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RECORDS MANAGEMENT PRACTICE IN LAND SECTOR AGENCIES, EVIDENCE FROM THE LAND REGISTRATION DIVISION OF THE LANDS COMMISSION IN ACCRA - GHANA

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Abstract

One key aspect of land management involves proper information and records management. In the absence of appropriate methods of keeping records, there is the high likelihood of important land information to get lost, causing considerable adverse implications for national development. Indeed many of the land related conflicts are as a result of the absence of land based information management systems.

The Lands Commission (LC) is the main state institution mandated in land administration in Ghana, which places them at the center stage of these discussions. This paper examines Records Management practices of the Land Registry Division (LRD) of the LC Accra office. It provides an empirically based account of the records management situation in the Registry, bringing to light ways of improving upon it.

Data for the research was collected between December 2011 and January 2012. Primary data was gathered through field observations, semi-structured interviews and the use of close and open-ended questionnaires.

Findings show that the LRD generates numerous records daily and most of these are referred to frequently for smooth running of every department in the Registry. There is an alarming rate of misplacement, slow speed of retrieval of parcel files from storage and sometimes unavailability of records when needed for decisions. The approach to records management by the LRD has resulted in a poor records keeping culture, which although highly noticeable has seemingly been ignored for years. This has contributed to lowering general standard of service delivery at the Registry.

Based on these findings we recommend a Records Management Policy to be in place, computerizing work flow processes, a website to facilitate interface with clients, institutional coordination, cooperation and training, and also support from the GLAP Phase II Project. Adding to calls from various stakeholder groups on the need for good records management practices in LSAs.

Keywords: Records Management, Land Registration Division, Land Information System, Accra – Ghana

1.1 Introduction

Records have certain uniqueness and are needed in various aspects in the proper management and in pursuance of transaction of business in an organisation. Among the uses are to develop, deliver and assess the effectiveness of organisational policies; make informed choices between alternative courses of action; provide the basis for openness and accountability; protect individual rights and enforce legal obligations (Millar, 1999). Records provide information about the past, present and future to be able to identify the root of an issue, take informed decision for present and future actions.

The Public Records and Archives Administration Act, 1997 (Act 535) Section 27 defines records as;

“Recorded information regardless of the form or medium created, received and maintained by an institution or individual in the pursuance of its legal obligation or in the transaction of business”.

Records are critical to the administration of Land Sector Agencies (LSAs) and so do require effective and proper management. Despite the importance of Records Management (RM) in LSAs, there is a lot of difficulty and limiting factors associated with its adoption in LSA in Ghana. The Land Administration Project (LAP) phase 1, intended solving this as part of Component 3 (which is one of 4 thematic areas the project sort to improve in land administration in Ghana) by establishing the Land Information System (LIS). The project as noted by Aidoo (2010) aims at instituting an efficient LIS that supports good Land Records Management practices for transparent transactions. This attests to the fact that there is still the need to create awareness of the importance of RM in LSAs.

1.2 Problem

The Land Registration Division (LRD) of the Lands Commission (LC), Accra generates an immense quantity and variety of records in their day-to-day activities. A lot of files are multiplied in numbers on daily basis and most of these records (especially parcel files, land registers and cartographic materials) are vital in the sense that they are referred to frequently for the smooth running of every department in

the Registry. There is an alarming rate of misplacement and slow speed of retrieval of parcel files from their storage and sometimes the unavailability of records when needed for decision. This motivated an exploration of the current RM environment in the Registry and to come out with possible policy recommendations.

1.3 Main Objective and Research Questions

The main objective of this research is to review the current records management practices and analyse inherent problems in the LRD, Accra. Main research questions that the researchers were concerned about were how LRDs current records are generated and managed? What are some of the problems inherent in the Registry's records system? And how the current records situation can be effectively improved upon?

1.4 Scope and Choice of Study Area

In terms of coverage of agency, this paper only considered the Accra office of LRD. The Registry in Accra deals with different forms of records; financial, cartographic, stationery, land registers, deed records, among others. It was selected due to the vibrant nature of the land market in Accra coupled with the increasing insecurities boarding acquisition of landed properties, and so the need for registration of title to the land or landed property for various reasons. This has increased the number of documents being lodged at the registry for title registration on a daily basis.

1.5 Methodology

To ensure the broadest possible data and opinion coverage for a comprehensive analysis, the study employed qualitative and quantitative research designs. Data for the research was collected between December 2011 and January 2012.

Primary data was gathered through field observations, semi-structured interviews and the use of close and open-ended questionnaires that were administered. Some of the variables that were considered include the state of the (LRDs) records room, the skills of the records staff, records users, speed of retrieval of records, completeness and reliability of the records, policies and procedures. Secondary data used included journals, and relevant published and unpublished reports.

The study population comprised internal and external records users. Internal users for the purpose of the study refer to staff of the LRD, while external users refer to applicants and other agencies that help LRD with its work. Purposive sampling was used in the selection of all internal users. These people were selected due to their contact and knowledge of the issue at hand and role as key players in managing, use and need for records in the Registry.

A sample size of 78 of the categories mentioned above was used. 22 internal users

which comprise of a selection of 1 key personnel from the 9 Sections of the Registry, 1 personnel from Management and 12 other staff purposely selected from the various Sections. 56 external users who had already lodged documents at the Registry were randomly selected for the study.

Quantitative data collected from field survey was analyzed and used to derive percentages, frequencies, graphs, and charts. Data was then processed using Microsoft Excel (2007). Qualitative analysis from in-depth interview with management and key informants were transcribed after the field survey. Observations made during the study are included to support results obtained qualitatively and quantitatively.

2.1 Records and its Management

Records come into being when attempts are actually made to preserve information for future reference. Information implies the collected facts and data about a specific subject. Information is knowledge that human beings perceive through one or more of their senses. It remains intangible until it is recorded in a formal manner as (processed) data. When it is represented as data in a document, information can then be stored, processed and used. When information affecting an organisation is gathered and documented to be stored, it becomes a record. The records themselves form part of or provide evidence of such transactions. Records and its evidence nature make it a vital organisational resource. The information it contains gives support to organisations' records management by providing information on a particular phenomena and the action(s) taken.

Records Management (RM) is primarily concerned with the evidence of an organisation's activities, and is usually applied according to the value of the records rather than their physical format (Millar, 1999). The International Standard Organisation ISO 15489: 2001, defines RM as

“the field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including the processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records”.

RM and information management as described by Barry (1996) has an arcane vocabulary that is not well understood outside most professions. RM entails more rigorous forms of information management than is normally required for other kinds of information. Nonetheless, it can be said that records management is information management in disguise. RM and what it entails can be deduced to a combination of human and technical resources to effectively and efficiently control and monitor all aspects and the dynamics of an organisation's records.

2.2 Private and Public Land Sector Records in Ghana

Information can be said to be critical for communication and decision making in LSAs. Thurston (2000) asserts that people take better care of land and are more productive when they know they can prove their title or claim to land and can buy, sell, or lease land with assurance that their rights to do so will be respected. All such rights, claims and titles are managed through records. Consequently, good records keeping is essential for good transparent management that in turn leads to security, better land management, and better economic development. No LSA can effectively and efficiently manage its records if it has no plans/ policies regarding its records. LSAs comprise both Private and Public institutions working together.

Private Land Sector Records are records created, received and maintained by non-governmental LSAs relating to their private and public affairs. Private LSAs include Private Surveying Firms, Customary Land Secretariats, and Private Land Management Firms, to mention but a few. Generally, their activities complement that of public LSA's as they often serve as a link between the general public and the public institutions. In some cases, however, their activities are in competition with the public LSAs except where they cannot provide that service but can only help as in the case of title registration.

Some Private LSAs are constrained today due to poor records keeping practices in the past. As noted by Hoyle and Sabina (2008) most chiefs in Ghana make no attempt in keeping records on allocations and alienation of land. Storage and retrieval of these records is problematic. There have been some gains with the introduction of Customary Land Secretariats Since most land users do not bother to register title to land, there exist no written records of such customary land transactions in Ghana. Today, though there is still room for improvement in the records keeping practices of Private LSAs especially Customary Land Secretariats, this assertion cannot to a large extent hold due to the support from donor agencies and education on the need for documentation of title to land.

Public Land Sector Records on the other hand are records created, received and maintained by governmental LSAs relating to their constitutional mandate in serving the public interest. In Ghana, the Public LSAs include the Lands Commission (Land Registration; Survey and Mapping; Land Valuation; and the Public and Vested Lands Divisions), Town and Country Planning Department and the Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands. According to Odame (2010) these bodies are mandated by law to advice and facilitate a good land delivery system in the country through proper documentation and good records keeping in order that they can contribute towards the nation's socio-economic development.

Public LSAs work in tandem; they do not work in isolation. They tend to share information all the time. However, this information sometimes tends to be displaced. This can be attributed to the poor RM culture that exists in these public LSAs. The loss of control over records and poor handling of it in most public LSAs has led to the unreliable information they sometimes produce. As part of sub-component 3.4 of the Ghana Land Administration Project Phase One (LAP 1), it would improve records management in the Land Registry by developing simplified administrative procedures to streamline processing activities, improve efficiency and reduce processing time. This would lead to a reduction in the duplication of data recording across agencies, and would provide a means for developing better security measures for the extremely valuable cadastral and tenural records stored in archives. The LAP would also provide for the establishment of computer-based LIS which is secure and fast. Management of paper records would be improved upon by the provision of adequate storage facilities.

Good records keeping have long been a low priority in most LSAs in Ghana. Officials often prefer to focus their energies on action and decisions rather than the records keeping infrastructure required to support and sustain their work. The inclusion of RM as one of the aspects of organisational development in LSAs especially the public sector in their development strategies and policies can help it perform better. If records are to be managed efficiently throughout their life, a structured records keeping system must be put in place.

The next section provides a brief overview of the legal establishment of LRD, its work and records generating activities.

3.0 The Land Registry Division (LRD)

3.1 Brief Profile of LRD (Accra Secretariat)

LRD is one of the 4 Divisions of the “new” Lands Commission. The ‘Registry’ as it is referred to has its mandate from the Land Registry Act, 1962 (Act 122), Land Registration Law, 1986 (PNDCL 152), Land Registration Regulations, 1969 (L.I. 1341) and Lands Commission Act, 2008 (Act 767). It registers titles to land and landed properties. Title to land is a legal term for a bundle of rights in a piece of property in which a party may own legal or equitable interest (Da Rocha and Lodoh, 1999). Title being an interest in a property indicates by which means an individual claims to be the owner of a property.

Implementation of land title registration started with creation of the Land Registry Office in 1988 (Kuntu-Mensah 2006). The Accra secretariat of LRD has two offices namely the Accra and Tema branches. The focus of this study is on the Accra branch.

The Registry registers all interests in land which could be for first registration, transfer of whole or part of land for an already registered land, discharge of mort-

gage, among others. Interests one can register include; Freehold, Leasehold, Transfer, Mortgage, Power of Attorney and Vesting Assent. LRD does not confer interest or title to land; it only registers the interest or title already created.

3.2 Workflow

For the purpose of this study the workflow in LRD has been categorized as being internal or external. Internal workflow refers to activities within the office of LRD whereas the reverse holds for the external workflow.

External Workflow

These divisions perform unique roles in order to perfect the title to an interest if one is able to successfully go through the entire process. Figure 3-1 illustrates the external workflow for title registration in Ghana.



Figure 3-1: External Workflow for First Registration

N.B: LVD – Land Valuation Division; LRD – Land Registration Division; SMD – Survey and Mapping Division; PVLMD – Public and Vested Land Management Division; OASL – Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands

After the document is accepted for lodgment, title plans needs to be prepared by SMD before the registration of applicants parcel of land can continue. PVLMD makes an official search for the applicant from their records. When complete, applicant submits it to LRD to continue the registration process.

Internal Workflow

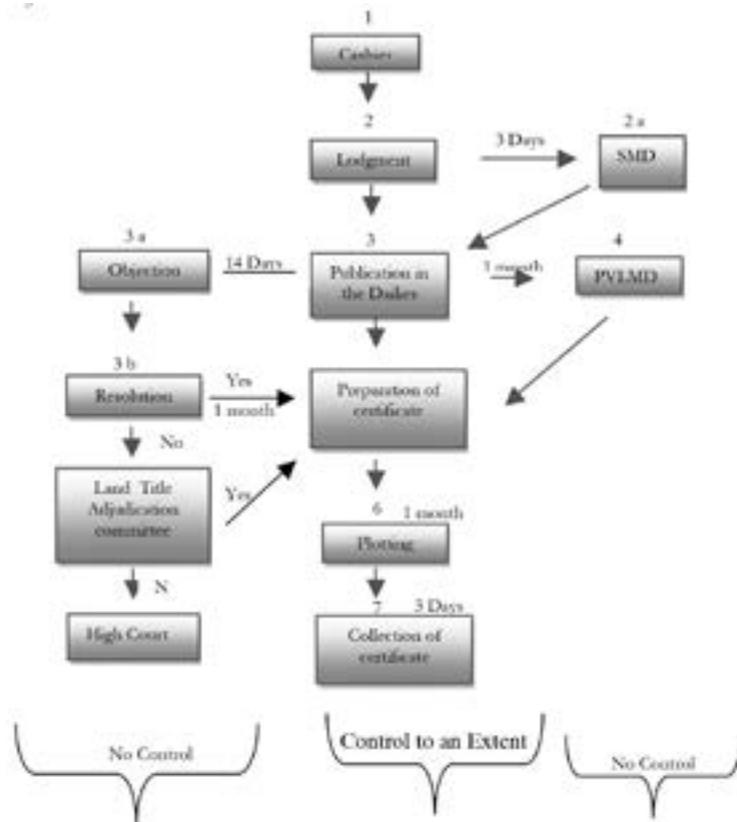


Figure 3-2 General workflow for title registration

Figure 3-2 shows the general work flow for a client to receive a land title certificate. The appropriate fees are paid and the client’s document lodged at the LRD. The documents are then sent to the SMD. The processes continue until the client receives a title certificate. Full details of the entire process are explained in section 3.3.

3.3 Sections in the Registry and Their Work

The various section of LRD correlates its activities internally to perform better. Each section is tasked with unique set of duties. As often as information is required, these offices provide each other with that information only if available. Also, depending on the issues at hand ones document goes through various offices

as often as it is required. The Sections in the Registry can be grouped as; Technical, Recording, Binding, Financial, Legal, General Administration, Client Service Unit and Records Room.

Financial Section – section includes the cashier and accounts office. These units deal with financial transactions for or on behalf of the agency.

Lodgment Section – After payment of fees and filling of the appropriate form and the oath of proof done, one tenders the document at the lodgment section for a file to be opened for the registration of his interest in a parcel of land. On allocation of a number, the number and file name is booked into the Presentation Book.

Technical Section – This is where all district, sectional, and family maps are kept for records purposes in the Registry. All areas have sectional or district maps or both covering it. This unit is charge of mapping, plotting, conduct of field inspections, yellow cards, description of parcels for special publication, preparation of grid plans where sectional plans are not available for later transfer, and conduct of official searches for the general public and corporate organisations.

Records Room – All lodged documents and Land Registers popularly known as “Kalamazoo” are kept to be made available to officers when needed. The records room of the registry is referred to as the “Strong Room”. These lodged documents are the parcel files of applicants whiles the Kalamazoo contains information about each certified and registered land for ease of reference. Staffs here do handling, sorting and storage of files for advert; multiple requests related issues, mortgage and searches as well as certificates. All documents are filed according to areas, year of lodgment and the office that originating office. This implies that all inactive records for the time being are stored there. There are currently six personnel in this office.

Recording Section – This section is in charge of mortgage, discharge and transfer or change in ownership. They are also in charge of typing out the certificate by recording the details of the parcel to be signed by the Registrar be it approved for certification, inspection or signing of certificates.

Client Service Unit – This unit ensures prompt and quality service delivery to clients. All enquires relating client dissatisfaction of service or any clarification on publication, searches and multiple requests are directed to this unit. It exist to receive application and also to respond to grievances as quickly as possible. The public who come to the registry for any enquiry are directed to this unit.

General Administration – They are in charge of all administrative duties. This unit comprises of the Director’s Office and the Administrative Office. The latter deals with all correspondence that comes to the office and those that needs to be dispatched. They also keep records of all family lands, state lands and those belonging to corporate bodies or institutions in their office. The Director’s office is headed

by the Chief Registrar who oversees all activities in the Registry. All issues that requires the intervention of the Registrar is directed to the office. Certificates ready to be signed are forwarded to this office for signing before it goes for plotting. The Director can purposely request for any record.

Legal Section – All legal issue bordering lands for registration which requires legal interpretation of a judgment or a legal instrument is directed to this office or purposely requested for. This section also plays the role of the solicitor to the Registry. It represents and defends the registry in any court suit related to its work.

Binding Section – This is the last stage of the title registration process. All signed land title certificate are collected here. Before releasing the certificate photocopies of a valid identification card, the yellow card of the applicant is collected to verify their personal details for a background check. In situations where it is to be collected on behalf of applicant, an authorization note must be provided. The diagram below shows the internal workflow for first registration.

Figure 3-3 depicts the internal flow of work within the various offices for first registration. This form of graphical perspective may look simple but involves lots of activities and time. The following steps are followed;

1. Submit copy of stamped indenture with LVD to the cashier's office and purchase the appropriate form.
2. Fill form and have the oath of proof sworn at the High Court.
3. Pay fees, attach all necessary documents (all previous document recited in the indenture has to be added except where the Registry already has a copy) and phone number and submit at the lodgment desk. In the case of a corporate body, certificate of incorporation by law should be added.
4. Collect acknowledgement card known as the 'yellow card' (make sure it has the seal of the registry on it) and a letter to SMD for preparation of parcel or cadastral plan.
5. After parcel plan has been prepared submit to LRD.
6. Pay for publication and wait for any objection (four weeks). Publication is advertised in the Ghanaian Times and a copy pasted on the site.
7. At the same time search forms are placed on two (2) photocopies of the parcel or cadastral plan to be presented at PVLMD at a fee for them to conduct a search
8. When search is completed, LRD goes for it in bulk and places it on individuals parcel files.
9. If no objection(s) or no conflicting search report then drafting, typing, signing, plotting, sealing of certificate is done (two weeks).

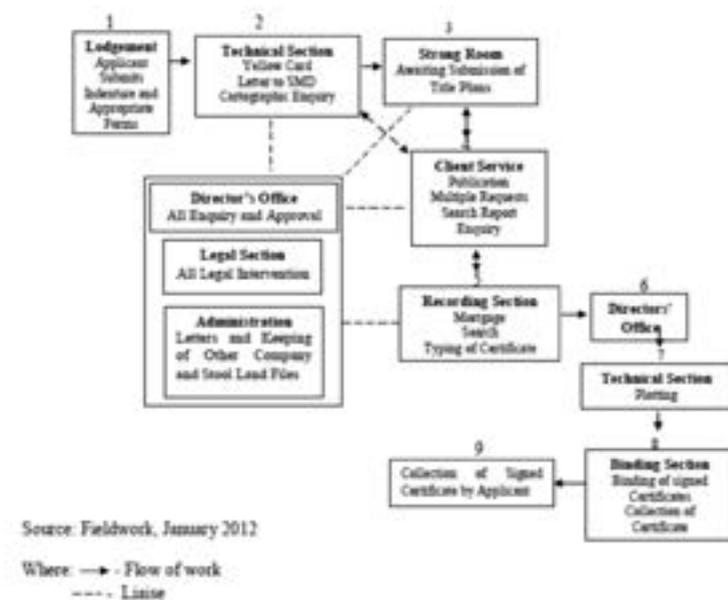


Figure 3-3: Internal Workflow for First Registration

3.4 Forms of Records Generated and its Management

The following are the types of records presently maintained by LRD in undertaking its duties.

Administrative Records – It includes records relating to budget, personnel, managerial, supply and administrative functions. Examples are annual reports, progress reports, as well as minutes of various committees and other bodies among others. These records are kept in metal cabinet in the Administrative Office.

Financial Records – Good records keeping is essential to clear and accountable financial management. The Registry as a government agency generates revenue for the government. They keep records of all financial transactions. Examples are financial statements, ledgers and cashbooks.

Parcel Files – These are paper files opened for clients for title registration purposes. These files are given unique reference numbers which reflects the year of lodgment. These files are protected by putting them in 'plastic jackets' which helps keep it neat and also prolong its life span. Details of each client's registration are kept together in one file bearing the client's name and other personal details. The principle of maintaining a single file for each individual client is crucial to the conti-

nuity of individual's transaction with the office. Parcel files are kept in the Records Room and the various offices if it is being worked on.

Land Registers – These are files containing complete individuals' registration details and copies of Land Certificate issued. The Kalamazoos are filed by areas and are kept and managed in the Strong Room and are arranged on wooden shelves

Publications – Examples are advertising brochures, poster, newsletters, registration adverts, and search reports, among others. The office keeps its own publications and those that are received from other bodies. They are stored in metal cabinets at the Client Service Unit.

Cartographic Records – Part of the machinery of an effective system of land title registration is the production of maps and plans to able to accurately identify the parcels of land to which the titles are registered. Sections 34 to 42 of PND-CL 152 provide that registry maps be prepared by the Director of Surveys shall be maintained in the Registry. Provisions are also made for the ascertainment of boundaries and boundary features. Examples of the cartographic materials are maps, plans, diagrams, charts and sketches. These materials are used to enable referencing to be done. These are updated with time with reference to the initial map(s) covering that area. Also it helps the Registry check from its records if any transactions affect the said parcel or it falls within the boundaries of its grantor(s). Cartographic records are kept in the technical office. They are either rolled or kept in lateral metal cabinet.

Archives Materials – Examples include mother documents and scanned old deed records. The former are kept in the Strong Room or the CPO while the latter is kept and managed at the Deeds Registry.

LRD uses its records for assessment of work done and decisions taken. A critical look at the functions and work of LRD gives one a fair idea as to the quantum of records generated in the performance of its functions. The agency being a government organisation in the service industry has legal duties to perform and must ensure that at all times its records can be accounted for present and future reference.

It must be stated clearly that checks made by the authors show that there exists no Land Records Management Policy both at the divisional level and at the national level. We were however made aware that as and when an issue crops up, then ad hoc solutions to re-align records are done.

4.0 Results

This section provides an assessment of the Land Registration Division's (LRD's) present records and information keeping practices and procedures as at the time of the survey and entails a discussion of the research findings, analysis and interpretation of data collected.

4.1 LRD - Records Management Survey

4.1.1 Quantity of Records Generated

For the purpose of this study the researchers focused on areas that generated or kept large amounts of records in the Registry. Areas considered included the Lodgment Section, Records Room, and Deeds Office.

Lodgment Section

Data gathered from the Lodgment Section reveals that on the average approximately 50 – 60 indentures are lodged on a daily basis for title registration related issues. This gives one a fair idea of the quantum of records tendered in for title registration purposes.

Strong Room

It was observed that on a daily basis between 80 – 100 documents are directed to the "Strong Room" to be stored, or for a file to be attached to another. Letters/ correspondence also range between 30 -50 on a daily basis. These letters are usually multiple requests. Also in storage are over 100 Land Registers also known as "Kalamazoos". The storage capacity at the Registry can accommodate approximately 3,000,000 records. The current storage capacity was seen as inadequate. Due to the large amounts of records generated, coupled with inadequate storage spaces, records are stored in a variety of ways by staff as they deem appropriate. Some are put into boxes, cabinets, wooden selves or left on the bare floor.

The lack of adequate storage spaces had led to the poor arrangement of files. Overfill of boxes made them too heavy to lift or carry and weak. Files kept directly on the floor or on the top of storage furniture (like cupboards) were susceptible to damage from pests. The inadequate space coupled with the disorderly arrangement of files made accessibility to files and free movement within the Strong Room very difficult. Storage area though dry was very dusty.

4.1.2 Filing Back

Filing back is a term used to describe the re-arrangement of files when returned to the Records Room (a room for the storage of land related documents). Filing back is supposed to be done after sorting according to months and years has been done. It was observed that this was actually not done and staff in the Records Room com-

plain that it was because they are most of the time doing so many things at a time. Filing back seems to have been neglected for years and had become a problem which they (staff) had to adjust to. Arrangement of files lacked any proper order. Figure 4-1 illustrate the poor state of files in the Records Room. These files are left unarranged. The filing back of files is totally neglected and this makes retrieving files very difficult, thereby causing unnecessary delays to applicants and staff.



Figure 4-1: File storage in the LRD

Files are arranged by piling them together and tying with a twine. This is very easy to do but has devastating consequences. File cabinets in the Strong Room are made of a mixture of fire resistance (no experiment was conducted to confirm this) and non-fire resistance materials.

4.1.3 Tracking

Records in whatever format it may take that leaves any office needs to be tracked. Tracking helps officers know the where-about of files, letters and other records, the office it went to, the officer who signed for it and the date it was signed. Tracking by staff is done by the use of outgoing books and an electronic database using Microsoft Excel sheets in some of the offices. Applicants track their files or letters by identifying the last known office and walk to each office they are directed to with pieces of paper with date of forwarding file(s) or letter(s) on them as well as the officer who signed for it to help trace it.

Records retrieval upon request is done with the help of staff in that Section; or staff looking for them depending on the urgency of the issue at hand or waits for that office to later book the file(s) to him.

4.2 Relationship between Speed of Retrieval and the Average Delivery Period

How quick issues pertaining to a particular file would be solved or addressed largely depends on the speed at which it can be retrieved from where ever it is. 19% and 9.5% of applicants had their records retrieved quickly and very quickly respectively. The reason is that normally if a superior officer requests a file, staff look for it themselves or the urgency of the matter at hand makes the retrieval quicker (as staff have an interest in the process and vice versa if no superior makes such a request).

The average speed at which records can be retrieved is considered to be slow. About 71% of applicants think that the process is slow. It can therefore be concluded that retrieval of records generally is slow in the Registry. When a request is put in, files take longer time to be retrieved. This implies that though eventually the file may be retrieved if found, it would be available at the wrong time and so comes to add to the already heaped files. Whereas if found earlier work on it would have been done.

The speed at which records are retrieved is a cause for concern. Majority of staff admitted to the negative impact this had on service delivery. On other occasions the researchers observed some applicants quarrelling with staff over retrieval of their files or work to be done on file not yet done. This occurs especially when there are indications of not finding a specific file. This accounts for client dissatisfaction and allegations levied against staff for intentionally keeping/ hiding files most of the time.

Applicants sampled were asked the average delivery period when an issue needs to be resolved. 7% of applicants sampled who chose a delivery period of “1 Day – 1 Week” gave the following reasons for a faster delivery period. They knew the staff handling their documentation issues; they had to offer “lunch money”; the applicant was a well-known personality; applicant usually checked on the progress of his application; or a request was made by a higher authority for it to be given priority attention.

54% (majority) of applicants indicated “1 Week – 1 Month” as being the typical delivery period out of the four options provided. It therefore implies that at least each Section in the Registry takes between a week and a month to complete work on a file forwarded to it. If each step of the registration process takes this long then it stands to reason that allegations made against the process as being time consuming and slow is true. Applicants are habitually given periods of more than 2 weeks to follow up documents submitted.

The effectiveness of the delivery period depended on how often applicants follow the progress of their application. Letters are usually prepared when applicants are present. This implies that letters to be prepared from files with no one to follow up tend to be delayed and some cases unattended to.

4.3 Risk Assessment

An analysis of fire resistance and duration it takes to burn the plastic jacket used in the Registry to protect paper files was conducted. It was realized that the plastic contained additives (flame-retardants), as well as the colouring agents, which make it retard flame, and assumes its colour respectively. Flame-retardants are less flammable, protect, burn slowly, and do not propagate fire. It can therefore prevent the spread of flames; burning and thereby creates a layer of char that inhibits further combustion.

It was observed that there were fire extinguishers in place but no fire detectors had been installed. The Registry is only partially prepared for risk in terms of fire and other risks associated with records management such as loss (through other means other than fire); security for records, among others seems to have been neglected.

4.4 Problems Identified in LRDs RM

Data collected and observations made reveal that the LRDs current RM environment, as at the time of study showed symptoms of a poorly run unit. Creation of records is uncontrolled. Files and letters at the initial stages of creation are easy to control; however subsequent movements are done without proper checks. This makes controlling it very difficult.

There is a partial computerised system for ease of tracking files. One would expect that most of the systems employed by the LRD would be computerized. But this is not so, everything is done on manual basis for authentic verification. E-records kept by the Registry are susceptible to loss or damage, lacked proper protection, and could be easily manipulated and overwritten. Without any security provisions and effective data storage facilities in place, electronic records could be easily altered or deleted without the Section's knowledge. Each Sections database could only be accessed from that office and nowhere else. Related information in different locations/ Sections is not networked. In some instances the office working on the 'supposed file' had to go ahead to work on it without waiting for the other file to be found and if later found reference may be made to it.

Duplicate records exist due to loss of records in the Registry's system or different parties trying to register the same parcel of land. Some files are lodged as supplementary lodgment at the applicant's cost (which ought not to be so) when there are indications of not being able to track the file. Also double registration at the initial stage is very difficult to identify. Until the process gets to the Survey and Mapping Division (SMD) to become a multiple request or detected in mid-stage it goes unnoticed.

Files lack any form of proper filing back to ensure timely retrieval. There is a lot of time wasting in looking for files and letters. This causes delays as expressed by the external users. There is excessive waiting especially in retrieval of files from the Records Room.

More so a number of delays in retrieval also cause user dissatisfaction. For instance typing out of letters could take weeks to be completed. Due to constraints faced by applicants and wanting to be attended to on-time, most people sought to provide "lunch money" (bribes) to officers in order that they will receive early attention. This is an avenue for breeding corruption.

Shortage of materials brings work to a halt. Staff complained that the shortage of paper or ink for printing most of the time led to the preparation of letters taking more time than expected. Faulty equipment also leads to no work at all and in some instances, applicants make photocopies on their own, to submit to the office. At the time of this research (January 2012) binding materials for certificates had been in shortage for more than three (3) months and work on signed certificates had come to a halt.

The absence of the schedule officer working on a particular file meant in some cases that nobody could work on that file let alone locating it. There was only one schedule officer working in the Binding Section, his absence meant no collection of certificates on that day.

Records in the various offices lacked proper security. Though it was boldly inscribed on some office doors that they were "Out of Bounds" to non-authorized persons, any staff could enter with or without permit to assess any information required for official or personal use. Offices like the Strong Room, Technical Office and Binding Sections had this inscription. Among these 3 the Binding Section seems to be the only office implementing this policy.

To conclude it can be realized that there seems to be a lot of problems with generating, managing and retrieving records at the Registry. All problems identified have an adverse effect on records management. The larger percentage of the success of the entire process of title registration uses records. Records cannot function on its own; it needs other resources to help it achieve results. And if these resources are problematic, then delays associated with RM cannot be avoided. There needs to be a conscious effort to ensure that a clear records management policy is in place and adhered to. This will ensure effective service delivery.

4.5 The Role of Technology at the Registry

Some sections of the Registry make use of technological equipment. There was no land management software in use for managing its records as at the time of undertaking this research.

Also, the server had been used to create a database that worked like the Presentation Book. Details as entered into this book are captured and this is being done on pilot basis. This system would aid in retrieving lodgment numbers for applicants if they are able to provide certain details. This is a step in the right direction.

An inventory was undertaken in all sections of the Registry to examine how technology has influenced the work output of staff using technological gadgets. It was observed that the technological tools employed in the Registry included computers, a fax machine, telephones, typewriters, printers and photocopying machines as shown in the table 3 – 1.

Sections	Nbr of computers	Nbr of printers	Nbr of telephones	Nbr of photocopiers
Technical	3	1	Nil	Nil
Records room	3	1	1	Nil
Recording	6	1	1	Nil
Binding	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Administration	3	3	3	1
Lodgment	2	Nil	Nil	Nil
Cashier	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Deed registry	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Client service	4	1	2	1
Legal	3	2	1	Nil
Typing pool	4	3	Nil	Nil

Table 3 – 1: Technological Tools in Use

Almost all sections have at least a computer except the Binding, Cashier's and Deed Registry Sections. Photocopiers are virtually non-existent at the LRD. The few equipments/ tools available have to be utilized in order to enhance service delivery. Most of the staff as observed were computer literate but were not using these equipments to enhance their work processes.

All Sections of the Registry are connected to the internet. It was observed that though connected it was not really used as part of the work processes. The connection was mostly unstable but there were officers who still used it all the same. The internet is under-utilised in the Registry. The Registry has no website solely devoted to the agency that could be accessed by the general populace to view the status of their transaction, or for enquiries on any information. The Division's information can only be viewed from the Ghana LAP website (www.ghanalap.gov.gh).

4.6 Role of Management in LRDs Current RM Situation

To help curb the poor state of service delivery and to be able to work on more documents, Saturday overtime work was instituted. Staff that turned up were given an allowance of GHC 20. This intervention as observed by management had not been effective due to the meager amount paid and the delay that is sometimes encountered in payment.

Provision of adequate storage through expansion (of shelves) was in progress. This was being undertaken to help accommodate more documents/ files in the Records Room. Management sought to provide new wooden shelves to accommodate the increase. Measurements had been taken at the time of this research. This expansion will be futile if the main problem of filing back for ease of retrieval is not tackled when finally completed. Comfortable working conditions had been provided through provision of minor redecorations, air-conditioning and lighting.

5.1 Recommendations

The above discussions bring to the light the various challenges the LRD faces with respect to managing records it accumulates daily. The authors recommend certain interventions that can help to manage the current situation and promote a good records management culture. This in the view of authors can promote an effective and efficient records management system. The list is however not exhaustive.

Accurate retrieval of records and timely availability for use can reduce common problems of records management in the LRD. These problems among others include difficulties in retrieving information needed to take decisions, delays in responding to enquiries, or accumulation of administrative matters which ought to have been discharged. Recommendations suggested have been grouped into short and long term interventions and are considered to be realistic and geared towards improved performance in the Registry.

Short Term Policies

The LRD should have in place a Records Management Policy which is a statement that describes what the organization does and intends to do with respect to its records. It underpins the records management programme giving it authority and emphasizing its importance to the organization.

The policy needs to be flexible so that it could be amended. Regular reviews and amendments are essential to ensure any policy document remains relevant.

The policy must be approved and supported by the highest levels of the organization. If senior managers are not supportive of the policy from the beginning, then it is likely to be ignored. The RM program would require rigorous, ongoing education to make sure the organisation adheres to policies and understand their effects. Ideally, records management in the LRD should have its own budget or, at least an adequate allowance within the department of which it forms a part. In the budget, drawing consideration and inclusion of funding for RM programs should be encouraged. Value for money should be achieved through a plan for expenditure on staff, accommodation, equipment, and materials that matches the requirements for the delivery of an efficient and economical records management program.

The quality of any records management program directly relates to the quality of staff that operates it. Records keeping must be seen as a worthwhile activity. Staff that are employed should have a background in the field of land management and related fields. They should be adequately trained in innovative ways of improving their records management skills. The keeping of a diary of time records among staff should be encouraged. Staff should have a daily plan of activities with priorities, only then can more work be done in less time. This would take a lot of self-discipline on the part of management and staff. Plans must be realistic to achieve result. Also, the use of national service personnel from relevant fields would go a long way to help ease the workload on staff. At the time of this research, there was one National Service Personnel at the Registry; if he can be accommodated then more can be brought on board.

Innovative ways should be employed in maintaining paper records. People easily identify colours especially when it is used for differentiation of items. Colours can be recognized faster than reading a text. Colour-Coded Files can be adopted. This implies that a range of coloured files would be used to replace the current white paper files used for lodgement of parcel files. Each year would have a unique colour allocated to it. Files can be more quickly located, filing back also becomes more efficient and mis-files become apparent instantly.

Yellow Cards, which are identity cards for lodged files should be given a touch of durability. It could be changed from paper to a potable plastic ID card with address, phone number and email of applicant and the Registry, as well as the seal of the Registry on it as a security feature. In the interim old yellow cards could be laminated as and when applicants follow up on their application. Staff are encouraged to insist on the production of this card anytime information is sought from any Section of the Registry.

To achieve an improved and effective filing back process the following have been suggested;

- Arrangement of files if properly done should be placed in a straight line. The eye scans files easily if it does not have to look back and forth across a drawer or shelf. The use of lateral shelving would help accommodate more files. Minimal use of wooden shelves should be considered and those already in existence can be coated with insect and fire retardant materials.
- Adoption of the hospital system of filing back is recommended. This system works on the basis of hospital staff adhering to the strict regulation concerning records. There is a schedule officer whose work is solely filing back of files when no longer required. If this is properly adhered to, speedy retrieval can be achieved.
- Alternatively, excel sheets can be used to create a database for filing back. The spreadsheet would have attributes of the files, shelves or compartment number, originating office and date file or letter was received among others

determined by management. It can be done according to Sections the files are coming from or as it may suit management (with the records policy in mind) for ease of retrieval.

Computerization will undoubtedly facilitate the work processes of the LRD in all spheres of its records generating activities, especially when it comes to retrieval and storage of records in whatever format it may take. Caution must however be taken in the adoption of this system in that its success or failure largely depends on the human factor working with this vital resource and degree of security provided for it. E-records can be created as main documents or back-ups for physical records as part of the long term goals with respect to its records. Old records could be scanned and saved in a special system to be developed for it. There should be a shift from the manual to the digital environment. This will be in the best interest of the division. Space problems will still persist in the short term. The move towards electronic capture and storage will reduce the need for paper cabinets among others.

The internet can be used in diverse ways to improve service delivery. Redesigning of a web page solely devoted to its work has a lot of merits associated with it. Applicants can view the status of their registration using their lodgment number and file name just as checking your e-mails. Mobile applications can be developed to monitor the registration process by applicants. Also, any enquiry on land transactions and the registration process should be obtainable from this site at a small fee.

LRD should link all computers in their workspace via the internet and intranet and still have security over its access. Unlike public access networks, intranets are restricted to provide security. Only authorized computers within the organisation can connect to the intranet, and the organisation can restrict communication between the intranet and the global Internet. The restrictions will allow computers inside the organization to exchange information but keep the information confidential and protected from outsiders. Alternatively, Microsoft Outlook or Windows Mail via connection to the internet can help link work PCs to promote internal communication for the mean time and later extended to the other public LSAs. Each Section only needs a unique IP address to be able to communicate through e-mails. Information request can be done with ease and at a fast rate. This will eliminate paper and encourage a paperless agency.

If work PCs are linked, anytime a Section electronically updates records in their system, all relevant Sections that need to work on the particular document are automatically notified. There would not be the need for an "incoming or outgoing book". This system can be used in communication, enquiry, sharing information, among others. Communication with other LSAs can also be done in the same manner. Also, letters can be sent to the mails of applicants. So that even in cases where agents are involved, clients' are updated on the progress of their registration process from any part of the world.

Land records in every sense are a vital resource to any nation and if lost can bring development in all aspect of the economy to a halt. If no back-ups exist, then re-placing records would mean starting the entire process of registration again. Installation of fire detectors and security of records should be given attention. This would also help raise awareness in the other LSAs in the installation of fire detectors and provision of adequate security for its records.

Long Term Policies

In the long term, the following are recommended. LRD should consider a move from the manual system to an automated system that is much more effective. The system proposed by the authors would invariably require the development of a Database Management System (in a Geo-Information System environment), commitment of monetary resource as well as competent officers to control it and security for e-records generated. It should however be mentioned that during the 5th FIG Regional Conference in Accra in 2006, the Social Tenure Domain Model (STDM) was top on the agenda. This is a tool developed to address reforms and improve land management and security of tenure, targeted at developing countries with little cadastre coverage. The model can be used as a basis for the development of a land administration system that can support all forms of land rights, social tenure relations and overlapping claims (Lemmen et al 2007). The speed of this intervention has been too slow if meaningful gains are to be expected. The Dutch Kadastre could also be analysed to glean useful lessons about how they have managed their land administration.

At the Lodgment Section forms can be filled electronically with each form having a unique serial number. Relevant details required from an indenture can be captured and entered into the database of applicants. This interface would have information on the file name, lodgment number, parcel plan co-ordinates and other relevant information to be determined by the Registry. Each applicant would have a file within the database that works like the normal files they work with. Afterwards, details can be forwarded to the next office to work on it. Every information either physical or e-records would be used to update parcel files. This system would help identify parcel files with the same details at the onset of the registration process. With a good land boundary and information in place nationwide, plans with wrong co-ordinates can be easily identified. The process would be automated such that parcel plans prepared by SMD and search reports from PVLMD only needs to be updated in the central database then the LRD will have access for further processing. This can also be used to develop a database for registered land titles in Ghana.

There may be the need to provide public access to particular records and information. Internally, a search system termed the "Title Search" (T Search) can be adopted. Software can be developed for this purpose. It would require linking database of movement of files which needs to be updated any time a particular file moves. On following up of progress of their registration, applicants can monitor and know the where about of their files as well as checking if work has been done or not.

5.2 Conclusion

The approach of staff to records management has resulted in a poor records keeping culture, which although highly noticeable has been ignored for years. This in turn has contributed to a lowering of the general standard of service delivery at the Registry. All "records users" in the Registry are well informed of the several problems inherent in the agency's records keeping activities. The problem of poor records management in the LRD is evident in all aspects of its records keeping, especially its Parcel Files.

In order to achieve a successful paper and electronic records management programme as well as being able to address constraints afore-mentioned, LRD needs to understand its core mandate in records management so that they can establish a sustainable records management system for posterity.

Implementation of the recommendations would need a lot of commitment of financial resources to attain. As part of Component 3 of the LAP Phase II, financing of these recommendations on a pilot basis will be a step in the right direction.

Lastly the LRD should consider itself like any organisation in the service industry. Customer satisfaction, better and improved delivery of service as well as promoting title registration in a bird's-eye view should be its mantra. Also, for recommendations to be achieved, the human nature of doing thing in the Registry needs to be re-oriented towards developing a positive attitude towards work.

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AN ASSESSMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN A REAL ESTATE TEACHING DEPARTMENT – CASE STUDY: DEPARTMENT OF LAND ECONOMY, KNUST, KUMASI, GHANA

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ABSTRACT

The department of Land Economy has pertinent problems inhibiting teaching and learning. It is not known how students generally rate the level of teaching and learning in the department. The university evaluates lectures and courses through student evaluation questionnaires. Over the years it is realized that most of the students do not take these assessments seriously as they do not see how their inputs are incorporated into a better course design. Also participation of third and final year students dwindles because of reasons mentioned above.

The main objective is to review teaching and learning activities of the DoLE to promote quality education. To do this the researcher adopts and modifies the Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ). 312 students in the third and final year of the BSc Land Economy and BSc Real Estate of the Land Economy Department participated in this assessment. The questionnaires were administered at the end of the 2012/ 2013 academic year when students had completed their end of semester examinations. The overall response rate achieved is 93% representing 312 students. 18 different scales were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The reliability of the scales was checked using Cronbach alpha values.

The principal conclusion reached is that the SEQ has diagnostic power to measure strengths and weaknesses based on student response at the programme level. This is a diagnostic tool that should be treated as being indicative, rather than absolute. It was realized that more than 50% of students from all the classes sampled agree that the quality of the programme is good.

Areas which could need further improvements at the programme level include; Self-managed learning; Requisite feedback from staff to assist studies; Teaching for understanding in order to make students understand course design, course material and course content; and Active learning that encourages student participation and also diversity in course delivery.