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Records Management Practices in Public Service and Effects on Service Delivery

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A research report submitted to the Graduate School of Public Development Management, University of Witwatersrand in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management (Public and Development Management).

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ABSTRACT

Records management is an important component of information management. Records represent a major source of information that provides evidence of decisions, actions, and interactions between government and citizens. Records management practices underpin all aspects of public service administration, and are a critical activity for effective service delivery. Records are regarded as the "lifeblood of public administration" (Fletcher, 1990). To this end, record keeping is a fundamental and core activity of public sector management. Without reliable records, there can be no accountability and no rule of law. The failure to manage records leads to poor decisions and an inability to measure programmes and service effectiveness.

The Directorate of Social Security within the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development is used as a case study to investigate records management practices and effects on service delivery. The key issues raised in the study were: records management processes and procedures, records management policy and the regulatory environment, influence of Information Technology on records management practices. The research findings were assessed against the International Standard for Records Management (ISO 15489) to identify gaps between best practices captured in the standard, and what is happening in reality in relation to records management policies, procedures and processes. The standard (ISO 15489) is endorsed by the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa. It provides guidelines on records management practices and a benchmark to measure the effectiveness of records management programmes and systems in organizations.

The key findings include:

- There is no records management policy statement, the social grant records are managed without recourse to legislative requirements
- Training is not focused on records management principles.

- The implementation of the Social Development Information Management System has brought improvements to service delivery, though there are still infrastructural and communication problems between social grant offices at local, district levels.
- Respondents cited lack of human resources and functional capacity in some areas of social grant processing as an obstacle to service delivery.

DECLARATION

I declare that this report is my own, unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Management (in the field of Public and Development Management) in the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

_____

PUMLA NGWENDU

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late parents Nomini and Mangaliso.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to:

My supervisor, Dr. Mike Muller, for his guidance and assistance;

The officials of the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development for making the basic data available;

My family and friends for their support, encouragement and understanding throughout the research period;

Pat Mothopeng, Librarian at the Wits Management Library for her support and encouragement in my darkest hours.

ABBREVIATIONS

NARSA	National Archives and Records Service of South Africa
MIS	Management Information System
SDIMS	Social Development Information Management System.
EFMS	Electronic File Management System
ISO 15489	International Standard Organizations
DSOD	Department of Social Development
IMT	Interim Management Team
SOCPEN	Social Security Pension System
PERSAL	Personnel and Salaries System
GEPF	Government Employees and Pension Fund

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Service Cycle

Figure 2a: Programme Expenditure Summary

Figure 2b: Departmental Expenditure

Figure 3: Components of a records/information lifecycle

Figure 4: Organizational structure of Social Security Directorate

Figure 5: Graphic representation of a District Coordination Model

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Summary of Departmental Expenditure

Table 2: Interview Sample

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii
DECLARATION iv
DEDICATION v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT vi
ABBREVIATIONS vii
LIST OF FIGURES viii
LIST OF TABLES ix
TABLE OF CONTENTS x
CHAPTER ONE 12
1.1 Introduction 12
1.1.1 The Service Cycle 13
1.1.2 Government interventions to improve services 14
1.1.3 Legislative and regulatory framework 14
1.1.4 Information Technology and Records Management 15
1.2 Background of the Study 16
1.3 Statement of the Problem 19
1.4 Objectives of the Study 20
1.5 Research Questions 20
1.6 Significance of the Study 20
1.7 The Structure of the Research Report 21
CHAPTER TWO 22
LITERATURE REVIEW 22
2.1 Introduction 22
2.2 Defining Records 24
2.3 The Characteristics of a Record 26
2.4 The Nature of Records Management 28
2.4.1 Defining records management 29
2.4.2 The importance and objectives of records management 30
2.4.3 The impact of Information Technology on records management 30
2.4.4 The benefits of records management 31
2.4.5 The risks of not managing records 32
2.5 The Theoretical Framework 32
2.5.1 Phases of records 33
2.5.2 The components of a records lifecycle 34
2.6 The African Experience 37
2.7 International Experience 38
2.7.1 The International Records Management Standard (ISO 15489) 39
2.8 Chapter Summary 41
CHAPTER THREE 43
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN 43
3.1 Introduction 43
3.2 Planning of the Study 43
3.3 Research Design 43
3.4 Context of the Case 44
3.4.1 An overview of the Department of Social Development 44
3.4.2 The Social Security Directorate 45
3.4.3 The Service Delivery Model 46
3.5 Research Strategy 49
3.5.1 Observation 49
3.5.2 Interviews 50
3.5.3 Document Reviews 51
3.6 Reliability of Results 51
3.7 Data Analysis 52
3.8 Limitations of the Study 52
3.9 Chapter Summary 53
CHAPTER FOUR 54

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS 54
4.1 Introduction 54
4.2 Profile of sites 54
4.2.1 Site A 54
4.2.2 Site B 55
4.2.3 Site C 56
4.3 Results from Data Collection 57
4.3.1 Records Management Processes and Procedures 57
4.3.2 Records Management Policy 63
4.3.3 The influence of Information Technology on records management 65
4.4 Chapter Summary 68
CHAPTER FIVE 69
ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS 69
5.1 Introduction 69
5.2 Records management policy and the regulatory environment 69
5.3 Records management processes 71
5.3.1 Data capture/ creation/ receipt 71
5.3.2 Organization, transmission, use and retrieval 73
5.3.3 Maintenance, protection, storage and retention. 74
5.3.4 Disposition through transfer or destruction of records 76
5.4 The implementation of a record system 77
5.4.1 Training 79
5.4.2 Technological improvements in relation to service delivery 80
5.4.3 Challenges of implementation 81
5.5 Lessons Learned 82
CHAPTER SIX 83
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 83
6.1 Overview 83
6.2 Review of research objectives and summary findings. 83
6.2.1 Objective1: Current records management processes 83
6.2.2 Objective 2: Identified gaps between current state and desired state. 84
6.2.3 Objective 3: Records management practices and service delivery 87
6.2.4 Objective 4: Recommendations 87
REFERENCES 90
APPENDIX ONE 97
APPENDIX TWO 99

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

Records management is an important component of information management. Records provide evidence of decisions, actions and transactions between government and citizens. As natural by-products of activities of governmental bodies, records reflect the efficient and effective use of public resource and are regarded as the "lifeblood of public administration"(Hare & McLeod 1997).

Government departments, as major producers and providers of information in the form of letters, policy documents and contracts, have a large stake in the effective and efficient management of their records. The information contained in records need to be managed so that it can be identified, accessed, preserved and disposed of in a timely systematic manner. Records management practices underpin all aspects of public service administration (Akotia 2000; Wamukoya 2000).

Sound records management is the foundation of government activities, to fulfil its obligations of accountability towards its citizens and to protect their rights. Without reliable records, fraud cannot be proven, meaningful audits cannot be carried out, and government actions are not open to review (Ngoepe, 2004).The failure to manage records can lead to poor decisions and an inability to measure programmes and service effectiveness.

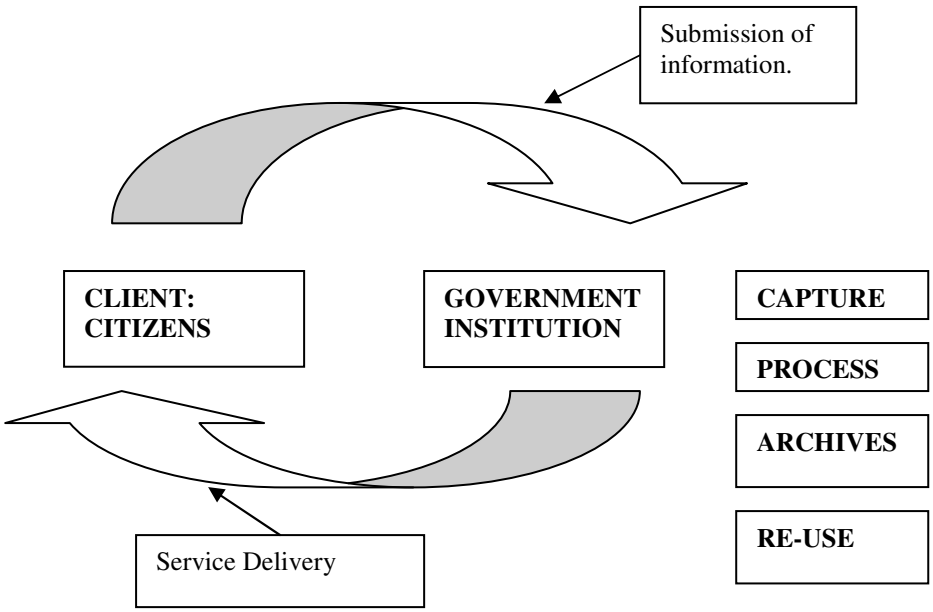
One of the fundamental responsibilities of government is to deliver services to its citizens. Some of the services delivered by government depend on the availability of various types of records e.g. policy records, hospital, school and accounting records. Various records management processes have to be carried out before services can be delivered and these processes take place within a statutory and political environment.

In this regard, sound records management practices are important for effective service delivery (Wamukoya 2000). However, records managers need to understand the regulatory environment, which defines records management processes and functions to meet customer service objectives.

1.1.1 The Service Cycle

The interaction between government and its citizens is sometimes transactional in nature. A person who requires a service or a benefit from an institution that represents government has to submit certain information to get the benefit or service. The benefit or service takes various forms that include tax rebate, approval for building plans, or a social grant. Problems emerge if public institutions fail to manage the information requirements submitted by citizens. Once a submission is made, the serviced public depends on the capacity of government to efficiently manage information before any service or benefit can be realized. In some instances the preparation and submission of the information represents an administrative burden to government officials if they lack the necessary resources and functional capacity to carry out their duties, which may adversely affect service delivery.

Figure 1: Service Cycle



Source: Centre for Public Service Innovation, 2004.

Figure 1 illustrates the administrative transactions between government institutions and beneficiaries and how information is processed before service is delivered.

The information submissions from citizens constitute the transactional records of government, which need to be carefully managed before a service, or benefit is delivered. The processes of managing records need to be positioned as integral to government department's operations and as such impact on policy implementation and service delivery (Centre for Public Service Innovation, 2004).

1.1.2 Government interventions to improve services

The previous apartheid government was characterized by inequitable distribution of services, which discriminated against the majority of the population. The new government sought to correct this anomaly by overhauling the service delivery machinery and to modernize the public service.

A White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery was introduced in 1997 to transform public service delivery in South Africa and to make it customer friendly. The White Paper introduced eight principles of Batho Pele to guide all spheres of government on how to provide better service delivery programmes. Pertinent to this study are the principles of providing access to accurate information and openness and transparency. These two principles have direct relevance on how information is managed. Batho Pele (People First) is a good innovative initiative particularly in a country where public servants are perceived to be apathetic to citizen's needs. The Batho Pele campaign cannot work on its own or as an add-on to the daily business of government but it should be driven by operational and service strategies that are underpinned by sound records management practices to make service delivery a reality.

1.1.3 Legislative and regulatory framework

Sound records management practices exist within a regulatory framework that requires accountability, transparency and good governance. The National Archives and Records Services of South Africa is a regulatory authority that promotes efficient sound records management across the public sector in all sphere of government i.e. national, provincial and local.

Key pieces of legislation which apply to public sector organizations include the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act, 1996, and the Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000.

The National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act, promulgates the need to develop and implement a records management policy to ensure that all records are captured and protected to support legal and regulatory requirements across the public sector (National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act, No 43 of 1996). The Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000 promotes open access to information, a fundamental imperative in modern democracies (Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000).

The implementation of these key pieces of legislation affects the way public bodies create, retrieve, use, maintain and dispose of their information. These records management functions require the development of policies and the implementation of records management programmes.

1.1.4 Information Technology and Records Management

Government departments are using computers, photocopiers and other office systems to work better and smarter. Whilst the use of information technology has many benefits, such as: rapid information processing, quicker communication and the elimination of administrative blockages, but there are also disadvantages such as the increasing amount of information produced and the resultant accumulation of records. Consequently the accumulation of records is changing the records management landscape. Records are becoming complex and diverse thus challenging records managers to shift from traditional practices of managing paper records to new methods of dealing with both paper and electronic formats (Duranti, 1999: Mnjama, 2003).Modern technology has contributed significantly to major developments that make records management a central management issue today. The impact of technology on records management is huge, by implication so is their impact on records managers (McLeod, Hare & Webster, 1998).

Planning and preparing for changes to the recordkeeping environment are challenges and necessary for all organizations including government. In light of the above, the study examined records management practices in public service and effects on service delivery. The study focused on social grant records of the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development.

1.2 Background of the Study

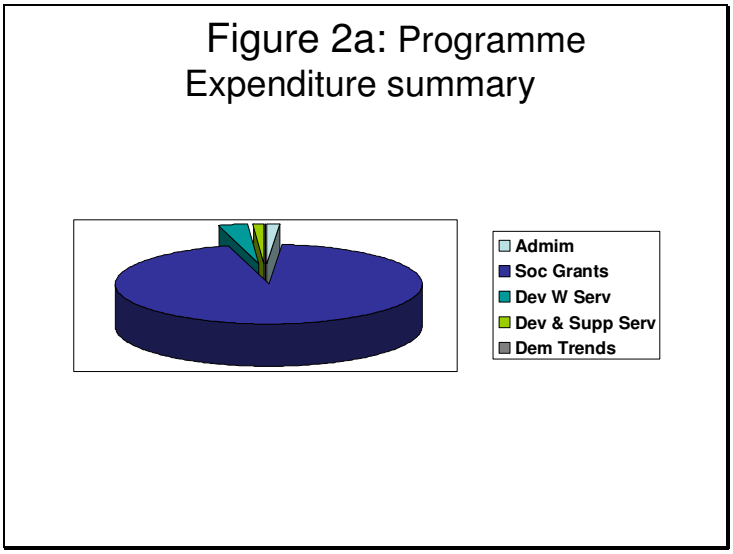
A social grant system is an attempt by government to address socio-economic inequalities. Currently, there are eight different social grants in South Africa ranging from old age grants to war veterans grants The provision of social grants is the government's biggest poverty relief programme, paying out in the region of R50 billion per annum to nine million South Africans. It is estimated that close to 50% of South Africans live below the poverty line, and to most poor households social grants are the only key source of income (Centre for Public Service Innovation, 2004).

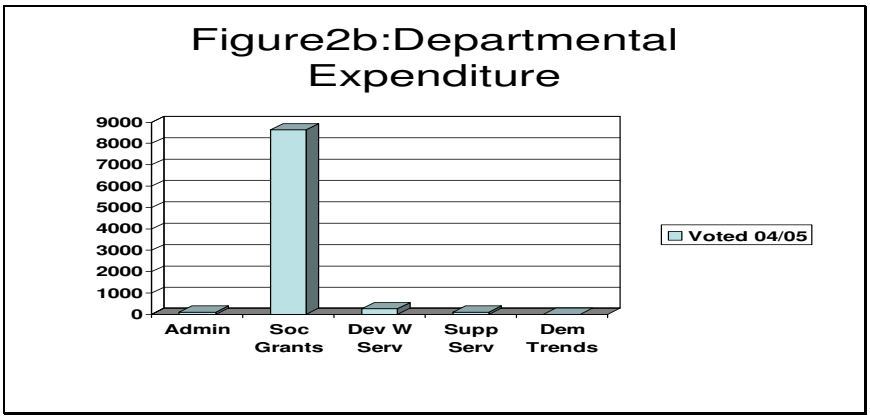
The Eastern Cape Department of Social Development allocates 96% of its budget on social assistance programmes. The allocation reflects the high level of poverty in the Eastern Cape Province. Given the extent of poverty in the Eastern Cape, there is a clear need for social grants to be administered as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Table1: Departmental Expenditure on Social Grants.

Table 1:Departmental Expenditure

Programmes	Voted for 2004/05 (R'000
Administration	117.959
Social Assistance Grants	8,647.332
Developmental Welfare services	268.282
Developmental & support services	117.079
Demographic trends	1.377





Source: www.ecprov.gov.za

The Directorate of Social Security, within the Department of Social Development, is the core functional area that administers social grants. The administration of social grants entails registering beneficiaries, creating records profile for beneficiaries, allocating and distributing funds. All of these administrative functions involve putting formal systems in place that include records management systems to ensure effective service delivery.

After 1994, the Eastern Cape provincial government has earned a reputation for poor service delivery in the area of social grants and a weak management of public resources (Overy& Zuma, 2004).

Media reports detailing the extent of corruption and maladministration in the Eastern Cape provincial government have created public interest and concern. The Eastern Cape Department of Social Development had numerous administrative shortcomings which resulted to missing beneficiary files and ineffective systems to track missing documents. More importantly, service delivery to the needy suffered.

Towards the end of the year 2002, following persistent report of the service delivery crisis in the Eastern Cape provincial government, President Mbeki's cabinet deployed an Interim Management Team to investigate and ensure that service delivery backlogs were addressed and to establish sound management and leadership in four departments that are key drivers to service delivery. The targeted departments were: Social Development, Health, Education and Public Works. Poor recordkeeping was identified as one of the contributing factors to poor service delivery (Ngoepe, 2004).

In April 2003, the Interim Management Team released its report on the four service delivery departments it has been tasked to help manage. The report was highly critical of the situation regarding the payment of social grants within the province and lack of management capacity.

The key intervention areas proposed by the Interim Management Team to stabilize service delivery in the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development included:

- Elimination of backlogs in the processing of social grant applications
- Implementation of an Electronic File Management and a Workflow Monitoring Systems (Eastern Cape Department of Social Development, Annual Report, 2003/04).

The proposals put forward by IMT led to the development and implementation of a Management Information System with 7 modules that include a Social Development Information Management System module to improve social grant processes and service delivery.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The pressure to improve service delivery, the legislation that drives records management practices, namely, the Promotion of Access to Information Act, the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act, are likely to impact on how records are managed in government departments.

Failure to maintain and manage records may have serious consequences for government if it becomes unable to defend itself against liability claims for non-payment of social grants.

Prior to the implementation of the Social Development Information Management System the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development was plagued by allegations and accusations of mismanagement, corruption, poor service delivery and inaccessible social grants.

Problems directly pointing to recordkeeping were identified as follows:

- No reliable filing system
- Poor registry conditions
- Loss of files and delays in finding a file
- No control over file movement

The key question that arises is: How are social grant records managed and maintained to ensure that recorded information is easily accessible to meet service delivery imperatives?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- To assess the current records management processes, practices and procedures of the Social Security Directorate in line with the implementation of the Social Development Information Management System.
- To identify gaps between the current state and desired state of having records that are available, accurate and up-to-date throughout the lifecycle of records
- To determine the extent to which records management practices affect service delivery
- To provide recommendations to address the identified gaps in records management practices.

1.5 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions.

- What procedures and processes are employed to make information contained in records accessible?
- What is the current state of policy in records management?
- What are the possible influences of using Information Technology on records management practices?

1.6 Significance of the Study

Government departments operate in an environment where an increasing majority of information is both created and disseminated in electronic and paper forms. Much of this information constitutes the records of the organization. Records in electronic form are becoming especially critical as developing countries embark on e-government strategies, to enable government to deliver its programmes and services more effectively and efficiently and to increase the participation of citizens in their own governance. The e-government initiatives will directly impact on how records are managed in the public service. Citizens will need accurate and reliable information.

There is also a potential danger of what is coded and written electronically will be lost for ever if there are no plans in place to preserve electronic information. Thus the development of records management policies and strategies become crucial. The research was conducted with a view to improve the standards of records management practices of social grants in the Eastern Cape provincial government.

1.7 The Structure of the Research Report

The research report is structured as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Design

Chapter 4: Presentation of Results

Chapter 5: Analysis of Findings

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to identify and analyze key issues of records management practices and to define the context within which records management field operates. The review also considered the theoretical framework that informed the study. Literature relating to records management practices internationally and in the African continent.

The definition of what constitutes a record is the first step in exploring records management. The need to define a record is becoming crucial in the fragmented environment created by the diffusion of technological innovations. The definition of a record and records management are debated with an intensity and concern unequalled since the origin of the records management profession (Dearstyne, 1999).

The definition debate is fuelled by the rapid technological changes of the last two decades and the increasing dependency of society on electronic documentation (Lin, Ramaiah, and Wal, 2003).

The characteristics that make information technology valued in organizations today such as; quicker communication, improvement in information retrieval and interactivity, are the same characteristics that make records management in an electronic environment difficult (Dearstyne, 1999).

Discussions of legal, technical, policy, and theoretical approaches to resolving the challenges posed by the constantly changing technologies used to create records emerge from the literature (McLeod, Hare, and Webster, 1998).

The greatest challenge to the records management community is the ability to adapt traditional practices to the realities of the emerging technology and to maintain a viable definition of a record (Duranti, 1999).

The records management profession has always been perceived in the context of a paper-based environment and the training of records practitioners tended to focus on traditional formats (Wamukoya, 2000). The focus has now shifted from the traditional functions such as filing and storage of paper records to retrieval, dissemination of information and the handling of records in electronic systems (Yusof and Chell, 1998). Personnel who deal with records require records management skills and knowledge of record keeping systems (Hare and Southwood, 1995).

In light of the above, the nature of records is examined in terms of the following:

- Defining records
- The characteristics of a record

Records management is examined in terms of:

- The nature of records management
- Defining records management
- The importance and objectives of records management.
- Benefits of records management.
- Risks of not managing records
- Theoretical framework
- Records management practices internationally
- Records management in the African continent

2.2 Defining Records

The distinction between physical records and electronic records is debated in the literature, to the extent that some writers believe that electronic records are not purely documents nor objects because they are technology dependent and cannot be read without an intervention of a computer (McInnes, 1998).

This study explores a few definitions of a record to develop an idea of what records management is. It is not the intention of this study to list all the various definitions of records, but to arrive at a workable definition pertinent to the study.

Penn, Pennix and Coulson (1994) defines records as any information that is recorded on any physical medium, created, or received by business as evidence of the organization's functions, policies, procedures, operations, internal and external transactions. Langemo (1995, p.415) regards records as "the memory of the organization"; "the raw material for decision making": the "basis for legal defensibility". The opinion of Langemo represents many views about what records are.

Charles Dollar defines a record as "recorded information that comes to existence as a by-product of a transaction conducted by an organization or an individual and is evidence of that action" (Erlandsson 1996, p.28).The National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act, 1996 defines "record as recorded information regardless of form or medium".

The above definitions are rooted in the notion of a record as a tangible object, despite the caveat about "recorded information exists in any physical format". The definitions are appropriate in a print environment where most records are static and permanent but records in electronic systems are fluid, volatile, and easy to manipulate than the traditional physical, tangible formats such paper, tapes and disks (Arp& Dickman, 2002). The digital technology undermines the definition of a record as a tangible object (Dearstyne, 1999).

Barry (1996) defines electronic records as records that are increasingly captured and maintained in digital electronic forms of storage rather than in paper or microform storage media.

The National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (2003, p.5) identifies, “an electronic record as information which is generated electronically and stored by means of computer technology. Every electronic record generated has the potential to be a public record and should therefore be managed properly throughout its lifecycle”.

The use of computers has opened up growing complications in the integration of paper and electronic records. Organizations or individuals create records in a variety of media and formats. It is common for records relevant to a single matter to exist partly in paper files, partly in an e-mail box and partly in a spreadsheet application. However, there may be problems in maintaining consistency within hybrid assemblies of paper and electronic records unless explicit intellectual links are established among these records from creation to their disposal or destruction (Duranti 1999, p.150).

The issue of maintaining links between paper and electronic records is particularly relevant where records are stored in unstructured systems. Consequently documents are not named or stored to facilitate efficient access and retrieval. Flowing from this is the need to maintain appropriate access control for as long as the organization needs the documents (NARSA, 2003).

The main issue with electronic records management is to ensure that the information retains its integrity and that its context can be clearly understood even after a long period of time since it was created.

2.3 The Characteristics of a Record

The rationale for creating a record is to provide evidence of transaction or decisions taken by an organization. However, recorded documentation cannot qualify as a record unless certain evidence about the content and structure of the document and the context of its creation are present and accessible (Lin, Ramaiah & Wal, 2003).

Record integrity depends on three attributes: content, context, and structure of the original record. All these properties are easily identifiable in a paper environment and are fused in a single physical paper document. However, in an electronic system, the properties of content, structure and context may be physically separate. An electronic record may be multi-layered and multi-dimensional so that it can be displayed in different ways for different purposes. In an electronic media, the content, structure and the context of the record change significantly from the traditional paper environment. The only approximate match with the paper is the content element, where letters and numbers look the same on the computer screen as on paper, but the structure and context of electronic records are not apparent when retrieved from text only (Cook, 1995, p. 50).

An analysis of electronic records shows that they distinguish themselves from the paper records in the following ways:

- Electronic records are easy to duplicate, alter and delete
- Related paper and electronic files may not be linked together for a complete record.
- Electronic records are difficult to preserve because of the rapid changes in technology
- Records management requirements such as retention periods and records disposal schedules are not built into computer systems.
- Electronic records are stored on potentially unstable media (Palmer, 2000).

The reliability and integrity of electronic records depend on specific controls which include:

- Compiling records according to predefined standard formats and templates
- Authenticating records using pre-established methods, depending on record type and function
- Embedding in the electronic systems access privileges, by assigning to each person who has access to the electronic system, on the basis of clearly identified competencies, the authority to compile, classify, annotate, retrieve, transfer, or destroy only specific groups of records
- Embedding in the electronic records system 'workflow rules' according to which the system will present only the person competent for each action with the related records.
- Limiting access to the technology or to parts of it by means of magnetic cards, passwords, fingerprints etc.
- Designing within the electronic system an audit trail, so that any access to the system and its consequences (e.g. modification to the record, a deletion an addition) can be documented as they occur (Duranti, 1999, p.154).

Despite the uncertainty surrounding the definition of a record, there are three aspects common to all records, namely: the message or the information they carry, the medium or the physical carrier of the information and the context or the purpose for which they were created (McLeod et al, 1998).

A record is, therefore, an evidence of an activity (transaction) and the evidence can only be preserved if the content, structure and context are maintained.

2.4 The Nature of Records Management

Managers are usually very interested in the use of information in the workplace, but are often disdainful of records. Records management has often been dismissed as a valuable but not an essential administrative support service. As a result the profession has enjoyed a very low organizational profile and a low budget in terms of investment in human capital. There is also a perception that records management has little to do with the dynamic management of business. Consequently, many existing records management programmes are largely isolated from, and irrelevant to the principal objectives of the organizations they serve (Coulson, 1998).

The terms "records" and "management" have proven difficult to define in a satisfactory way. It remains unclear whether it means "managing records "as in taking care of records or "managing people who manage records" as in traditional general management. The confusion of defining records management has led to an assumption that a records manager is a euphemism for a "file clerk" or a "file supervisor" (Diamond, 1995: Sanders, 1998).

Records management both as a profession and a discipline in the information sector is relatively new and evolving. It is therefore not surprising that records management often experiences misconceptions by both the general public and its counterparts in the sector (Coulson, 1998).

However, the development of records management profession has gained momentum with the advances in technology. Records are increasingly created in electronic form, if properly managed, they have a potential to be part of organizational change rather than remaining part of a paper work problem (Barry, 1996).

The records manager's developing role is three fold: Firstly, to establish records management standards for the organization. Secondly, to ensure that people responsible for carrying out records management responsibilities are properly trained to do so. Thirdly, to develop effective monitoring procedures to ensure that standards are complied with (Hare and Southwood, 1995).

In this context, records management needs to be accepted as a central operating requirement, particularly, in government where policies and information are captured and embodied in records.

2.4.1 Defining records management

The literature on records management focuses on trying to accurately define what it is and who does it. There is no acceptable broad theoretical model yet among information professionals as to what constitutes a valid core of records management. Records management has been defined in different ways depending on the interest of various information professionals. To those looking for economic reasons, records management is a factor contributing to productivity. From a lawyer's point of view, records management is a means of ensuring that legal requirements are met; whereas to the archivists and historians, it is the preservation of information that counts for posterity and research. (Yusof and Chell, 1998).

Records management is often presented as archival management, but what distinguishes records management from archives is its response to the management of current active records. From a records management perspective, records are managed for their practical business value, whilst archives preserve records for their historical or evidentiary value. However, the proper transfer of records with archival value to archival repositories is an important part of a records management programme (Yusof and Chell, 2002).

The lack of a comprehensive and acceptable definition has led to a general consensus that records management is a multi-discipline construction consisting of various interrelated techniques to achieve practical goals such as space saving, increased efficiency, time saving, protecting the survival of the organization, and the provision of timely and accurate information (Morddel, 1990: Penn, Pennix and Coulson, 1994).

Regardless of the various definitions that emerge in the literature, records management is the systematic control of all organizational records during various stages of their lifecycle: from their creation or receipt, through their processing, distribution, maintenance and use, to their ultimate disposition.

The purpose of records management is to promote economies and efficiencies in recordkeeping, to ensure that useless records are systematically destroyed while valuable information is protected and maintained in a manner that facilitates its access and use (Hare and McLeod, 1997, p.3).

2.4.2 The importance and objectives of records management

Organizations depend on efficient access to the right information to plan, make decisions and business continuity. Records management is concerned with the following objectives:

- Accurate and complete document policies and transactions of the government
- Control the quantity and the quality of records produced by the government
- Establish and maintain mechanisms of control with respect to records creation in order to prevent the creation of unnecessary records and with respect to the effective and economical operations of a government department
- Preserve and dispose of records in accordance with the governing statutes
- Direct continuing attention to records from their initial creation to their final disposition, with particular emphasis on the prevention of unnecessary government paperwork

(National Archives and Records Service of South Africa: Policy Guidelines, 2003).

2.4.3 The impact of Information Technology on records management

Information Technology has fundamentally altered the way organizations operate and records are kept. Computerized systems offer significant advantages over conventional methods of keeping records; in particular, they can manipulate a large amount of information and generate a wide range of information products.

Computers offer speed, precision, diversity, flexibility and a comprehensive documentation of processes, as a result they have been accepted around the world as a critical information management and communication tool.

However, the appearance of personal computers on virtually every desktop has greatly increased the amount of information processing taking place. It has also increased the power of individual users who not only create information objects but also can alter or destroy that information with a single keystroke (McInnes, 1998).

An active programme committed to managing and preserving records from their creation to final disposal is a prerequisite for fulfilling record keeping responsibilities (National Archives and Records Service of South Africa, 2003).

2.4.4 The benefits of records management

The benefits of records management are listed as follows:

- To enhance the efficient and effectiveness of service delivery because relevant and timely information is available
- Improve compliance with legal and regulatory requirements
- Improve knowledge sharing and retention of, and access to, corporate memory
- Better management of evidence –related risks
- Improved capacity to explain, and provide evidence of an organization's actions and decisions
- Appropriate management of records consistent with their retention requirements
- Decreased storage, material and labour costs (Swan, Cunningham & Robertson 2002, p. 79).

These benefits are possible in government departments if an effective records management programme is implemented.

2.4.5 The risks of not managing records

The risks and consequences of poor record keeping can be detrimental to government, individuals and society. The risks include:

- Poor decisions, policies, programmes and services
- Reduced access to rights and entitlements, unfair treatment of citizens
- Reduced transparency, accountability and trust in government
- Cynical and uninvolved citizens and groups
- Duplicated and wasted efforts inability to measure programmes and service effectiveness
- Increased costs and huge backlogs of old and valueless records (Lipchak, 2002, p.6).

Implicit in the various definitions of records management and the benefits that can be derived from managing records, is the need to manage records from their point of creation to their disposal or destruction regardless of what media on which they are created or stored. The records lifecycle provides a theoretical framework for managing records. The thrust of the records lifecycle theory is that if records are to meet the requirements of accountability and good governance, their management must cover the whole extent of their existence from creation to disposal (Mordell, 1990: Penn, Pennix and Coulson, 1994).

2.5 The Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by the records lifecycle theory, which underpins records management practices. The lifecycle of records is based on the fact that records have a life similar to a living organism; it is born (creation), it lives (use and maintenance) and it dies (disposition). The records lifecycle theory elucidates the rational analysis of records in terms of their administrative, operational, legal and historical uses. Historically, organizations have always disposed of records when there was no more space to store them; the lifecycle theory normalizes this destruction with schedules that ensured that records could be destroyed as soon as, not before, their various purposes had expired.

The theory makes it possible to recognize the value of an inactive phase where infrequently accessed records can be stored off-site to conserve space whilst increasing efficiency of accessing active records (Sanders, 1998).

2.5.1 Phases of records

For administrative convenience, Diamond (1995) grouped records into three phases: active or current, semi-active or semi-current, and inactive or non-current records

- **Active or current records**

Active or current records are used in the daily activities of the office. They assist in the execution of the administrative functions, decision making and service delivery. They could be classified as confidential or non-confidential depending on the type of information they contain. These records need to be effectively managed for efficient use.

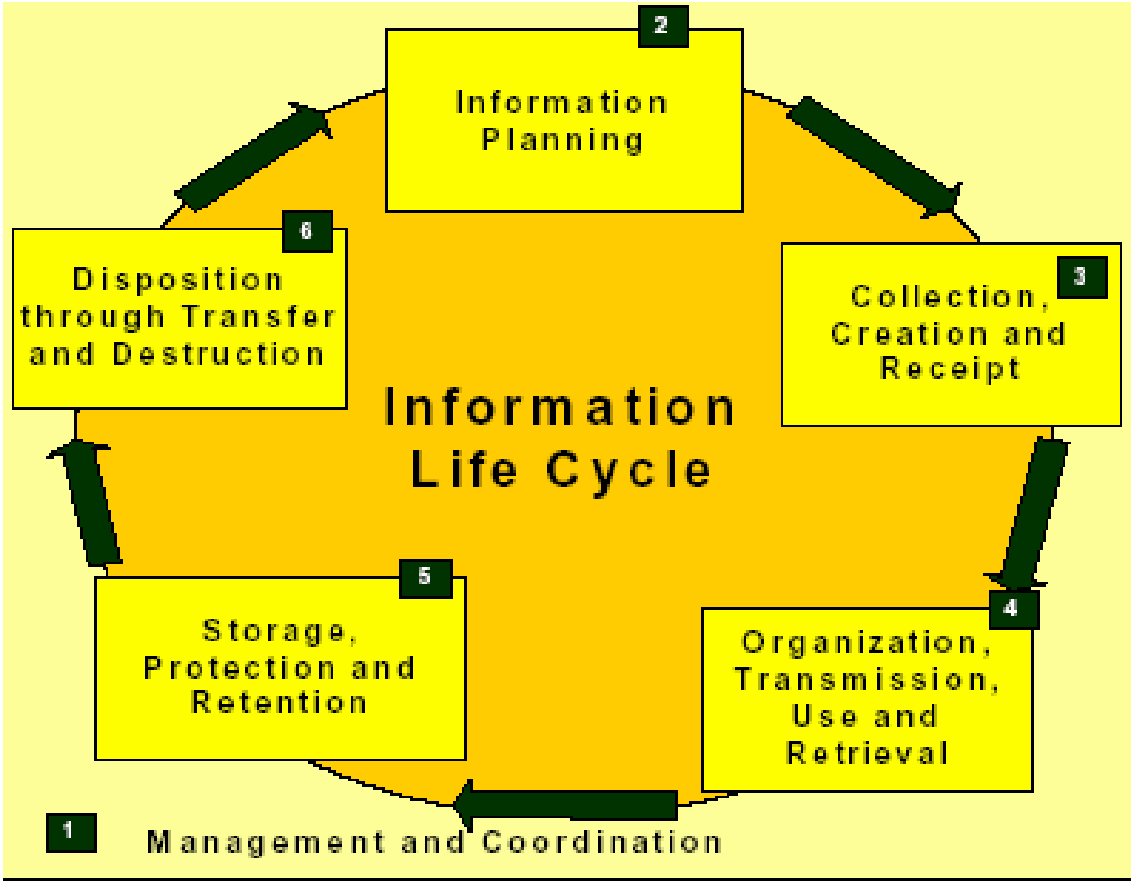
- **Semi-active or semi-current records**

These records are not often used. Only occasional reference is made to them, and they usually occupy valuable space in the office. They should be transferred and stored in Central Registries or Records Centres

- **Inactive or non-current records**

Inactive records are often not needed for the day –to-day operations of the office. They are valuable records containing information on the activities and transactions of the department. The value of inactive records lies in the reconstruction and continued operations of an institution in the event of a disaster or litigation cases. The disposal of inactive records must be managed with caution.

Figure 3: Components of a Records/Information Lifecycle



Source: Guide to the review of Management of Government Holdings

2.5.2 The components of a records lifecycle

The major components of a records cycle are:

- Management and Coordination
- Information Planning
- Collection, creation and receipt
- Organization, transmission, use and retrieval
- Storage, protection, and retention.
- Disposition through transfer and destruction.

Below is a brief description of each component of the records lifecycle.

- **Information planning**

Information holdings of an organization should meet the operational needs of the institution and satisfy legislative and policy requirements. Information and records management plans must be coordinated and information technology requirements are assessed in relation to records management requirements.

- **Management and coordination**

This component ensures that an institution's management structure facilitates effective coordination of all records –based functions to improve better programmes and service delivery. The roles and responsibilities of records management must be clearly defined, understood and accepted.

- **Creation / capture**

The creation and receipt of records should meet operational, legislative and policy requirements and to avoid collecting, creating and receiving information that is already available to minimize costs and response burden. Records that are created and received should be incorporated within an established record keeping system

- **Organization, transmission, use and retrieval**

The component refers to formally accepted methods and tools for organizing, using and disseminating information, which should be in place and used throughout the organization. This includes methods and tools for the management of paper and electronic records. Records should be available and accessible to users by using a number of searching and locating mechanisms in a timely convenient way. Opportunities for sharing and re-use of information should be identified internally and externally.

Maintenance, protection, storage and retention

The organization develops an approach that incorporates established principles for maintaining and preserving records regardless of format. The established procedures are communicated to internal users and some external stakeholders. Recorded information is maintained while it has operational value in terms of supporting decisions, programme operations and service delivery and while it is required to meet legislative and policy requirements. Consideration has to be given to the impact of technological changes.

- **Disposition through transfer and destruction.**

A formal set of principles, policies and standards for disposing and destroying records should adhere to legal and policy obligations. The disposal and destruction policies must be documented and communicated throughout the organization.

At each phase of the cycle, both paper and electronic records need to be actively managed according to established procedures, to ensure that they retain qualities of integrity, authenticity and reliability (Goodman, 1994: McInnes, 1998: Wamukoya, 2000).

The identification of the phases through which records go through is critical to the accuracy and management of an organization's information history (National Archives and Records Service of South Africa, 2003).

Literature reveals that 80% of records management costs are incurred at the creation stage hence the need for careful creation of records (Popoola, 2000). The functional requirements for the management of electronic records should be addressed at the design and creation stage to ensure that the content, context and structure of the records provide reliable evidence of actions and decisions made. Some of the decisions that have to be made regarding the preservation of electronic records are: clarity on how long documents must be retained or whether to be destroyed or archived.

In short, governmental bodies need practical means whereby records can be managed throughout their life cycle to improve their effectiveness (National Archives and Records Service, 2003).

Goodman (1994) argues that historically records managers have focused on the later stages of the records lifecycle by receiving records once they are past their active use.

Ideally records managers should be involved in all the phases of a records lifecycle to contribute to the ultimate value of records as sources of information to the organization. This sort of involvement in the whole record lifecycle is increasingly important as the use of computerized records becomes extensive.

Erlandsson (1996, p.18) refers to this involvement as the conception stage. Conception is concerned with the idea that "unless provision for creation of a record has been built into an electronic system at the design stage, records creation cannot and will not take place". It is clear that the records lifecycle concept must be rooted in sound records management practices and core business processes defined by a strategic information planning. To this end, the administration of social grants should be supported by sound records management practices.

2.6 The African Experience

Extensive research on records management has been conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa. Barata, Kutzner and Wamukoya (2001) discuss an array of challenges confronting developing countries in terms of maintenance and use of electronic records. They note that developing countries are turning to new technologies but the necessary infrastructure is far from established. They emphasize the need for training, resources, and appropriate experience.

Studies conducted by the International Records Management Trust in Sub-Saharan Africa reveal that poor records systems have serious consequences for both government and its citizens and affect the government's ability to manage resources effectively and to comply with international conventions.

The lack of capacity to control the receipt and creation of paper and electronic records is highlighted as the major problem afflicting sub-Saharan Africa. Government institutions in Namibia are faced with problems of managing electronic records while addressing ongoing problems in managing paper systems (Barata, Cain and Thurston, 2000).

Barata et al (2001) suggest that records professionals in developing countries need to engage in global discussions on how best to preserve and manage computerized information over time.

2.7 International Experience

A number of studies on records management have been conducted in Europe, US, and Australia. The major issues of concern that constantly emerge from the literature are the lack of policy guidelines and the narrow focus in regard to the preservation of electronic records (Barry, 1996). By and large, the field of information technology has ignored the problems of long- term preservation of records. Institutions that store records in electronic systems with long-term retention requirements but have no formal policy in place for their preservation are going to experience problems of inaccessibility (Lin et al, 2003). The biggest challenge of managing records in an electronic environment is the inability to anticipate future developments in technology. The preservation of electronic records has become a global information management problem. Rick Barry, a US records management consultant articulates the preservation problem, thus: "Preservation is one of the most intractable technological issues facing all of us in building electronic records capacity and readiness for the North and South alike" (Electronic discussion on electronic readiness and capacity building: 29 Nov.- 12 Dec.2003).

Research findings reveal that 50 US government departments have records management policies but fail to follow records management procedures. The impact of new technologies on records management practices is not taken into account (Fletcher, 1990).

The records community is in transition from paper to electronic records as the predominant recordkeeping medium, strategic planning for long-term preservation is a necessary component of a records management programme (Yusof and Chell 2002).

In Finland, the records management field is fragmented and underdeveloped. Scientific education, research or theoretical discussions have generally not existed until 1997. Sweden and Finland have national archival laws that give the National Archives greater power to control the management of records of state and municipal authorities (Valtonen, 1999).

The most progressive countries in the area of records management are Hong Kong and Australia. The government of Hong Kong introduced the Code of Access to Information in 1995, which required the establishment of a range of information and methods of access, which government departments must provide.

Australia developed the first set of standards for records management (AS 4390) produced anywhere in the world. The Australian Standard (AS 4390) was developed into the first ever International Records Management Standard (ISO 15489) published in 2001 by the International Standard Organization (Swan, Cunningham, and Robertson: 2002).

The standard (ISO 15489) provides guidelines on records management practices and provides benchmark to measure the effectiveness of records management programmes and systems.

2.7.1 The International Records Management Standard (ISO 15489)

ISO 15489 is a global benchmark for records management practices and is being actively implemented across the world. The standard tries to share the message that records management is integral to business operations since records are the inputs and outputs of business operations and therefore contains the evidence of those operations (McLeod, 2003).

The standard is applicable to all organizations, irrespective of sector, and makes no distinction between records in electronic, paper or any other format (McLeod 2003).

ISO 15489 is the latest development in the global best practices movement that has been gathering momentum for the past 15 years (Stephens 2001: 2)

The National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (NARSA), in terms of its statutory mandate, endorse ISO 15489 as the required standard for records management. The standard requires organizations to put the necessary infrastructure, policies, strategies, procedures and systems in place to ensure that all records are managed in an integrated manner (NARSA: Policy Guidelines, 2003).

The International Records Management Standard is divided into 11 parts as follows:

- Part 1-3: Scope, Normative References, Terms and Definitions .The first three parts are introductory in nature
- Part 4: Benefits of Records Management. The standard lists the benefits to management of establishing and nourishing a vigorous records management program, one that complies with ISO 15489.
- Part 5-6: Regulatory Environment; Policies and Responsibilities. The first section here deals with understanding the regulatory environment which includes laws, regulations and codes of best practices, as well as the establishment of policy and procedure frameworks necessary to assist the development and maintenance of a records management program.
- Part 7: Records Management Requirements: This section defines the principles and basic functions of a records management program. It defines the characteristics of a record by addressing authenticity, reliability, integrity and usability.
- Part 8: Design and implementation of a record system provides a framework to design both manual and automated record systems. A records system is an important tool to manage records in the way that meets operational needs of the organization.

- Part 9: Records management processes and controls establishes a core set of records management processes and instruments that can be used to establish procedural standards for an organization to achieve records management policy objectives.

The records management processes according to ISO 15489 are as follows:

a) Determining which records are to be captured
b) Registration
c) Classification
d) Access
e) Storage
f) Determining retention
g) Tracking
h) Disposition
i) Documenting records management processes. (ISO 15489- 1; 2001).

2.8 Chapter Summary

It should be noted that there is no clear consensus on the standard definitions for records and records management. The digital information technology has undermined the traditional concepts and definitions of a record.

Many of the attended problems associated with electronic records such as the legal admissibility, the speed at which they can be altered, their dependence on hardware and software, which are constantly changing, are all issues yet to be resolved. However, Information Technology makes it possible to do a much better job of records management today than was possible a few years ago.

Despite the lack of a universally accepted definition of a record, but what is clear is that records enshrine the accountability of governmental bodies to citizens and government; their proper management is necessary to fulfil this imperative. Hughes (2003) argues that ethical records management issues are significant concerns for records managers particularly where there are legislative requirements to comply with procedures. This argument is particularly true where many African countries are engaging on democratic principles such as corporate governance, transparency, better use of public resources and accountability to citizens.

The information age makes it imperative for South African institutions to know that operating in a global village calls for the use of standards that are comparable worldwide (Ngulube, 2005). There is a need to share best practices within a broader management community, given the inextricable link between record keeping, organizational processes and accountability. ISO 15489 provides an opportunity for sharing best practices at a strategic and global level.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the planning of the study, the research design used, the rationale for its use, data collection tools, rationale for selecting the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development as a case study, discussion of measurements used to ensure reliability, data analysis, limitation of study and a chapter summary.

3.2 Planning of the Study

The researcher, in preparation for data collection, sent a letter of introduction to the Head of Social Security, to seek permission to visit the sites where interviews and observation took place. The letter outlined the objectives of the research project. A pre-interview was conducted with the Head of Social Security to set the stage for the actual study. Key personnel at operational and managerial levels were selected for interview sessions in three different sites. Respondents were assured that data would be confidential and would not be associated with any particular response. Offices studied are referred to as Site A, Site B and Site C. Sites A& B are decentralized Area and District offices designated as service delivery points and Site C is a central social grant processing centre where all paper social grant records are maintained and stored

3.3 Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative case study research design. Qualitative research is used to answer questions about the nature of complex phenomena with the purpose of understanding or describing the phenomena or to build a theory. Yin (1994) defines a case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real life context. To this end, a case study satisfies three tenets of the qualitative method: describing, understanding and explaining (Tellis 1997).

Case studies are often used in government to evaluate a particular programme or to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of a programme (Stake 1995).A frequent criticism of a case study methodology is its dependence on a single case, which renders it incapable of providing a generalizing conclusion (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001).

However, Yin (1994) argues that three conditions should be considered when deciding whether the case study is the preferred method over other qualitative methods such as historical analysis or experimentation:

- The type of research question: a case study is useful for exploratory research involving "how" and "why" questions. In this study, the type of research question is exploratory, namely "How are social grant records managed to ensure that recorded information is easily accessible to meet service delivery
- The extent of control an investigator has over behavioural events. In this study the researcher has little control over behavioural events, which are involved in managing social grant records.
- The degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events. The study focuses on contemporary events as organizations globally are grappling with records management issues in technology -driven environments.

The above three conditions set out by Yin (1994) confirms that the case study technique is the appropriate method to use for this study. The purpose of the study is to assess the current records management practices in the Directorate of Social Security.

3.4 Context of the Case

3.4.1 An overview of the Department of Social Development

The Eastern Cape provincial government inherited an apartheid legacy of three separate government bureaucracies, namely, the impoverished Ciskei and Transkei homelands and the apartheid Cape Provincial administration.

The by-product of the amalgamation involved recapturing the data of recipients of social grants onto a single computer system throughout the province across all previously separate welfare systems. In 2002 the Social Welfare department was renamed the Department of Social Development. The Social Security Directorate was established to administer social assistance and developmental programmes.

3.4.2 The Social Security Directorate

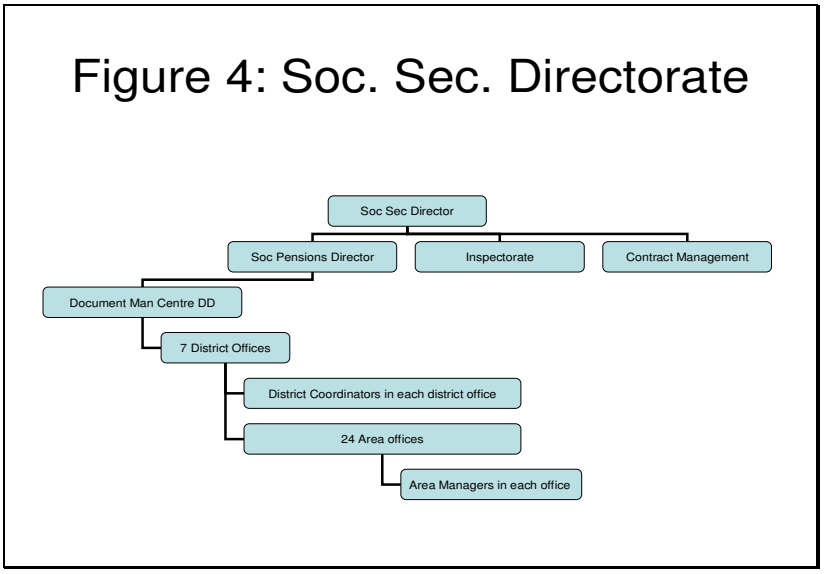
The objectives of the Directorate are:

- To improve the administration of social security grants and provide access to grants
- To provide high quality service to beneficiaries
- To transform the public service specifically the implementation of the Batho Pele principles

The records that are created within the Directorate of Social Security have the following purposes:

- A reflection of legalization, accountability, democracy, transparency and performance of social development and management
- Provide legal evidence for disputes such as non-payment of grants, covering the rights of citizens, creators of records and for public interest.
- Important information resource for planning, evaluating programmes and e-government (www.ecprov.gov.za).

Figure 4: Organizational Structure of the Directorate of Social Security



Source: www.socdev.gov.za

3.4.3 The Service Delivery Model

Responding to recommendations proposed by the Interim Management Team, the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development reconfigured its service delivery processes by focusing on the following areas:

- Development of the Management Information Systems.
- District Coordination Model

3.4.3.1 Management Information System

The Eastern Cape Department of Social Development developed and implemented a Management Information System with 7 modules one of which was a Social Development Information Management System. The Social Development Information Management System is the first customised system developed in the country.

The core term of reference on planning the Management Information System was that it had to be web-based and be linked to a central database to facilitate accessibility to other Social Security offices across the Eastern Cape Province.

The implementation of a Social Development Information Management System marked the beginning of an Integrated Social Security System, designed to interface with snapshots of existing transversal systems such as the Social Security Pension System (SOCPEN), Personnel and Salaries System (PERSAL), Government Employees and Pension Fund (GEPF) and Home Affairs system, to verify beneficiary details upon file capture and store such files according to their District of origin.

Key performance indicators that spanned various functions performed by the Department of Social Development were developed. Examples of the key performance indicators are the utilization of staff, application intake rate, application turn around time, application backlog estimates. A series of input tools were then designed to ensure that all the information required to capture the key performance indicators is captured.

The SDIMS incorporates an Electronic File Management System, Workflow Monitoring System which are linked to an Electronic Central File Registry. The system was primarily designed to monitor programmes and services through key performance indicators, workflows and exception reporting

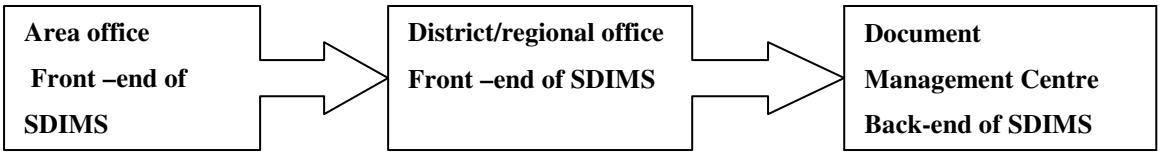
3.4.3.2 District Coordination Model

Central to the implementation of the Social Development Information Management System was the development of a District Coordination Model in which the administration and control of social grant areas was consolidated into 7 District/ Regional offices, 24 Area offices and +/ - 120 Service offices which are aligned within the boundaries of local municipalities and a Central office located at provincial level in East London.

The District Coordination Model is in line with the restructuring of government's services and programmes to bring them closer to communities by decentralizing some activities whilst controlling decisions centrally. The Area and District offices form the front –office component of the Social Development Information Management System where registration of beneficiaries and data capture take place. At provincial level, the Document Management Centre is the back –end of the SDIMS hence referred to the "Back office". The rationale for the establishment of a "Back office" is to strengthen, support and add value to the work performed by front line workers in Area and District offices to improve service delivery.

The Eastern Cape Department of Social Development believed that the delays in social grant processing were caused by its decentralized methods of data collection, under the Social Development Information Management System files are centralized, organized and recorded on a Central Registry database managed by DMC. (www.ecprov.gov.za)

Figure 5: Graphic representation of a District Coordination Model



3.5 Research Strategy

The data collection method was based on observation, interviews and literature and document reviews. Yin (1994) asserts that the use of multiple sources of evidence is one of the good principles of data collection. The process of using multiple sources is called triangulation, and enhances the validity and reliability of results.

Data collection began in three selected sites; Site A and Site B located in the Nelson Mandela Bay (P.E) area and Site B is situated at provincial level in East London. The three sites visited constitute a District Coordination Model which suggests that the social grant processes progressively move from local to district offices and ultimately to the central office at provincial level.

3.5.1 Observation

The main purpose of the observation method was to gain insight into records management practices in three selected sites. Direct observation improves the data collection process through a better understanding of the concepts and a heightened awareness of important issues pertaining to the study but there is also the danger of bias or subjectivity. Patton (2001) discusses the notion of "sensitizing concepts" to orient fieldwork. Generally "sensitizing concepts" gives the researcher a general sense of reference and is also a reminder that the researcher does not enter the field with a blank slate. It was, therefore, important to prepare a formal list of major sensitizing concepts and used those concepts to organize and guide fieldwork. In this study, "records management processes" constituted a fundamental sensitizing framework, identifying the elements of:

- creation, capture and receipt
- organization , transmission and retrieval
- maintenance, protection and retention
- Disposition, destroy or discard.

The observation method involved looking at procedures and processes to make information contained in records accessible.

3.5.2 Interviews

The purpose of interviews was to gather data from records management processes that could not be directly observed. An interview guide was prepared with a list of questions pertaining to issues that were to be explored in the interview sessions. The research interviews were unstructured, open-ended and conducted on a one-to-one basis in the offices of respondents. Unstructured interviews are common at exploring where depth of understanding is required. The use of open-ended questions ensures that respondents are free to reply to questions in anyway they wished. The disadvantage of open-ended questions is that they produce a mass of different words that sometimes mean the same thing (Stacey, 1969). (Appendix One: Interview Guide)

The broad areas of investigation focused on the following issues:

- Records management processes
- Records management policy and the regulatory environment
- The use of Information Technology and its influence on records management practices

Notes were taken during the interviews and follow-up interviews were conducted telephonically whenever there was a need for clarification on certain issues that were missed during the interview

Table 2: Interview Sample

Senior Administrative Officer/ Office Supervisor Administrative officer	Site A
District Coordinator/Senior Manager Administrative Officer	Site B
Senior Manager Senior Administrative Officer/ Supervisor	Site C

3.5.3 Document Reviews

Documents constitute a rich source of information about organizations and programmes (Patton, 2002). At the planning stage of the study, access to documents was negotiated with senior managers to provide the researcher with information about aspects of the study that could not be observed.

Document reviews formed the secondary source of data for the purpose of triangulation. The following documents were reviewed:

- The Social Development Information Management System documentation
- The Department of Social Development Annual Reports, Strategic Plans
- Information sources from the Public Service Accountability Monitor, a research unit based at Rhodes University, which investigates service delivery issues in the Eastern Cape Provincial government.

The data from the documentary sources was integrated and collated with the data already collected from interviews and direct observation to conclude the data collection stage.

3.6 Reliability of Results

The case study method with its multiple data collection methods provided the researcher with opportunities to triangulate data in order to strengthen the findings and conclusion. The triangulation method involved comparing data collected from documents and the data obtained from the observation and interview methods. The interviews and observation methods were conducted without any bias from the researcher. It can therefore be assumed that the information given was correct.

3.7 Data Analysis

The challenge of qualitative data analysis lies in making sense of a large amount of data. This involves reducing the volume of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal (Patton, 2001).

A content analysis is a data analysis method which involves identifying, coding, categorizing and classifying the primary patterns of the data or extracting common themes from the data. This means analyzing the core contents of interviews, observations, and documents to determine what is significant (Patton, 2001).

The key issues of the study were drawn out and the final interpretation stated. The final interpretations were related to the key issues that were raised in the research questions. The records management processes were drawn from the components of the records lifecycle theory which also guided the observation method. The assessment of records management practices was measured against the International Standard of Records Management (ISO 15489). The standard is discussed in Chapter 2 section 2.7.1 of the literature review.

3.8 Limitations of the Study

Financial and time constraints prevented the researcher from interviewing the beneficiaries of social grants; although their insights might have added more depth to the study. The interviews were limited by the use of terminology; the respondents did not associate “records management practices” with the social grant administration although most of the functions performed in the department involve creating and maintaining records

Lack of understanding on how systems operate in the public service limited the capacity of the researcher to delve deeper into the study. There were processes of social grant administration that were not revealed to the researcher as she is not a member of the public service. There were instances where interviews had to be rescheduled because respondents were not available as per appointment.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the context of the case, planning of the fieldwork, and research methods used to collect data to address the research questions. The research process was informed by a qualitative case study approach. Despite the limitations, there was sufficient data to proceed with the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results collected from observation, interviews and documents. The first section of this chapter discusses the profile of each site, areas of responsibility and the activities carried out to fulfil the responsibilities. The second section presents the findings from interviews and documents. For purposes of confidentiality, responses are not attached to any particular individual. Direct quotations are put in italics to illustrate how an individual issue was perceived by a particular respondent.

4.2 Profile of sites

4.2.1 Site A

Site A is located in the township nearby the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality and conveniently situated for beneficiaries who cannot travel long distances to apply for a social grant. The office has 6 staff members of which there are data capturers, data verification officers, and the Supervisor. The office is physically separate from Site B office by a distance of about 10 kilometres and 20 kilometres from the city.

Areas of responsibility:

- Registration of beneficiaries
- Creation of records profile of beneficiaries
- Data capture from application forms electronically and manually
- Data verification

Activities undertaken to perform functions:

- The Work Monitoring System begins on submission of an application form and data capture on the Electronic File Management System.
- The system does a number of attest checks to ascertain whether the beneficiary has applied before or if the beneficiary is a government employee.
- Three bar-coded labels are then printed, one receipt to the beneficiary, the second one is attached to the application form and the third one is attached to the beneficiary file.
- The application form is scanned out of the Attesting Officer to the Verification Officer, who ensures that the information on the application form is complete and accurate.
- The application forms are then batched according to the type of social grant applied for and packed in coded labelled boxes and transported to the District Office.
- At each point the application forms are scanned out from one person to the next for the purpose of accountability and responsibility.

4.2.2 Site B

Site B is a District office situated in a Municipal Council buildings of the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality. Site B has a compliment of 200 staff members

Areas of responsibility:

- Coordinates Site A and Site B social grant files and activities
- SOCPEN database management
- Medical assessment of disability grants
- Approves / rejects social grant applications

Observed activities undertaken to perform functions.

- Verification of data of social grant files from Site A
- Data is captured on the SOCPEN database.
- Post notification letters to beneficiaries advising them of the status of the application.
- The physical social grant files are packed with control sheets in coded labelled boxes and transported to Site C for maintenance and storage
- Comprehensive control sheets covering all boxed files are complied at point of departure prior to transportation and checked off against the inventory when delivered.

4.2.3 Site C

Site C is located in East London in a double storey building that was previously a blanket factory. The office has a staff compliment of 420 who work two shifts a day and are mainly responsible for dealing with social grant file back-logs emanating from the previous welfare administrations, e.g. Transkei, Ciskei and the Cape Provincial Administration. But only 80 staff members are directly involved in the administration of social grants.

Site C addresses problems within the Department of Social Development which include overall inefficiency, litigation cases brought against the department due to delays in the processing of applications, lost application forms, and the inability to access key information.

Areas of responsibility:

- Central Registry database management
- Maintenance and storage of records from different offices through out the Eastern Cape
- Medical assessment of disability grantees

- High level inquiries relating to litigations
- Review of grants, life certification for old age grants.

Observed activities undertaken to perform functions.

- Data validation, ID numbers are scanned and compared to SOCPEN
- Check digit validation with the Department of Home Affairs.
- Capturing data from all social grant files in the electronic Central Register and manual register
- Store active files in demarcated areas by Districts of origin
- Inactive files are stored in archives by year.

4.3 Results from Data Collection

The interview questions addressed the following issues:

- Records management processes and procedures
- The current state of policy on records management
- The influence of using Information Technology on records management practices

4.3.1 Records Management Processes and Procedures

4.3.1.1 Views on the control and creation of unnecessary records

Respondents were generally confident of the quality and accuracy of records but some of the respondents from the decentralized offices (Site A & B) were uncertain of the social grant functions performed at Site C.

Comments from respondents:

- The Department has established procedures to control the creation of unnecessary records to eliminate fraud.

- The control and authenticity of files are assured by using computer generated pre-numbered standard format application forms. The application forms are accounted for by the Office Managers of each office and are limited to 20 a day.
- The application forms filled out by applicants do not cater for all the information required by the system.
- Respondents felt that the application forms need to be appropriately amended.

One respondent noted (3) that:
The requirements of the Auditor-General and the numerous incidences of litigation are placing pressure on the department to ensure that records are created and rigorously maintained

Another respondent (2) said:
Supervisors perform random quality checks on processed files to ensure that any incorrect information is corrected immediately

4.3.1.2 The record keeping system used to support social grant processes

- EFMS is a web-based application accessible to all social security offices throughout the Eastern Cape.
- The system has a bar-code filing system for scanning and file retrieval.
- The EFMS screen has a template for document metadata which is entered by all offices filing social grant records. Metadata fields are controlled for consistency and accuracy by predefined fields from which the user must select.
- Records that were previously held in paper form are now created and stored electronically. However, both paper and electronic record systems are still in operations.

All respondents were of the opinion that the implementation of an Electronic File Management System has increased the level of productivity. There has also been a significant administrative change as a result of standardized recordkeeping.

One respondent (2) explained:

The information on beneficiaries is on the database and paper records are all filed in the same systematic order for the whole department.

Another respondent (3) remarked

The ultimate capture of all files at a central venue has solved many management and control issues that would otherwise be extremely difficult to solve logistically, including the fact that these files have to be transported to the venue over long distances. This ensures that there is standardization of processes and procedures.

4.3.1.3 Written guidelines for recordkeeping procedures

All respondents unanimously agreed that there are no written guidelines for records management processes, but there are operational manuals on the use of EFMS which are available on the intranet.

4.3.1.4 Responsibility for the measuring the effectiveness of processes

Comments from respondents:

- Supervisors take daily statistics on how many grant applications have been processed.
- There are no clear cut benchmarks against which to measure the effectiveness of the processes.
- There is lack of performance indicators to assess the effectiveness of records management systems, rigorous measurement tools are not available to government institutions and is a difficult area to evaluate without them.

4.3.1.5 Organization of records for easy access and retrieval

Responses:

- Files are registered, indexed and batched according to social grant type and accessed via ID numbers
- Boxed files are randomly organized but accessed through bin entry system by scanning the coded labels.
- Bar-code filing

4.3.1.6 Awareness of recordkeeping and competency

Senior managers displayed a high level of awareness on the importance of keeping and managing records in light of allegations of corruption and mismanagement that plagues the department. Respondents from decentralised offices did not associate social grant processes with the importance of keeping records.

One respondent from Site C commented thus:

Managing records is important particularly if the Promotion of Access to Information legislation is enforced. The legislation suggests that government departments need to be more transparent and accountable for their actions and decisions. However, there need to be a balance between access to records and protecting the rights of individuals.

Respondents from Sites A and C expressed concern on the following issues:

- Pockets of functional incompetence, which sometimes results in misfiling of documents, which affect quality control.
- Lack of human resources slow down social grant processes and was cited as an obstacle to effective service delivery.

The Department of Social Development Annual Report (2004/5) reported a vacancy rate of 51%.

The Auditor-General's report (2004/5) acknowledges improvement in social grant processes due to the centralization of files, but problems were noted with SOCPEN database management. Grant types were not always captured on SOCPEN as a result the validity of grants and the amount the beneficiaries are meant to receive could not always be confirmed. Some beneficiaries were also registered on the Government Employee Pension Fund (GEPF) meaning that they were receiving grants as well as government salary.

In other instances, deceased beneficiaries were still registered on SOCPEN whilst registered on the Home Affairs death register, files showed that grants were still being paid out. Consequently these problems affect the payment of social grants at pay points, contracted companies find it difficult to link information supplied by the department to a particular beneficiary.

4.3.1.7 Risk management plan

Electronic back-up systems, secure access through the use of passwords to protect records featured prominently in respondents' accounts to address security and risk management issues in regard to records.

Responses were:

- All records are stored in a secure environment with a 24 hours security service and "no smoking" signs and fire extinguishers are displayed in all buildings**.**
- Site C ,where the Central Registry database is located, is linked to an off-site storage facility
- Restricted access levels
- Network log-in and pass word to data base
- Data security with offsite server
- Daily back-ups

However, some respondents expressed concern about storage facilities for paper records. Despite the implementation of SDIMS files are being delivered to Site C where they are sorted and stored manually. The storage area was clean but congested with storage boxes that were placed in demarcated areas according to the district of origin. Limited storage space is a serious concern for senior managers as files accumulate. The preservation of electronic records was not clearly addressed except that the computer systems are upgraded every five years.

One respondent (3) notes:

There is a huge problem of storage space for paper files and the Department has plans to extend.

4.3.1.8 Retention and disposal of records

Opinions varied on the issue of the retention of social grant records after the death of a beneficiary. There are no clear guidelines as the department does not have a retention policy. The general view was that social grant records have evidential value and vital for the protection of legal rights of persons affected by government activities, therefore, they should be retained as long as possible. One respondent (3) noted that social grant records are not destroyed but are kept for ever.

Similarly, when asked about records disposal, respondents had no knowledge of records disposal programmes in place. It was noted that inactive records are transferred to an in-house archive at the Document Management Centre. Computerized records are extracted from the electronic active file registry and transferred to an archive registry. There are no clear, monitored, institution wide procedures in place.

4.3.2 Records Management Policy

4.3.2.1 Role of a records manager

Views of respondents from decentralised offices;

- There is no designated records manager
- The role of records manager is played by the head of Social Security on the basis of his strategic responsibility on all matters pertaining to social grants.
- Respondents were puzzled by the notion of a qualified records manager with a view that any person already in the post can perform records management functions.

4.3.2.2 Recordkeeping policy

There was a general unawareness of the legislative requirements to develop a records management policy. All respondents did not know what the contents of a records management policy should be. One respondent notes that any changes to the processes are piecemeal and ad hoc. Another respondent believed that the set of operational procedures serve as a records management policy.

4.3.2.3 External compliance and audits and best practices

The role played by NARSA in providing guidance to records management practices is generally not known. Respondents were not familiar with the legislative framework or national standards of records management.

However, one respondent from Site C explained that the lack of knowledge about the legislation stems from the fact that the Provincial Archives do not play an active role in the public administration. “The Provincial Archives Act is not operational in the Eastern Cape”

However, the Auditor – General as a supporting government institution, plays an oversight role in auditing and reporting on the accounts, financial statements of national and provincial state departments. The National Archives and Records Service entered into a joint venture with the Auditor – General's office so that while Auditor-General audits governmental bodies at the same time certain aspects of records management can be checked.

4.3.2.4 Feedback from customers

All respondents concurred that there are no mechanisms in place to obtain feedback from customers in relation to the department's performance. The department has no proper communication strategy. The relationship between Site C and decentralized offices is perceived as an area of difficulty there is often no feedback and the head office is often out of touch with the realities of social conditions in decentralized offices. The Eastern Cape Department of Social Development concluded the Service Level Agreements with outsourcing companies who distribute social grant payments without an input from civil society interest groups. The Service Level Agreements were not made public, with the result that beneficiaries of social grants remain unaware of the service standards they are entitled to (Overy & Zuma, 2004).

Findings of a research conducted by Joseph, (2005), reported that the Department of Social Development has consistently failed to communicate its decisions to social grant beneficiaries and this has resulted in the rise of litigation cases against the department.

Another respondent from Site B raises the issue of notification of beneficiaries. He notes that all social grant notification letters are sent out by registered mail but 60 % of them are sent back undelivered by the post office because beneficiaries change addresses or relocate without advising the offices concerned,

4.3.2.5 Training

Views from respondents (Sites A, B, C)

- Training is initiated by the Head office provincially but is not far reaching to filter through lower level staff. In decentralized offices.
- Training is provided on customer service and software training.
- Respondents were familiar with the principles of Batho Pele but find it difficult to translate the principles into practice in the work environment
- Training is not focused on recordkeeping skills
- There is training centre established at Site C to train and mentor identified registry staff on general document management skills and filing
- The nature of training varied but the preferred methods are on the job training and workshop.

4.3.3 The influence of Information Technology on records management

4.3.3.1 Description of recordkeeping system

Respondents were asked to describe the record keeping systems used by the department to support social grant processes.

Responses:

- The department has implemented a Social Development Information Management System which incorporates an Electronic File Management and a Workflow Monitoring software
- The implementation of a file management system is the key component of social grant processes.
- The system interfaces with other existing transversal system such SOCPEN, GEPF, and Home Affairs for data verification of beneficiary details, to share information and to eliminate fraud.
- EFMS has a functionality of capturing file contents.
- Under the SDIMS, files are centralized, organized and recorded in a Central Registry database.

- Through a Workflow Monitoring System, senior managers are able to monitor "from a distance" and can anytime trace the exact location of a file as well as the detail of the person responsible for managing it.
- The system has a built in validation system which alerts users of possible fraudulent activities.

A respondent (3) noted that:

Though the National Archives and Records Services recommends an Integrated Document Management System for managing records and documents in government departments. The SDIMS used in the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development is customized to meet the specific needs of the department.

4.3.3.2 Service delivery improvements

Respondents expressed views about the effectiveness of the information management system. All respondents regard computerization as essential to achieve greater efficiency. All agreed that social grant processes have greatly improved since the implementation of SDIMS. For example, files are now rarely lost, missing documents are more likely to be the result of human error rather than ineffective systems.

Social grant files are created under strict controls and there is more accountability amongst staff. The system has delivered a number of successes in regard to rooting out corruption.

Views from respondents on the success of SDIMS:

- Processes have improved due to the centralization of social grant files. A large number of previously misplaced files have been identified and subsequently captured on EFMS.
- It is now easier to monitor and evaluate staff performance, which was impossible to measure accurately due to the number of dispersed offices in the Eastern Cape.

- There is an increased productivity and all new applications are processed without backlogs. The system has enabled the Department to improve the processing time of the application of social grants to meet the statutory requirement of 90 days.
- All beneficiary files of social security are now traceable and easily accessible. Physical files can now be found in a matter of minutes.
- Reduction in litigation cases.
- Increased turnaround time for applications and timely responses to queries.
- Better quality of data due to control measures

4.3.3.3 Challenges of implementing a new system

Despite the innovation, respondents from Site A & B noted that there are also a number of problems with the new system. There are ongoing problems with telephone connectivity and power failures making it impossible to access the system. There have been occasions when documents have been caught in a processing bottleneck and had to be filed manually to meet deadlines.

Power failures were cited as a drawback to the workflow monitoring system, because speedy access is an important factor in processing social grant applications.

One respondent (4) observed thus:

The system's performance slows down when a number of people log on. This has a negative effect on the number of applications that could be processed on a daily basis.

Responding to questions surrounding the continuing fraud and litigation cases, one respondent (4) noted that the emerging fraud and litigation cases are historical problems that emanate "pre-SDIMS".

4.4 Chapter Summary

The Department of Social Development suffered numerous administrative and procedural shortcomings which resulted in poor service delivery. On the recommendations of the Interim Management Team appointed by the President to investigate service delivery problems, a Management Information System which incorporates Electronic Filing Management software was developed and implemented to improve service delivery and eliminate backlogs in the Department.

The key findings included:

- There is neither records management policy statement nor an appointed records manager.
- Respondents were confident of the quality of their management of records but felt that improvement is needed in some areas.
- The department runs a parallel recordkeeping systems of paper and electronic records
- The coordination between the department and outsourced companies who distribute payments is still problematic due to staff shortages and functional incompetence
- Training is not focused on records management practices per se rather on software training. The Eastern Cape Department of Social Development has benefited from the use of SDIMS. It is easier to monitor the Department's programmes, services and staff performance.
- The procedures for social grant processes are not documented
- There is lack of communication between Site C and decentralised offices and the beneficiaries.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the findings. The findings are arranged according to the research questions raised in section 1.5. The study used the components of the records lifecycle theory as a framework for analysis.

The International Standard for Records Management (ISO 15489) and the literature review are used as guides to best practices and current, emerging trends in records management in government. Standards provide a solid basis for records management services and act as a yardstick by which the services can be monitored and measured.

5.2 Records management policy and the regulatory environment

The first section of the standard deals with understanding the regulatory environment that includes national laws, codes of best practices. The regulatory framework is a basis for the establishment of a records management programme, to follow standards in all aspects of managing records. An organization need to establish, document, maintain and promulgate policies, procedures and practice for records management to ensure that its business need for evidence, accountability and information about its activities is met (ISO 15489- 1 ,2001).

Section 13 (5) of the National Archives and Records Service Act, 1996 specifically requires the head of a governmental body to designate an official of the body as the records manager. It is essential for each organization to establish its own records management policy to link its own unique processes and procedures to the requirements of the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act. (National Archives and Records Service of South Africa: policy guidelines, 2003).

The National Archives and Records Service of South Africa provide detailed policy guidelines on records management practices and procedures to assist governmental bodies to comply with legislative requirements regarding records. The strategies described in the policy guidelines are based on two fundamental pre-requisites. The first is the need to understand the concept of a "record" and the second is to develop a policy that addresses the management of records regardless of their physical format (National Archives and Records Service of South Africa, 2003).

Departmental heads are required to develop sound management systems for social grant records to meet the requirements of:

- Accountability in social grants administrations
- Efficient discharge of social grant transactions to effect service delivery

Despite the vital importance of social grant records as evidence or interaction with client communities, the accountability for their management is poorly defined. From the interviews, it was noted that there are neither policies nor guidelines in place for records management practices, which suggests that there is no consciously designed records management programme. An understanding of the legislative framework is a critical factor in regulated sectors such as public service institutions (Loadman, 2001).

The strategic plans of the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development (2004/5) make no reference to the legislative and regulatory compliance in relation to records despite the acknowledgement that records are created to provide legal evidence for disputes of non-payment.

Shepherd (2006) contends that legislative requirements should feature in organizational objectives as part of the strategic framework for records management.

The Eastern Cape Provincial Archives is not functioning optimally in terms of its statutory mandate to guide government departments on sound records management practices. The reason given was that the Provincial Archives legislation is not operational.

Section 17 (4) of the Act stipulates that if the provincial legislation is not in place, the provisions of the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act, 1996 should apply to the provinces as well.

Despite the stipulation of the Act, there is lack of coordination between the Provincial Archives and the provincial administration. The non-existence of a records management policy at the Social Security Directorate demonstrates a gap in compliance with the legislation.

5.3 Records management processes

The following records management processes were assessed:

- Data capture / creation/ registration
- Organization, transmission, use and retrieval
- Maintenance, storage, protection, retention
- Disposition through transfer and destruction.

The findings of the study are analyzed and discussed under the following:

5.3.1 Data capture/ creation/ receipt

The key component of data capture/ creation is the determination of accountability of the organization and the organization's knowledge of its regulatory environment (ISO 15489-1, 2001). More precisely, records must be created under strict control to maintain their reliability and authenticity. It must be clear who created the record, when it was created, how was it created and for what purpose (Arp& Dickman, 2002).

The EFMS has a template for metadata fields which describe the contents of files in terms of where the document comes from, who created it, when and why was it created and where is it located.

All respondents expressed confidence in the department's performance in the area of records creation and data capture. The department uses computer- generated pre-numbered forms that have to be accounted for by the head of each office. The application forms have a face value like a cheque book to eliminate fraud.

Data from the application files is verified in all offices to ensure the quality, accuracy and completeness of social grant files. Throughout the process, the file is scanned out from one officer to another to ensure responsibility and accountability.

Problems were noted with the database management of SOCPEN which lead to incomplete outdated information relating to beneficiaries. The problems were attributed to staff shortages.

One respondent conceded that the department is "understaffed and under-resourced". The Department of Social Development Annual Report (2003/4) reported a vacancy rate of 51%. It was acknowledged that the staff shortages slow down the processing of social grants. Currently he staff to beneficiary ratio in respect of social security administration in the Eastern Cape Province is 1: 2900, this contrast with average ratio in other provinces of 1: 1700 (See Appendix Three : Map of the Nine provinces) (Overy & Zuma, 2004).

On the question of the effectiveness of processes, the strategic plans of the Department of Social Development lack a rigorous evaluation of past years' performance on service delivery. There is no quantitative assessment of service improvements (Eastern Cape Department of Social Development 2004/5).

The strategic plans need to contain accurate information on the service delivery environment and the challenges faced by the Department and the need to calculate the human, financial and material resources that the Department requires in order to address the needs of its customers (Joseph, 2005).

5.3.2 Organization, transmission, use and retrieval

This component refers to methods of organizing records for easy retrieval and use. This includes methods and tools for the management of electronic and paper files. An important aspect of records management is the need for the created records to be adequately maintained for use.

According to ISO 15489-1 (2001), a records system should apply controls on access to ensure the integrity of records is not compromised through unauthorized use, alteration or deletion of information. Organizations should have formal guidelines regulating who is permitted access to records in what circumstances.

An Electronic File Management System has the following features:

- Files are registered, indexed and classed into categories according to the type of social grant applied for
- Multiple levels of user identification and password controls, matching specific functions to their authority levels
- All files are logged out to a user resulting in an ownership audit trail
- The utilization of bar codes of beneficiary identity numbers to improve accuracy in file accessing and tracking
- Identification and reporting of missing files per District
- Identification and reporting of incomplete files per District, as well as which critical documents are missing per file
- The system identifies and electronically merges duplicate file records
- Archive files are stored by the year in which they became inactive, catering for future destruction purposes.

- The operating system, database design and programming language cater for the interaction with and comparison to other relevant databases.

(Social Development Information Management System Planning Document: Eastern Cape, 2003).

The workflow monitoring system controls and monitors the movement of files between different offices. One respondent noted the ability of assigned staff to monitor social grant files "from a distance" and can any time trace the exact location of a file as well as the details of the person who is handling the file.

5.3.3 Maintenance, protection, storage and retention.

Records maintenance and storage arise through out the records' existence not only when it becomes inactive. Records storage is an important component of records management. The durability of transactional records is crucial for preservation, accessibility, and for producing evidence in litigation cases that arise from non-payment. A record which is inappropriately stored ceases to exist if it cannot be retrieved. Electronic records are more vulnerable to loss through technological obsolescence which can render them inaccessible. In this regard, records storage is more crucial in the electronic environment (Cumming, 2003).

Technological obsolescence seems to pose the greatest single threat to the preservation of electronic records. Many solutions to the problem have been suggested in the literature, migration seems to be the preferred solution. Migration is the periodic transfer of digital material from one hardware or software configuration to another. The method of migration guarantees the preservation of the integrity and usability of electronic records in a constant changing technological environment (Duranti, 1999).

The question of preservation of electronic was not dealt with in depth, respondents at senior management level cited efforts to upgrade the computer system after every five years to keep up with technological changes.

As in many other countries, the protection and preservation of electronic records over time is not perceived as a records management problem by IT specialists. The absence of department- wide policies and standards reinforces this perception

The requirement of the standard is to ensure that records are retained in a safe and secure environment for as long as needed particularly records that document the rights of individuals (ISO 15489-1, 2001).

Factors such as temperature, relative humidity, light intensity, illumination and atmospheric conditions need to be kept under acceptable levels (Akussah, 2002).Lack of retention policies might lead to retaining records that are passed their usefulness thus congesting the storage space. However, the records management policy guidelines stipulate that the retention of non-archival records must be determined by the organization itself (National archives and Records Service of South Africa, 2003).

All respondents agree that social grant records have evidential value that protects the rights of individuals. The decision on the retention period is at the discretion of the Head of Social Security. The prevalent retention practice in the department is to retain social grant records “for ever”, although nothing has been documented on paper and most respondents from the decentralised offices were not aware that there should be a written retention policy.

The maintenance and use of records hinges upon a disaster preparedness and disaster recovery plan as part of a records management programme. Disaster recovery plans are necessary to ensure continuous business operations in cases of major disasters such as floods, fires, earthquakes, etc. which could result in the destruction or loss of information (Ngulube, 2004).

Disaster recovery includes plans, policies, and procedures intended to prevent or minimize damage to records from unexpected occurrences that may inflict widespread destruction of records.

The SDIMS is designed with data security access, back-up and a disaster recovery plan. It could not be ascertained whether files packed in storage boxes are monitored against environmental deteriorative effects such as fungus, and atmospheric pollution. The buildings are protected by a 24 hour security service, 25 fire extinguishers, and "no smoking signs are displayed

Respondents expressed serious concern about limited storage space as paper files accumulate. However, the Department has future plans to extend the storage area.

5.3.4 Disposition through transfer or destruction of records

Disposition procedures must be systematic and routine. Destruction may not take place until there are assurances that there is no further need for the record, no outstanding work on it, and no relevant litigation pending. Records disposal should be managed through a policy and established procedures.

Disposition refers not only to destruction but includes:

- Extended retention
- Transfer to internal storage
- Transfer to internal archive
- Transfer to external archive (ISO 15489-1, 2001).

All respondents agreed that there are no clear, monitored, institution wide procedures for the disposal of records but inactive electronic files are removed from the active registry to an archive registry. The inactive paper files are transferred to in in-house archive at the DMC.

5.4 The implementation of a record system

The key requirement of the ISO 15489 is the design and the implementation of recordkeeping systems. The standard is concerned with organizing, managing and utilizing records created and captured as part of a business process. This can be done through the establishment of organizational recordkeeping systems. The objective of designing and implementing a record system is to enable records to be accountably managed. (ISO 15489-1, 2001).

The National Archives and Records Service of South Africa recommend the implementation of an Integrated Document Management System which incorporates an electronic records management application. An electronic records management application supports the medium and long term information needs of an office by managing records according to records management principles (National Archives and Records Service of South Africa, 2003).

The Eastern Cape Department of Social Development has, however, developed a Social Development Information Management System that incorporates an Electronic File Management System to manage social grant records (Social Development Information Management Project, 2003).

Johnston and Bowen (2005) differentiate between a recordkeeping system and an information system and note thus:

- A recordkeeping system is time-bound, context-stamped, inviolable and unchangeable once created,
- An information system contains data that is timely, easy to manipulate and non-redundant.

Record keeping systems vary from system to system but often include a number of the following functions:

- Security processes: to control which users have access to any document for what purpose
- Organizational processes : methods of organizing documents into related groups, e.g. folders
- Workflows and audit trail : the ability to route documents from one user to another in a controlled fashion
- Imaging methods –such as scanning for converting paper documents into an electronic format
- Metadata: the recording of information associated with the document (such as creator, the date it was created etc) (Raynes, 2002).

The Social Development Information System possesses all of the above records management functionalities. Through a workflow monitoring system, senior managers are able to monitor the performance of staff and the movement of files between social grant offices. On the issue of security processes, the system has restricted access levels, network- login and use of passwords to the database, to protect records against unauthorized access. An information system as against a record keeping system is appropriate for the department because the contents of social grant records are sometimes amended as circumstances of beneficiaries change such as a change of address, or in some instances a disability grantee might be taken off the system if his or her condition changes.

The International Standard of Records Management (ISO 15489) does not establish hard and blanket rules as to the form and structure that records system should take. A key focus of the standard is establishing organizationally appropriate recordkeeping structures that are tailored to organizational practice and requirements.

It is important to note that NARSA issued guidelines on the management of electronic records. But the major shortcoming of the guidelines is that they are not simple or comprehensive or specific enough to be easily applied as procedures.

5.4.1 Training

The automation of processes in organizations creates dramatic improvements in the work environment but to achieve such outcomes requires training. The use of Information Technology requires more than the installation and application of hardware and software but the key element in the implementation of any system is training. A reference is made in the standard (ISO 15489) to the need to train all staff whose work involves creating records. Training may encompass the following methods:

- On –the-job training
- Training courses provided by an educational institutions
- Leaflets and booklets
- Brief sessions (ISO 15489-1, p.17, 2001).

Training in the department is not far reaching enough to filter through lower level staff in decentralized offices (Site A and Site B). Technical training on software application is provided rather than professional training based on records management principles. The policy guidelines of NARSA stress the importance of training based on records management principles.

Despite random quality checks by supervisors there are still pockets of functional incompetence regarding filing skills which affect quality control.

5.4.2 Technological improvements in relation to service delivery

The implementation of a recordkeeping or an information management system is not only a technical application but a framework of people, procedures, policy and tools that create and sustain organizational records and recordkeeping. The key question is: "What benefits and improvement to people, processes and service delivery flow from the implementation of SDIMS?"

Prior to the implementation of the system, the processing of grants was done manually as a result the system was fraught with risks that include:

- Files got lost resulting in duplication of work thus increasing the likelihood of tampering with files
- Lack of controls to ensure that documents passed from one individual to the next
- Hard copies make quicker searching difficult, as there are no searching mechanisms like key words
- Documents move from one office to another, travel from regional offices to head offices before final sign off. Excessive physical travel obviously increases the risk of document security and pages can become damaged.
- Remote viewing of document not possible, paper records can only be used by one person at a time whilst electronic records can be viewed by many people at the same time.

Findings reveal that respondents have enthusiastically embraced the implementation of the system. The basic improvement is that processes are done more easily, quicker, better quality, and it is easier to locate records.

The improvements can be summarized as follows:

For the organization:

- Work is done quickly resulting to improved productivity, and less application backlogs.
- The quality of processes and their outcomes has improved. Turnaround time for processing application forms has improved to 90 days as required.

For staff members**:**

- The information is available when required at the press of a button
- Greater efficiency and effectiveness at work (processes are better, easier and quicker.
- Evidence is available for what they were asked to do and what they did.
- Improvement of IT skills

These improvements demonstrate the requirement to manage information and records through out their life history.

In terms of service delivery improvements, findings from a research, conducted by Overy and Zuma (2004) of the Public Service Accountability Monitor, reveal that 92% of beneficiaries interviewed stated that service has improved since the outsourcing of payments and the implementation of a Social Development Information Management System.

5.4.3 Challenges of implementation

Reliability, accuracy and immediacy of record keeping are important aspects when designing and implementing a records keeping system. The SDIMS has performed well in some areas, but problems were also encountered. Problems of telephone connectivity (system web-based) and power failures were cited as drawbacks to the systems, thus work flows are disrupted. Respondents from decentralised offices complained of inadequate communication between different offices. Problems are referred to the head office but there is often no feed-back.

There are ongoing problems with the performance of the system which slows down when there are a number of people logged on. This has a "negative effect on the number of applications that could be processed on a daily basis".

Site C has succeeded in addressing operational problems relating to the organization of information and data capture but the Department has failed to address other infrastructural problem that hamper the ability of staff at regional and local level to efficiently process social grant applications.

5.5 Lessons Learned

- The District Coordination Model is aimed at developing District and Area offices to bring social services closer to communities. The administrative functions of filing, maintaining and social grant processing are removed from District offices to the Document Management Centre to allow the latter to improve service delivery.
- The capture of all files in a central office Document Management Centre (Site C) solves control and management problems because processes and procedures are standardized.
- The importance of ensuring that all files to be transported to the venue have been signed off and declared as complete by the responsible official. Failure to do so could result in a large proportion of files being overlooked at the offices.
- A comprehensive sheet covering all boxed files is compiled at the point of departure prior to transportation and checked off against the inventory when delivered to the Document Management Centre.
- Supervisors conduct random quality checks on processed files

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, conclusions are presented by reviewing the research objectives and summarizing related findings and recommendations are made.

6.1 Overview

The transformation of social development in South Africa has undergone extensive changes which include the amalgamation of services to include all population groups. Structural changes have resulted in all spheres of government. The development of a District Coordination Model has affected how services and programmes are planned. Social services have been brought closer to communities, and to improve communication with the citizens government is also implementing computerization projects and initiating e-government. The success of these projects should be supported by sound records management practices that include compliance with the legislation, training of staff on records management principles. The key drivers of sound records management practices include the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act, 1996 and the Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000.

6.2 Review of research objectives and summary findings.

6.2.1 Objective1: Current records management processes

The Department of Social Development has managed to address the administrative problems of missing social grant files and controlling the movement of files through the implementation of a workflow monitoring system. The creation of files and data capture is facilitated by using pre-numbered standardized application forms to ensure accuracy and quality of records. Supervisors perform random quality checks on processed files to ensure that any incorrect information is corrected immediately.

The security of records is protected against unauthorised access through the use of password and log-in identification. There is concern for limited storage space at the Document Management Centre where all social grant files from social grant offices throughout the Eastern Cape Province are delivered, sorted and stored manually. The Document Management Centre was created to provide back office functions to the front-line staff in Area and District offices, thus allowing the latter to improve service delivery. The DMC has succeeded in addressing operational problems relating to the organization of information and data capture. But it seems that the department has focused on back office support improvements to the detriment of improving services in local and district offices. Staff shortages and functional incompetence in decentralized offices limit the capacity of the department to fulfil its service delivery mandate.

6.2.2 Objective 2: Identified gaps between current state and desired state.

As record keeping moves from paper to computer technology, it is essential to formulate policies to ensure that the new media create and maintain records that are comprehensive, authentic and tamper proof. According to Davies (1998), the formulation of a records management policy is the first step in planning and implementing a programme. The policy should take into account the needs of the organization and the limitation of change, upon which the policy and practice can be built

The Eastern Cape Department of Social Development does not have a records management policy or a designated records manager as required by the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa, Act. The policy guidelines issued by the National Archives and Records Service state that government departments should develop and promulgate a records policy and link it with its own processes in line with the requirements of the Act. Respondents were not clear what the contents of a records policy should be. One respondent misconstrued the SDIMS training manual as a records management policy.

A records management policy includes the following:

- Identification of records manager
- Training personnel on records management
- Disposal of records
- Development of retention schedules
- Management of filing and information retrieval systems in any media
- Ensuring adequate protection of records that are vital and confidential
- Criteria for measuring the success of a records management programme

(National Archives and Records Service of South Africa, 2003).

The issue of the absence of legislation and policies for managing records in developing countries is often raised in the literature. Barata et al (2001, p.36) argue that external government ICT staff often ignore statutory obligations of National Archives to manage records. Recordkeeping, in the department is driven by litigation cases rather legislation compliance. There is no proper communication strategy with the beneficiaries; the Department often fails to communicate its decisions to social grant beneficiaries. This has contributed to beneficiaries resorting to courts. The Service Level Agreements between outsourced companies who distribute payments and the department were never made public as a result the social grant beneficiaries are unaware of the service standards they are entitled to. The issue of not informing the public about service standards suggests non-compliance with the Batho Pele principles.

The department does not have written guidelines for recordkeeping procedures or benchmarks for measuring the effectiveness of records management procedures. One of the requirements of the standard (ISO 15489) is to document all the processes so that a records management programme is monitored and reviewed Monitoring and review are the key elements of ensuring that records management continues to support the objectives of an organization.

There is no formal on-going evaluation of records management processes in the department. The evaluation of performance in terms of records management processes is critical to effective service delivery.

Lack of sufficient departmental direction in the form of policies, and guidelines has resulted in low level of awareness about recordkeeping practices particularly in decentralized offices.

Information flow between offices (Site A, B & C) was found to be inadequate. It was interesting to note that respondents from Site A are not well informed about activities in other social grant offices. The flow of information between offices should support the District Coordination Model and be aligned with the management of social grant records in a decentralized context.

Institutional capacity needs to be increased so that record keepers could protect the critical evidence of government actions and transactions. There is a need to train staff to manage electronic records to build records management capacity and inculcate the benefits of records management. Currently, training that is provided is not based on records management principles.

The other critical issue that has been identified is lack of placement of Provincial Archives in public administration regarding records management practices. There is a need to build partnerships with records managers in establishing records management programmes. The best practice approach depends on records managers and archivists to be brought together under an integrated recordkeeping framework which would provide common understanding of consistent standards and unified best practice criteria. Mnjama (2003) calls for archivists to play a leading role in auditing records management practices throughout the entire civil service comparable to what the Auditor- General's office is presently doing.

6.2.3 Objective 3: Records management practices and service delivery

The implementation of SDIMS has resulted in the coordination of records management processes. The system cuts across organizational lines for data sharing. This has led to more organic practices being developed and increased cooperation between functional units within the department.

The Department of Social Development annual report (2003/4) registered progress in service delivery. Litigations against the department have been significantly reduced due to the improvement of turn around time on processing applications.

The benefits derived from the implementation of a Management Information System are its capabilities to monitor and evaluate staff performance, which were impossible to measure accurately due to the number of offices and vastness of the province. There has been a reduction in delays in service through the workflow system of tracking records. 92 % of beneficiaries interviewed by researchers from the Public Service Accountability Monitor stated that services have improved since the outsourcing of payments. The emerging litigation cases in the Eastern Cape, according to one respondent, are historical problems that emanate "pre-SDIMS".

6.2.4 Objective 4: Recommendations

The department should build a working relationship with the Provincial Archives to strengthen the capacity of staff in records management practices. The best practice approach depends on records managers and archivists to be brought together under an integrated recordkeeping framework towards ensuring that reliability, authenticity and completeness of records. The framework would provide common understanding of consistent standards, unified best practice criteria, interdisciplinary approach and collaboration in the recordkeeping approaches for both paper and electronic records (An, Xiaomi, 2003).

There should be an accountability framework which would include a records management policy with roles and responsibilities that would define the service relationship between the Department of Social Development and beneficiaries.

A records manager's core responsibilities are three fold, thus:

- To establish records management standards for the organization.
- To ensure that those responsible for carrying out records management responsibilities are appropriately trained to do so
- To develop effective monitoring procedures to ensure that standards are complied with

Issues relating to the management of electronic records overtime need to be considered. These include storage of and access to electronic records, the need to preserve integrity, reliability and authenticity of electronic records and build capacity.

Strict penalties for non-compliance with legislative requirements would improve record keeping activities in government. Further research is needed to investigate the requirements of the regulatory environment of various types of organizations.

Formal training programmes should be developed to improve record keeping and filing with hands-on instructions. Guidelines and procedures on record keeping should be developed and made readily available to all staff across the department. The contents of the guidelines should provide a basic definition of a record, an explanation of a records lifecycle concept, legislation and regulations that affect records management practices. Records management and archives legislation is an essential component of the legislative basis for accountable, effective and efficient government. Furthermore, it provides the framework, which enables the records and information management programme to function with authority.

The Department of Social Development needs to expend more energy and resources to deal with problems which hamper its ability to process social grant applications This means that staff shortages need to be addressed and infrastructural problems such

as power failures need to be overcome. There is need for an effective communication strategy with all the relevant stakeholders.

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APPENDIX ONE

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Broad areas of investigation:

- Procedures and processes employed to make information contained in records accessible
- The current state of policy on records management
- The implementation of SDIMS and effects on service delivery

Specific questions to address the above issues:

Records management processes:

1) How do you ensure that the creation and capture of unnecessary data is controlled?
2) What recordkeeping systems are used to manage records that are created?
3) Does the department have formal recordkeeping procedures or guidelines for staff to follow?
4) Who is responsible for measuring the effectiveness of the processes?
5) How are records organized for easy access and retrieval?
6) What level of recordkeeping awareness and competency do staff members have to meet the work requirements?
7) Does the department have a risk management plan?
8) How long are records retained after the death of a beneficiary?

Records management policy:

1) Do you have a records manager in the department?
2) Does the department have a policy on records management programme?
3) How does the organization manage its external compliance regime in terms of audits, standards and best practices?
4) How does the department obtain feedback from beneficiaries?
5) Do you provide training to recordkeeping staff?

The implementation of SDIMS

1) Describe the recordkeeping systems used by the department to support social grant processes?
2) What technology improvements have given the department the best return in service delivery?
3) What were the challenges of implementing a Social Development Information System?

APPENDIX TWO

32 Bridgewater,
SOUTH END.

The Head of Social Security,
BISHO.

20 January 2006

Sir/ Madam,

I'm currently studying towards a Masters degree in Public and Development Management at the University of Witwatersrand. As part of my course requirements I'm required to conduct a research study. I'm interested in records management practices and effects on service delivery. I have chosen to focus on social grant records.

I, therefore, kindly request permission to interview some of the staff members who are directly responsible for the administration of social grants.

Thank You,
Yours truly,
Pumla Ngwendu