

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MRS. BRIDGET KATSRIKU, CHAIRMAN, PUBLIC SERVICES COMMISSION AT THE INTERNATIONAL TRAINING OF TRAINERS WORKSHOP ON THE PARBICA TOOLKIT UNDER THE THEME RECORD KEEPING FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE ON 7TH MAY, 2012 AT THE MEDIA CENTRE, ACCRA SPORTS COMPLEX.

MR. CHAIRMAN,
AG DIRECTOR, PRAAD,
OUR DISTINGUISHED RESOURCE PERSONS,
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE AUDIT SERVICE,
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL,
OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS FROM THE SUB REGION,
PARTICIPANTS FROM GHANA,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

It is a great pleasure for me to be invited as the Special Guest of Honour to deliver the keynote address, and to formally open this workshop which is aimed at training trainers on the PARBICA Toolkit which is under the theme “Record Keeping for Good Governance”. I consider this theme appropriate within the overall context of Public Service Reforms in Africa today, when Governments are striving to institutionalize and promote Good Governance.

I am, especially happy, to be part of this function because of its coincidence with themes selected this year by my own organization, the PSC, to sensitize the Public Service on the importance of records management.

In March this year, at the PSC’s Annual Conference for Chief Directors/CEOs of Public Sector Institutions, one of the topics presented and discussed was “The Challenges of Records Keeping in Public Service Organizations”.

Later on this year precisely on 16th May, just about two weeks from now, the PSC is organizing an Annual Lecture under the theme “Managing Data and Information for Effective Performance in the Public Service Organizations”. Perhaps the knowledge about these two events, might have influenced the decision by the organizers, to invite me as the Guest Speaker and I am happy to be here.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is no gainsaying the fact that, records management is increasingly becoming a challenge for carrying out government business effectively, and for that matter, it is imperative for all of us to be concerned about the way we manage Government records. It is against this backdrop that I wish to commend PRAAD and the ICA for holding this workshop at this time. Though long overdue it is better late than never.

May I take this opportunity to also welcome you all to this very important workshop? A very warm and specially welcome goes to, our brothers and sisters from our neighboring countries. I have no doubt, that you will all take advantage of this

opportunity for your training as trainers and use what you will learn for the benefit of your organizations in particular and for your countries at large.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, well-managed records are essential tools for good governance. Good Governance has been defined as the processes by which a government and its citizens interact to define common values, resources and activities, just to mention a few, for the achievement of set goals for the benefit of all. This implies clearly articulated values systems founded on tested rules, conventions, norms and practices and institutions, which establish the ways and limits of the exercise of public power. This process also provides the channels for participation in public decisions which are open to citizens and regulates the interactions between public authorities, private corporations and civil society organizations, in order to articulate their interests, mediate their differences and reach agreements on the public goals to be achieved, public problems to be solved and public services to be provided to citizens.

Effective records management, facilitate the achievement of transparency and accountability in public administration, as indeed in all other types of administration. This is especially, vividly demonstrated when members of the public have easy access to government records in situations of verifying actions and activities of public servants without unnecessary hindrances. In such situations relationships, based on trust between the government and the governed is greatly strengthened. The public service will then enjoy the confidence and the support of its citizens. Unfortunately, we are not doing well in this regard. As a result, the state of records management has not been satisfactory. The resultant effect has been the creation of an environment of mistrust, suspicion and above all lack of transparency and accountability.

Research findings clearly show that many developing countries such as ours have severe record management challenges. As a result, effectiveness in public administration is directly undermined in a number of ways: the administration of justice is greatly compromised and government revenue cannot be fully collected because the records on which their calculations must be based are not comprehensive enough, or were never created at all.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in an environment in which records are poorly kept accountability is practically impossible leading to poor governance. We, in the public service, on daily basis make decisions that relate to the provision of services. Rationale decision-making depends on credible and reliable records. Where records are disorganized, missing or lost, we are likely to make poor decisions, and sometimes delayed decisions. Our citizens are denied the benefit of quality decisions and therefore quality services. When citizens cannot get prompt services from public offices because the relevant records are missing or lost, or when the records in question have been intentionally hidden by some public servants, the citizens will be tempted to bribe so that somebody will “search” for them. Improper records management therefore, promotes corruption and I am sure we are all aware of it and it can easily be said that well-kept records are the greatest enemy to corruption.

Ladies and Gentlemen, improper records keeping does not only delay or duplicate Government business, but can also put individuals into unwarranted embarrassing situations. I have personally suffered from this when as the Chief Director in charge of a Ministry, I was hauled before the Public Accounts Committee four years ago to account for monies that have been disbursed but could not be accounted for, due to the fact that at the time of audit and even at the Public Accounts Committee the Payment Vouchers and or in some cases receipts for the transactions could not be traced.

In my case, what happened was that the records were available but could not be traced and retrieved readily. It took us some time to trace the records and presented them to the PAC and that actually saved me. I could have gone to jail.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the point I want to make is that proper records management is very important, not only for the organizations we work for, but also for our own accountabilities. The repercussions for improper management of records be it at the individual, institution, community or national level can be devastating. Lack of proper records management can send individuals to prison; it can destroy the credibility of organizations and Governments, and cause friction amongst communities and between countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the poor status of records management practices in the public services is as a result of:

1. The lack of a comprehensive national records management policy;
2. low level of appreciation of records and therefore lack of commitment from managers of public service organizations to ensure proper records management;
3. The low premium placed on our records offices and archives in terms of the caliber of the human resource who manage the offices, and the working environment for both the staff and the records ;
4. Inadequate resources placed at the disposal of the records offices; and
5. the lack of professional training for the records staff.

Ladies and Gentlemen, these and other factors combine to place the Public Service in a dangerous and precarious situation in as far as utilizing records to aid accelerated development is concerned .

It is important that we in public service realize that the roles of Governments are changing. Governments are no longer the sole decision makers. Governments are working in partnership with their citizens, who are demanding from Governments transparency, openness, accountability and their involvement in affairs that concern them. They expect Government to function in a manner that allows for mutual trust. Records, and the evidence they contain, are the instruments by which Governments can promote a climate of trust and demonstrate an overall commitment to good governance.

We shall be heading towards disaster if those placed in charge of records management do not sit up to our responsibility to the realization of the changing role of records management for our development.

Today, Ladies and Gentlemen, records management has been taken to a higher level, where the trend, which is fast gaining currency, is using ICT to manage records. Many countries in the Northern Hemisphere have moved considerably away from the manual to ICT - assisted records management. We have mechanisms and tools like e-records, metadata, digitization, e-mail and cloud storage, microfilm etc. These are modern mechanisms that we must also begin to adapt to assist us to improve on records managements.

I am aware that, this workshop shall, at one of its sessions, be examining the records management policy making process. This is gratifying to note and I want to believe that all the modern trends of records management will be factored into the policy. I need not say that when the policy is drafted it will be shared with all of us, not only for our inputs, but also for effective ownership and implementation.

On this note , Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, permit me to express our deepest gratitude to our resource persons, Ms Christine Martinez ,the Deputy General Secretary from ICA, Mr. Mark Crookston and Ms. Anna Gulbransen who are facilitators and have journeyed ,all the way from New Zealand. With their support and expertise we are confident that at the end of this training programme a solid foundation will have been laid for us in English speaking West Africa to help us modernize records management for a more effective governance.

It is important for Governments to pay more attention to records management in order to avoid unpleasant occurrences when the Freedom of Information Bill is passed into law.

Mr. Chairman, , Ladies and Gentlemen, it is now my singular honor and pleasure to declare this training of trainers workshop for English speaking West Africa officially opened.

Thank you.