sectors whose services are not critical to the needs of people especially when the government of the day does not appreciate the role of memory institutions. Currently, their Internally Generated Funds (IGF) comes from charges on photocopying of some archival materials available for public use, user fees, donations, grants and sometimes contracts to set up archives and records systems for organizations.

Although the mission, goals and objectives of PRAAD are clearly stated with a strong legal status, authority and purpose, it appears not much attention is given to the institution by government in terms of logistics and funding.

Objectives of the study

Memory institutions in Ghana over the years have suffered severally from fund deficiency. Their roles are continually undermined as a result of their dependence on public funding. In order to remain relevant, they need to look at other sources of funds to operate. The paper explores ways in which PRAAD can adequately generate funds for their operations to remain relevant. It also examines other innovative ways that can help PRAAD have access to other sources of funds to function.

Literature review

Memory institutions' are confronted with many challenges, from resources, technological change, and shifting public expectations (Council of Canadian Academies, n.d.). However, in Ghana, financial resources remain the biggest challenge to such institutions especially public libraries and archives. It is important to note that majority of literature in the area of study deals with libraries especially academic and public libraries rather than archives because fundraising had been of interest to libraries since the early 1990s.

Knell (2007) stated that cultural organizations in the UK do not tend to diversify their funds as much as their counterparts in the health, social and educational sectors. Although some UK non-profit organizations have increasingly become more savvy at attracting funding from a wider variety of sources and exploiting their own assets, the cultural sector remains highly dependent on government funding (Selwood, 2007). Opara (2012) opined that Nigerian public libraries depend almost totally on government public funding for their sustenance and that non-public funding source for libraries in Nigeria is hardly up to one percent (1%). This challenge is not mutually exclusive to the UK and

Nigeria. Ghana and for that matter PRAAD fits in the same situation. In a study conducted by Akussah (1989; 1991), it was found out that government considered the National Archives of Ghana (NAG) as falling within the category of expensive luxuries and as such did not give the department its fair share of funding and attention.

Goodman (2008) indicated that given Australia's wealth, public libraries and archives across all of its states and territories were among the most underfunded public institutions in the country. On the contrary most developing countries are not well endowed financially and so the limited resources available in such countries especially Ghana is distributed to public sectors' according to the sectors the government of the day deemed important. Studies conducted all over the world on funding memory institutions is highly concentrated on practical strategies of fundraising by memory institutions, fundraising as an archives function and the use of new media such as the world wide web and other social media networks. According to Ray et al (2013), traditionally, philanthropy is the bedrock of memory institutions funding. Since the 1990s, governments around the world have implemented tax policies to encourage potential donors. Ray et al further stated that in the UK, tax schemes encouraged philanthropic behaviour in memory institutions. On the contrary this is not the situation in Ghana.

European funding for culture is based on celebrating diversity and attracting tourists. Fundraising is not just about promoting collections or conserving them (Ray et al, 2013). In Ghana, little has been done when it comes to promoting institutions such as PRAAD through publicity to attract tourists. The only hype about PRAAD is the deteriorating nature of the institution and as a result putting the nation's collective memory at risk (Yeboah, 2013). However it appears this has not yielded any substantive results in bringing government's attention on the department.

Huang (2006) as cited by Ray et al (2013) stated that if cultural institutions want to manage and maintain existing collections, provide access to the ever growing electronic resources and launch innovative programs and new services, they must fundraise. Memory institutions such as PRAAD should have innovative outreach programs that can help them raise funds to help build the institution. However this has not been the case. Other innovative strategies can be through linking social networking to fundraising. Peacock (1969) posits that archival websites are important tools to promote activities of the institution and find new donors. Hence, their development can involve partnerships between institutions and companies which could provide computers, smart phones and expertise to create new software. An example is Association Wikimedia, which has built strong partnerships not only with institutions but also with local authority archives. They used the Wiki framework to build a new bridge between the collections and Internet users. The Wiki project has provided a way for the local authority archives to give the archives increased publicity through the

web to reach new audiences, attract new users, and to look for potential donors (Ray et.al 2013). Social media tools are important in a fundraising project because the institutions are given additional support and the opportunity to raise funds from new donors.

Fundraising is an act and in achieving a successful result, one has to have the skills in convincing the donor community why they need to contribute to help their course. Ray et al (2013) stated that skills and perceptions are prerequisites in order to ensure the best funding mix for archive services. Most importantly, fundraising depends on personal contacts and encouragement. Notwithstanding this, with good partnership, memory institutions can raise funds to support their operations. Some of the skills according to Ray et al (2013) are improved organizational competence and innovative programs. Does PRAAD have these strategies in place to help them fundraise? This and many are the focus of this study.

Methodology

The qualitative research method was used for the study. Connaway and Powell (2010) noted that qualitative research tends to apply to a more holistic and natural approach to the resolution of a problem and gives more attention to the subjective aspects of human experiences and behaviour. Thus small samples are often acceptable. The population for the study was four (4) respondents which comprise the Director of PRAAD (1) and the three heads of the records centre (1), preservation service branch (1) and the national archives (1) were interviewed. The researcher believed they had good understanding of the operations of PRAAD and were in better position to provide information that would help the researcher achieve the objectives of the study. Interview schedules were fixed with each respondent and their responses were recorded through writing. The data gathered was analysed using content analysis.

Findings and Discussions

Funding adequacy

Adequate levels of funding are crucial to the success of memory institutions in carrying out their roles effectively and productively. Opara (2012) indicated that without suitable levels of funding over the long term, it is impossible to develop policies for service provision and make the most effective use of available resources. When asked about the sources of funding for managing PRAAD and whether they were adequate, respondents clearly stated that their sources of fund were from government subventions, internally generated funds from charges on some of their user services such as photocopies and fees for accessing public materials from the search rooms; bindery and curative services provided by the preservation service branch. The Director added that these sources of funds were not enough to manage PRAAD effectively as they want to. In addition, the heads of the three

units stated that their budgets for operation were always not fully covered due to the financial status of the institution.

The Director together with the three heads stated that, support to PRAAD in the past had basically come from donor agencies like the Department for International Development (DFID), the International Development Agency (IDA) of the World Bank and the International Records Management Trust (IRMT) who implemented the Records Management Reform Programme in Ghana. Furthermore, the Head of the National Archives emphasized that the Danish government in the 1990s was very supportive to the National Archives through DANIDA (Danish International Development Agency) programme and the National Archives of Netherlands too was extremely supportive in helping acquire equipment for conservation of materials.

Ayenor (2007) indicated in his studies that insufficient funding had led to PRAAD being unable to automate her records. A report by Yeboah, 2012, showed that the national records continue to deteriorate because of poor facilities and financial difficulties. In a follow-up to the situation, the Head of the National Archives stated that agencies like National Information Technology Agency (NITA) and Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communication (GIFEC) have donated computers and have set up a training room for them but the department still needs more support from government, donor agencies and corporate institutions.

Allocation of resources

PRAAD has always suffered the fate of financial deficiency. When asked how they allocated their resources, all the respondents stated that about three-fourth of their budget was used to cater for employees' salary leaving them with virtually nothing for other operations. The Director further explained that more than half of their budgetary allocation of about GHS 2.9 million was used for personal emoluments, leaving very little for operations in all the ten regional offices. Twenty-six years down the line as asserted by Akussah (1989; 1991) nothing has changed. Governments over the years have not given the department the needed attention and support. One reason is the lack of awareness of the value of information in general and particularly in government circles (Yeboah, 2013). Paramount among the numerous challenges according to Akussah (1991) is the lukewarm attitude of successive governments to the whole issue of information processing and storage.

It appears that PRAAD has not been on the main agenda of government. Maybe if the institution is well marketed and the society becomes more aware of their importance, they can have all the support needed from government, the donor community and feature on the main agenda of government. Woode (2008) revealed in his study that the greatest challenge faced by PRAAD was the threat of inadequate financial resources from government because government funding to the department was

very meagre. Various researches and reports on PRAAD over the years have shown the same trend (Asamoah, 2013; Yeboah, 2013; Yeboah, 2012; Woode, 2008; Ayenor, 2007; Akotia, 2003; Akussah, 2003; and Woryno, 2003).

Expanding funding

Memory institutions need to take a serious look at diversifying their sources of funding (Coffman, 2006). In addition, having so many eggs in one basket is not a wise strategy no matter the funding source because it is highly risky, particularly when that basket is local tax revenue. In agreement with Coffman (2006) PRAAD can diversify its sources of funding through other innovative ways like outreach programmes, collaborating with some private institutions interested in cultural heritage and are willing to sponsor them. In this direction the respondents indicated that they had appealed to the donor community to lend their support and added that tullow oil so far has pledged to support the modernization of PRAAD which had not been executed. It was very interesting to note that not even the official website of PRAAD was accessible to the public. In this age of information technology one would have expected that the institution at least has a website where the public can know about them and those interested can form partnership with them. This seems not to be the case as respondents emphasized that they were financially handicapped and cannot afford the cost of upgrading and maintaining their official website. The social media presence of PRAAD was not much felt as the only platform they were quite active on was Facebook.

Conclusion

Numerous public memory institutions in Ghana are at the verge of collapse due to their over-reliance on government support for their operations. To remain relevant and be at a competitive advantage with the private ones these institutions' such as PRAAD need to be proactive and find other means to raise funds to operate effectively for their continued existence. Some innovative strategies such as collaborating with private organizations interested in cultural heritage and other sources of funding aside government would be a blessing in disguise.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study. It is anticipated that these recommendation would help the management of PRAAD look at other means of raising funds to help the institution grow.

PRAAD should be committed to the need to keep evolving and have a clear direction and plans for the future. This can be achieved through bilateral corporation with development agencies aided by government. Government should seriously look at signing bilateral agreement with developed

institutions like United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Bank among others who can help train and develop PRAAD through their development programmes and funding for memory institutions.

The governance system of PRAAD should be strengthened. Management should be proactive and dynamic in exercising their core mandate in order to remain relevant. Collaborating with National Information Technology Agency (NITA) would help them integrate the functional requirements of records management and archives into the development of e-records/information. For example PRAAD was not involved in the development of e-cabinet (information system of government sessions) which can have repercussion on the management of such e-records in the future.

PRAAD should intensify their marketing strategy (advocacy and publicity programmes) through mass media and social networking to attract donors to help strengthen the institution.

PRAAD should be given authority like the "Ghana Library Authority" with a lot more autonomy and working in close collaboration with other heritage institutions and be supported with the consolidated funds. This would give PRAAD a voice for an input into all aspects of records and archives management in the Ministries, Departments and Agencies.

Government should group all memory institutions together under one umbrella. For example "Ghana Heritage Institution" in order to strengthen their collaboration and attract donor agencies to support them. This will strengthen the sources of funding for memory institutions so that the ones that are in financial crisis can be supported by the ones that are well established and financially endowed.

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Appendix

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE HEADS OF PRAAD

Which Ministry, Department or Agency are you attached to?

Has your attachment to that Ministry, Department or Agency been beneficial?

Who funds your entire operations?

Are your budgets for operations adequately covered?

Do you have any publicity or advocacy plan?

If yes, have you embarked on any publicity or advocacy programme?

Who are your donors?

Has there been any interest shown by corporate institutions?

Has there been any international collaboration with agencies like UNDP, World Bank etc. to help PRAAD through their development programmes?

What recommendations would you make to improve the operations and effectiveness of PRAAD?