

# AN ASSESSMENT OF IFLA/DANIDA SPONSORED ILL/DD PROJECT IN GHANA - THE USERS POINT OF VIEW

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## ABSTRACT

*The need to assess DANIDA sponsored ILL/DD project in Ghana is justified by the important role it plays in the fulfillment of information provision in the University and Research Libraries in Ghana.*

*The availability of current materials and appropriate services offered by the ILL/DD offices in a congenial atmosphere motivate people to use the libraries for research purpose.*

*The aim of this study is therefore to find out to what extent the available materials and services provided by ILL/DD offices in Ghana are actually satisfying the needs of the users of those libraries and how effectively they are using those resources.*

*In doing this, the study evaluated the ILL/DD project in Ghana and analysed the impact of the project on the users to establish the current performance in terms of fulfilling the needs of the users.*

*In conclusion the study made some suggestions and recommendations for the development of the ILL/DD project in Ghana.*

## INTRODUCTION

Information is known to man to be an indispensable resource. It forms an

integral part of development.

The successful integration of the computer and telecommunications has led to the development of information accessibility. Librarians and other information managers have combined the information technology facilities in repackaging of information, desk top publication and catalogue creation.

The librarian also uses information technology in the acquisition process, storage and dissemination of pictorial, textual and numerical information. This development has promoted inter-library cooperation. No library, no matter how large and however well-endowed it may be can hope to operate entirely on its own. At different times and in different ways every library needs assistance in acquiring a document from some other source.

It might be rightly points out that even the largest libraries must engage in cooperative actions to augment their resources for today it is impossible for any library to be absolutely comprehensive in all fields.

Library cooperation is between librarians and libraries of all kinds

locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Library cooperation can therefore be seen as a symbol of goodwill on the part of librarians and libraries to share resources. At the same time, it implies at least a degree of reciprocity on the part of participating libraries. The list of activities that are involved in library cooperation are many. These include, inter-library lending, cooperative cataloguing and international cooperation.

Inter-library lending is concerned with satisfying readers with requirement outside the stock of the individual library or library system. The lending may be from local or national libraries or from libraries outside the country, and the kind of materials requested are, books, reports, theses, pamphlets, conference proceedings, periodical articles and many more.

After several years of discussion on the problems of inter-library lending in developing countries and activities supporting this, IFLA's section on Document Delivery and inter-library lending, decided at a meeting in Barcelona in 1993 to investigate the possibility of starting a trial project concerning document delivery in the third world. Consequently, a project group was established under the section with the chairman at that time, Niels Mark, as the Head. It was decided to make trial projects in two different areas of Africa. Two English speaking African University libraries were therefore selected for the trial project. These libraries were the Balme Library of the University of

Ghana and the Library of the University of Nairobi, Kenya.

With regard to funding, two institutions were contacted for financial assistance and these were, Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) and the Norwegian Ministry of Aid to Developing Countries (NORAD).

The Ghana project, the first of the two, is being funded by DANIDA and coordinated by a Danish Team.

The second part sited in Kenya is funded by NORAD and coordinated by a Norwegian group.

A formal ILL/DD service began in Ghana in April, 1998. The participating libraries search on line library catalogues and other databases on behalf of users. Photocopies of selected articles are then ordered from four Danish libraries; namely, the Danish Library of Science and Medicine, the Danish Veterinary and Agricultural Library, the Copenhagen Business School Library and the State University Library in Aarhus.

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT**

The aims of the project are:

1. to find methods for document delivery to developing countries
2. to establish electronic networks links with a regional and global approach to improve universal availability of publications and information.
3. to improve the competence of staff in handling inter-library

- loans and document delivery system (regional, national and global).
4. to support negotiations with main document centers/libraries to attain favourable bulk treaties for the participating libraries
  5. to develop the project as a model for emulation by other African and third world Countries that do not have such a system already in place.
2. The library of the University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast.
  3. The library of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi.
  4. The library of the University for Development Studies, Tamale.
  5. The library of University College of Education of Winneba, Winneba.
  6. The Library of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), INSTI, Accra.

In sum, the main objective of the project is to enhance the capacities of libraries in developing countries particularly University and research libraries, through organized ILL/DD procedures, to maximize their limited resources at the national, regional and International levels.

The libraries are being assisted by the project to form a consortium with the aim of sharing resources both locally and internationally by electronic means. At the International level they will be assisted to access and acquire materials listed in some of the great catalogues, databases and document supply centers on the world wide web (www) such as (OCLC) online computer library center, the British Library Document supply centre (BLDSC), and the resources of some of the major libraries of Denmark.

### **Participating libraries**

The participating libraries in Ghana are:

1. The Balme Library, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra.

### **Methodology**

Data was mainly collected through the use of a questionnaire. The population consisted of a cross section of users made up of Researchers/Lecturers and students. Four selected participating institutions namely; University of Ghana, the University of Cape Coast, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science Technology, and the Institute for Scientific and Technological Information (INSTI) of CSIR.

The targeted population made up of users, Researchers/Lecturers and Students were selected at random from their various institutions.

The questionnaire seeks to find out from the users, their level of satisfaction and the services that are provided by the ILL/DD Centres in the four selected libraries.

The study ascertained whether the users now easily find information from the outside libraries.

Other methods which were used to collect data was interviews and

discussions. These helped to clarify issues which were not well explained in the questionnaires.

The observation method was also used to observe activities in the library especially ILL/DD procedures, the interaction between library users and library staff in seeking information materials from within and outside the country.

The study also made extensive use of secondary sources, such as books, bibliographies, Journal articles and reports on the project.

### **Discussion**

The study assesses the progress of the project in each of the institutions covered (i.e. University of Ghana, University of Cape Coast, KNUST, and INSTI). It seeks to assess users' level of satisfaction with the project, problems associated with the project, level of patronage as well as users understanding of inter-library lending and their awareness about the project.

### **Lecturers And Researchers**

University of Ghana produced the highest number of respondents as far as Lecturers/Researchers were concerned (28.1%) or 9 out of 32 respondents. KNUST and CSIR followed with (25%) or (18) respondents each, University of Cape Coast came up with (21.9%) or 7 respondents. This provides a fair ground on which to assess the average responses from the various Institutions.

### **Contribution of ILL/DD to Academic Work**

When asked what other help respondents thought the ILL/DD could offer to make academic work easier (12.5%) or 4 respondents said all users should be trained to do their personal search. Another (12.5%) or 4 respondents said their libraries should be linked up with more libraries, (9.4%) or 3 respondents said their database should be broadened and another (9.4%) or 3 respondents said they needed more computers in their libraries, (6.3%) or 2 respondents gave other responses but (3.1%) or 1 respondent said students and Lecturers should be provided with all their information needs, whereas another one (1) person said they should increase the number of donor libraries. One (1) respondent said the libraries needed more funding from government. The response rate for this question was very high.

### **Problems with ILL/DD Service**

When asked to enumerate their problems with the ILL/DD service, (25%) or 8 respondents mentioned delays in getting documents ordered. (12.5%) or 4 respondents, pointed to difficulties with internet connectivity, (9.4%) or 3 respondents. mentioned difficulties in getting requests satisfied, (6.3%) or 2 respondents mentioned lack of education, another (6.3%) or 2 respondents said lack of resources and qualified staff and another (6.3%) or 2 respondents said their problems lay with getting requests from other libraries, (3.1%) or 1 respondent gave other responses and a significant

(31.3%) or 10 respondents did not respond at all to this question.

### **Suggestions for Improving ILL/DD Service**

The question asked for suggestions for improvement (28.1%) or 9 respondents said there was the need for more training of users and staff of the participating libraries.

Another (12.5%) or 4 respondents said there was the need for full internet connectivity (15.6%) or 5 respondents said the project should be expanded to satisfy the increasing number of requests and (18.8%) or 6 respondents, gave other responses such as the need for more education, more publicity and resources, etc, (9.4%) or 3 respondents said Faculty and Department libraries should be connected to the project, (3.1%) or 1 respondent said users should be made to pay for the services offered to them while (12.5%) or 4 respondents gave no response to this question.

### **Assessment of ILL/DD Services, (Researchers/Lecturers)**

The survey asked respondents whether they were pleased with the IFLA/DANIDA sponsored ILL/DD project in Ghana. (53.1%) or 17 respondents said Yes, while (46.9%) or 15 respondents said No.

### **Level of Satisfaction (Researchers/Lecturers)**

To determine the level of satisfaction, respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction (28.1%) or 9 respondents said they were reasonably satisfied. (25.0%) or 8

respondents said they were very satisfied and (46.9%) or 15 respondents said they were not satisfied.

### **Students Response**

#### **Institutions covered**

In the case of Institutions covered with regards to students survey, only three institutions (University of Ghana, KNUST, and University of Cape Coast) were covered. INSTI-CSIR was not covered because they are strictly involved with researchers.

The study shows that majority of respondents (45.3%) or 34 respondents interviewed were from the University of Ghana, (28%) or 21 respondents were from KNUST and (26.7%) or 20 respondents also came from the University of Cape Coast.

#### **Benefit of ILL/DD Service**

On the question of which aspect of the ILL//DD services respondents have ever benefited from, (37.3%) or 28 respondents said they had benefited from Inter-library loans in the form of articles from books and periodicals, (18.7%) or 14 respondents said they had benefited from external literature search, (29.3%) or 22 respondents said they did not benefit from any of the areas mentioned above and only (4%) or 3 respondents claimed they had benefited from all the two (1.3%) or 1 respondent gave other responses and (9.3%) or 7 respondents gave No response at all.

#### **Publicity of the ILL/DD Services**

On whether they thought there was enough information about the services

(34.7%) or 26 respondents said Yes. The majority of respondents (44%) or 33 respondents said No, (1.3%) 1 respondent gave other response and (20%) or 15 respondents gave no response.

#### **Level of Patronage**

When asked whether they had ever made use of ILL/DD services, (60%) or 57 respondents said Yes. (32%) or 24 respondents said No, and (8%) or 6 respondents gave no response.

#### **Impact of the ILL/DD Services on Research**

On whether the introduction of ILL/DD had changed the nature of their research at the library, (50.7%) percent or 38 respondents said Yes and (45.3%) or 34 respondents said No (4%) or 3 respondents did not respond to this question.

#### **Payment for the ILL/DD Services**

When asked whether respondents agreed with the idea of monetary contribution (76%) or 57 respondents said Yes, (22.7%) or 17 respondents said No and (1.3%) or 1 respondent gave other response.

#### **Assessment of the ILL/DD Project (Students Views)**

The survey asked respondents whether they were pleased with the IFLA/DANIDA Sponsored ILL/DD Project in Ghana. (68%) or 51 respondents said Yes and (24%) or 18 respondents said No, whereas (8%) percent or 6 respondents gave no response at all.

#### **Level of Satisfaction (Student View)**

To further probe the question of whether they were pleased with the IFLA/DANIDA Sponsored ILL/DD Project in Ghana, respondents who had responded in the affirmative were further asked to indicate their level of satisfaction (50.7%) or 38 respondents of this proportion said they were reasonably satisfied, (17.3%) or 13 respondents said they were very satisfied and (6.7%) or 5 respondents said they were not satisfied. Unfortunately (25.3%) or 19 respondents gave no responses.

#### **Problems of the ILL/DD Services (Students View)**

Concerning the problems associated with the ILL/DD services provided in their various libraries (16%) or 12 respondents, said the main problem was delays in getting Internet connectivity (12%) or 9 respondents said facilities are not enough (5.3%) or 4 respondents said personnel needed more training and (8%) or 6 respondents said the problem was impossibility in getting some urgent and vital information. (4%) or 3 respondents felt lack of computer literacy hindered information search. (1.3%) or 1 respondent said the problem was inability to conduct searches on their own. (24%) or 18 respondents gave other responses and as much as (29.3%) or 22 respondents gave no responses at all on this question.

#### **Suggestions for improvement (Students View)**

When it came to suggestions, majority of respondents (29.3%) percent or 22

respondents said more funding was needed to expand the project. Another (12%) or 9 respondents said more training was needed on the Internet and searching. (5.3%) or 4 respondents said personnel should always be available to assist in using the systems. (2.7%) or 2 respondents said the project should urgently be expanded and networked. (1.3%) or 1 respondent said the Universities should support the project. Another (1.3%) or 1 respondent said users should contribute something little in the form of money and another (1.3%) or 1 respondent said books should be loaned alongside. (24%) or 18 respondents gave other responses and (22.7%) or 17 respondents gave no response.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study was carried out with the aim of finding out the present state of affairs with regards to the IFLA/DANIDA, ILL/DD Project in Ghana. More especially to determine the level of satisfaction from the user point of view.

The project vision is commendable. It is expected to help investigate the possibility and problems of using new information technology to make information and documents available to students and researchers, in Africa and other third world countries in areas where library collections are poor and inadequate; to encourage and promote the culture of networking among member libraries for the purpose.

The progress made so far is comm-

endable. However, the implementation problems highlighted by the users need immediate solutions. The project faces many problems such as, lack of full internet connectivity, low level of knowledge about the purpose of the project even among librarians. The effective ILL/DD system in operation suggests that immediate steps be taken towards the formalization and institution of a national ILL/DD system in order to maximize the scarce resources.

The constraints and hindrances are real enough and intractable in some cases, but they should not prevent libraries from striving to search for solutions since our society more than most, requires information to promote development and literacy. Librarians should therefore, start by interacting with one another, by being more user conscious making the most of existing resources and thereby enlisting user support in this struggle. Once this is done, they would get support from Government and the private sector. If librarians are able to do this successfully, those other important environmental constraints will fall in line. Ghana also needs to have a National Library to coordinate and set bibliographic and other standards to facilitate ILL/DD development.

It is therefore hoped that the participating libraries would share their experiences with other tertiary institutions about how a practical inter-library lending system is organized. This way, there would be ample proof that the project is a big success. This would provide the

justification for commencing similar projects in other countries.

### Recommendations

In connection with the findings of the study, the following recommendations and suggestion are made:

1. There is the need for periodic evaluation of performance to be carried out.
2. There is the need for the creation of local databases by the participating libraries.
3. There is the need for the various libraries to step up their automation processes
4. The libraries should mount a deliberate policy of awareness creation among their own staff as well as their users.
5. There is the need for librarians of the various libraries to browse the Internet for current publication and provide content page of current journals for users.
6. It is also recommended that users should pay a percentage for ILL/DD services. The University and other authorities related to the project should be made to get their institutions to

support the project

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# PRESERVING ELECTRONIC RECORDS IN GHANA: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL HERITAGE

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## Abstract

*With the revolutionary global shift from print to electronic media as means of documentation and communication, the landscape of managing records is changing fast. In Africa, the public sector is more hit as a result of the lack of resources, legislative framework, infrastructure and institutional capacity. The article discusses the preservation of electronic documents in the public sector of Ghana and the implications for national heritage. It highlights key issues including, legislative reviews, technological support, staff re-engineering and capacity building and the active involvement of records and archives managers in the "conception" stage of electronic documents.*

## Introduction

It is an unnegotiable fact that we are living in a transition period from paper and print to paperless and electronic-based information sources and records (Cox 1998). The outcome of increased technical capabilities of technology has been increasing quantities of records being created, communicated and maintained in electronic form. The United States for example had estimated that about three-quarters of its transactions will be handled electronically by the year 2000 (Shepherd 1994). This notion has resulted in the United States Senate and House of representatives

enacting the Paperwork Elimination Act in 1995 (Ubogu 2001). On the contrary, Fitzgerald (1998) intimated that, the world will never see paper eliminated entirely but rather a society in which paper has a much-diminished role. While the debate is raging on in the developed countries, Africa being saddled with diminishing gross domestic products, ever soaring debt burdens, unfavourable trade balances and high inflationary trends is yet to start grappling with the pull and tug fashion with which rapidly changing technology is impacting on the institutions creating and managing records and archives.

The threat posed by the combination of the factors to the national heritage of Ghana is enormous. The controversy of what constitutes national heritage is not the concern of this paper. Most definitions limit it to monuments, buildings, historical sites etc. However, according to Smith (1985), in addition to physical evidence, heritage includes the products of man's unique capacity to think rationally and to record and transmit ideas and information. Documents serve not only to record and express human thought and action, but also to illuminate the collective sense of identity and continuity developed by a particular

people. Apart from the immense contributions to public administration, public documents particularly archive are the embodiment of a nation's common historical, social and political experience over the years and as such need to be preserved to ensure that generations of its citizens have both physical and intellectual access to them.

### The Preservation Problem

The geographical location of Ghana places it among a set of countries which experience high and fluctuating temperatures and relative humidity, abundance of sunlight, and a thriving macro and micro biological activity. Together with the economic throes of the past few decades, these have made the preservation of its documentary heritage a daunting task.

It is true that today only an insignificant proportion of the documentary heritage of Ghana is in electronic format. It is equally true that since 1963, when the first computer was installed in the public sector, there had been a gradual build up of electronic documents in public offices (Akussah & Tiarniyu 2000). Gradually some of these records are finding their ways into the Public Archives system and will need to be preserved along side the traditional paper-based documents. The implication of this is that preservation endeavours can no longer be solely focused on paper or other familiar documents.

As rightly pointed out by Buchanan and Jensen (1995), preservation of electronic formats embrace many of the same basic principles as the preservation of traditional media. These include among others selection, care and handling, storage, security and environmental control. However, the difference between digital documents and traditional paper documents in terms of the way they are generated, captured, transmitted, stored, maintained, accessed and managed demands more critical care for electronic documents (Rothenberg 1999). Apart from the uncertain longevity of electronic media, their fragile and delicate magnetic and optical carriers deteriorate faster under the pressure of heat, humidity and atmospheric contaminants (Hedstrom and Montgomery 1998). They are more prone to loss, corruption and unauthorized access. They demand more critical security for their integrity and authenticity. The constantly and rapidly changing technology seems to be aggravating the problem of extended intellectual access to digital documents. The National Historical Publication and Records Commission of the United States (1990) minced no words when it stated that:

Managing information in electronic form to ensure its availability for future use by a broad spectrum of users including records creators, historians, social scientists, genealogists, journalists, lawyers and private citizens is the most significant and difficult challenge currently confronting the archival community.

In Ghana, the creation, processing, security, integrity, storage preservation and the intellectual access to electronic documents have been for a long time taken for granted. Policies, methods and standards for records and archives management were developed to meet the needs of traditional paper-based environments, and for that reason making their applicability to the electronic environment difficult (Akussah & Tiamiyu 2000). This situation no doubt poses a great threat to the national documentary heritage. The writer is aware of the efforts in 1997 to develop a National Electronic Records Management Policy but nothing substantial came out of those efforts. Similarly in September 2001, a national forum was organized to brain-storm on a National Information Technology Policy. Concrete results are yet to be realized from this endeavour as well. The problem therefore lingers on.

### The Role of the Archivist

According to Cook (1990), archivists have an important role to play in the modern information age if they realize that "they are in the understanding business and not information business". Cox (1998) also cautions archivists about the fundamental matters they need to keep in sight to enable them survive. In Cox's view, the institutions creating the records and their keeping systems are changing rapidly with changing information technologies. Archivists therefore need to re-align their principles and knowledge to the range of information age concerns

such as classification and retrieval to enhance their opportunities for playing functional roles. It is equally important that archivists reflect on their institutions as well within the framework of the transforming nature of information technology. In the words of Bearman (1994) archivists will need to continue to stay abreast of changes and manage implementations to achieve the greatest possible degree of conformance.

To enable archivists cope with the preservation of the products of the changing information technology, Buchanan and Jensen (1995) propose that they need to understand the physical nature of electronic documents and their format. They catalogued the following key issues among others which need to be thoroughly comprehended.

- How is the information stored in the digital file?
- What type of medium is it stored on?
- What is the medium's life expectancy?
- What could affect the longevity or the accessibility of the information on the media?
- What technology is and will continue to be needed to translate the document including any hardware and software?
- How easily can the information be upgraded?
- What are the staff, time and cost implications' involved in preserving the information?.

For convenience, Buchanan and

Jensen's propositions can be viewed as constituting two main issues – technical and non-technical issues.

### **Technical Issues**

Technological obsolescence, it has been suggested by many, represents a greater threat to digital information than the instability and fragility of the medium on which the information is stored. (US Commission on Preservation and Access 1994; Buchanan and Jensen, 1995). Most digital media, even under the best of storage conditions have limited shelf life. The rate at which new devices, processes and software are changed should rather be of more concern to archivists.

An optical disc for example may have a shelf life of twenty-five years but the technology used to intellectually access the information on it may be obsolete in less than five years. In the face of the technological obsolescence problem and in the bid to ensure extended access to electronic information, the archivist needs to adopt the techniques of "refreshing" and migration (Bearman, 1989; Bikson and Frinking 1993; Rothenberg 1995).

### **Non-Technical Issues**

Electronic record formats are costly to acquire, and maintain. As such the archivist should be prepared to sacrifice everything to ensure their longevity. To be able to make reasonable impact in this direction, Buchanan and Jensen (1995) suggest their full involvement in the development of standards, quality

control, and user access software.

The archivist needs to be aware of the security issues associated with electronic records. He must guarantee the integrity, authenticity and reliability of the digital records. Comprehensive data security strategies as well as disaster prevention strategies need to be put in place (Akussah and Tiamiyu 2000).

System documentation and meta - data description, legal requirements, provenance, rights management and policy framework are all issues that the archivist needs to address (Drijfhout 2001).

### **Public Sector Electronic Records in Ghana**

The Public Records and Archives Administration Act of 1997 superseded the Public Archives Ordinance of 1955 as the legal framework for managing public records in Ghana. The new act statutorily established the Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD) embracing the Registries and Records Offices in the Public Sector, the National Records Centre Network and the National Archives Network. By the act, PRAAD is empowered to manage the total life cycle of Public records, (electronic records inclusive). It is interesting however to note that, policies and procedures deriving from the act and other supplementary legislations for the management of public records and for that matter archives were developed within the context of paper documents. This

brings to the question, the institutional capacity of PRAAD to manage public sector electronic records which ultimately constitute part of the national documentary heritage. Just like traditional paper records and archives, public electronic records reflect government decisions, transactions and activities, as such there must be proper guidelines pertaining to the archival functions of appraisal, preservation and the provision of both physical and intellectual access at different phases of their life cycle.

### **The Public Records & Archives Administrative Department**

The Ghana Public Sector Records Management Reform Programme which was initiated in the early 1990s was aimed at strengthening the legal framework and the institutional structures for managing public records. In addition, the programme sought to build capacity for efficient records management and information delivery. These efforts resulted in the promulgation of a new Act and some structural changes of the then National Archives (Akussah & Tiarniyu 2000). Sadly however, the focus had been on paper records. As mentioned earlier, the closest effort at addressing the electronic document management issue was an attempt at putting together an Electronic Records Management Policy. This did not bear any fruits. This leaves PRAAD, the custodian of public records and for that matter public electronic records legally and institutionally outpaced by the rapid changes in the creation and use of

electronic information media.

It would have been expected that the growing use of electronic technologies since 1963 in Ghana to support a wide range of information tasks at all levels in the public sector would have resulted in formal procedural changes for records and archives management, but this has not been the case. Most archivists in Ghana attribute this situation to prevailing legislations and particularly the present Act which does not explicitly mention, let alone recognize the evidential status of electronic records, hence the continuous reliance on paper documents for legal precedents since electronic documents are not "signed originals".

It is no secret that in the Ghana Public Service, this unfortunate situation has resulted in the maintenance of a dual system where electronic files run parallel to paper base files. The electronic files constitute the working document and the paper file the official records. The implication of this is that valuable information for the reconstruction of government business may not be part of official files. This situation is more critical with the now prevalent use of Electronic Mail for communication and transaction of government business through personal E-mail accounts of public officials. Such transactions continue to be treated as personal, and are managed through the adoption of electronic data management strategies that serve only their personal interest. The net effect of this is that, such valuable

records which should constitute part of the national heritage end up as "personal heritage", and are lost anytime there is a technological slip.

Equally disturbing is the assumption that every electronic document in the public domain has an equivalent or a parallel paper document. This assumption impacts negatively on records and archives management in the sense that the assumption obscures the need for rigorous examination, resulting in the loss of electronic information which otherwise would have constituted part of the national heritage.

PRAAD has a role to play, and this role relates to the appraisal, preservation and ensuring access to public electronic records. It needs to guarantee the integrity, authenticity and reliability of electronic records in the public domain. There is the need to ensure continuous access to such records by making them available, retrievable and understandable for as long as they constitute part of the national heritage. This calls for the maintenance of Meta-data, describing the functioning of institutions that produce and process electronic records, their structure, and contents. This function can be performed at various stages in the life cycle of electronic records.

### **The Way Forward**

Bleak as the situation as portrayed so far may look, very purposeful and swift intervention can easily turn the tide in favour of effective preservation of the electronic documentary heri-

tage of Ghana.

In the first place, the electronic records management policy void needs to be quickly plugged. This could begin with legislative reviews or supplementary legislations which should explicitly define the status of electronic information as official record material. Records and archives managers for that matter PRAAD should put together guidelines for electronic information handling which will benefit both the creators and the custodians. A plus for PRAAD is the fact that it has been assigned the responsibility for managing the full life cycle of public records under the Public Records and Archives Administration Act of 1997. What the records and archives managers need to do is to get involved as early in the life cycle of electronic documents as possible in order to ensure that functions such as appraisal, preservation, and access are well taken care of at the systems design stage. This implies teaming up with computer systems specialists to design technology that supports the requirements of preservation and use of electronic records.

PRAAD as an Institution today has very little technological capabilities to perform in the very volatile electronic information environment. The Government of Ghana should embark upon a conscious drive to provide technological support for PRAAD . This should be accompanied by staff re-engineering to re-align the skills of the staff of PRAAD to the changing landscape of the information environ-

ment.

Finally, there is an urgent need to develop effective interfaces between traditional records and archives management practices in the registries, record offices and the archives and the electronic records management systems. This will ensure continuity and avoid lapses and gaps in the steady build up of valuable national heritage.

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