

Burundi Archives In the Present Day Society

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the situation of Burundi Archives in the present day society, their role, development and future. It provides an overview of the current socio political and economic environment after the civil war that prevailed in Burundi in well known periods of time since the independence in 1962 up to 2005. Four decades of civil war affected the archival materials: some of the archives have been stolen while others have been burned. Corollary to this, is the gradual disappearance if no well oriented conservation policy is put into place. Recent research findings regarding current recordkeeping initiatives in Burundi public and private sector and their effect on service delivery are presented. The key characteristics of development are transparency, responsibility, accountability, participation of the whole people, both men and women, and responsiveness to the peoples' needs. The general assumption behind this presentation that development is to a large extent effectuated by the documentation of decision processes and actions, and making the resulting documentation accessible to the citizens. The paper concludes by positing that Burundi archives are under utilized as information sources.

Gli archivi del Burundi nella società attuale

SINTESI

L'articolo parla della situazione degli archivi del Burundi nella società contemporanea, del loro ruolo, sviluppo e futuro. Fornisce una visione d'insieme sull'attuale ambiente sociopolitico ed economico dopo la guerra civile svoltasi in Burundi dal tempo dell'indipendenza nel 1962 al 2005. Quattro decenni di guerra civile hanno colpito i materiali archivistici: alcuni archivi sono stati rubati ed altri sono stati bruciati. Corollario di ciò, la graduale sparizione a seguito di una politica di conservazione non ben orientata. Viene presentata una recente ricerca sulle iniziative di conservazione dei documenti correnti in Burundi nei settori pubblico e privato ed il loro effetto sul servizio di consegna. Le caratteristiche chiave dello sviluppo sono la trasparenza, la responsabilità, la partecipazione di tutta la gente, sia uomini che donne, e la risposta ai bisogni della gente. L'assunto generale che sta dietro a questa presentazione è che lo sviluppo è in larga parte effettuato dalla documentazione dei processi e delle azioni decisionali, e dal rendere la documentazione risultante accessibile ai cittadini. L'articolo si conclude postulando che gli archivi del Burundi siano sottoutilizzati come fonte di informazioni.

Burundijski arhivi v današnji družbi

IZVLEČEK

Članek obravnava razmere v burundijskih arhivih v današnji družbi, njihovo vlogo, razvoj in prihodnost. Ponuja pregled trenutnega družbeno političnega in gospodarskega okolja po državljanski vojni, ki je potekala v Burundiju v času od njegove neodvisnosti leta 1962 do leta 2005. Štiri desetletja državljanske vojne niso negativno vplival samo na življenje ljudi, temveč tudi na arhivsko gradivo: nekaj gradiva je bilo ukradenega, medtem ko je bil del uničenega in zažganega. Namen prispevka je predstaviti osnutek prihodnjega raziskovalnega projekta o vlogi arhivov in dokumentarnega gradiva pri spodbujanju dobrega vodenja in upravljanja ter v promociji odnosov med arhivskim gradivom, ki se nanaša na človekove pravice, dobrim upravljanjem v procesu sprememb pravosodnih organov in komisije za resničnost v post konfliktni burundijski družbi.

INTRODUCTION

Archives constitute the memory of nations and of societies, shape their identity, and are a cornerstone of the information society. By providing evidence of human actions and transactions, archives support administration and underlie the rights of individuals, organizations and states. By guaranteeing citizens' rights of access to official information and to knowledge of their history, archives are fundamental to democracy, accountability and good governance.

The purpose of this paper is to present the outline of a forthcoming research project about the role of archives and records in the promotion of good governance, struggle impunity and the relation between human rights archives, good governance in the process of transitional justice and truth commission of post conflict society. The study concerns Burundi country.

Human rights archives: Challenges and Opportunities

a) Challenges

The civil war that prevailed in Burundi in well known periods of time since the independence in 1962 up to 2005 not only negatively impacted on human lives, but also affected the archival materials: some of the archives have been stolen while others have been burned. Retailers unconscious of the importance of the archives used them to wrap their items in markets. Furthermore, some others were stored without care due to the lack of experience in terms of archives safe guard. Corollary to this, is the gradual disappearance if no well oriented conservation policy is put into place.

Rape is prevalent in Burundi, with more than 60% of reported victims being under the age of 18. During Burundi's lengthy civil war, sexual and gender based violence were used as weapons of war.

Populations encounter a country suffering the ill effects of a decade of war and prolonged underinvestment.

The illiteracy of Burundi population estimated at 85%. Even a few educated people are not interested in research.

There is no clear policy to safeguard archival materials and other information tools.

b) Opportunities

Both individual initiatives and NGOs are just starting out or are facing challenges, and also from better established recordkeeping programmes. The programmes are shaped around the theme «Recordkeeping for good governance, transitional justice».

The examples are multiples:

The research Project entitled «Aligning Records Management with E-Government/ICT and Freedom of Information in East Africa: Judiciary case study in Supreme Court of Burundi» that we conducted in April 2011, a regional project sponsored by the International Records Management Trust of UK.

The Project entitled «Sources and live memories of Burundi». This project envisages to collect all sound archives and other information tools on horrendous crimes that ruined Burundi from 1959 to 2005. The project endorsed by the Switzerland Government and started with March 2010. I spearheaded by my organization, Global rights' Burundian Office and another local organization called «Centre UBUNTU» mainly concerned with human rights defence, transitional justice issues.

Endorsed by Belgium Kingdom and another local organization «Great Lakes Production», my organization is drawing up a documentary project on human rights abuses in Burundi. The project plans to collect all archives (written and oral testimonies) in human rights violations that marked the great lakes region since the 1960's period to now.

Good governance

Good governance is defined as the process of public institutions conducting public affairs and managing public resources, while guaranteeing the realization of human rights, in a manner free of abuse and corruption and recognizing the rule of law (human rights in development). The key characteristics of good governance are transparency, responsibility, accountability, participation of the whole people, both men and women, and responsiveness to the peoples' needs. The general assumption behind this presentation that Good governance is to a large extent effectuated by the documentation of decision processes and actions, and making the resulting documentation accessible to the citizens. For example the creation, management and dissemination of trustworthy records, which will further be referred to as recordkeeping. Through access to information, people can assess the performance of government, call for responsibility and accountability, demand compensation for injustice and enhance their knowledge and freely evolve opinions (e.g. Masire 2004).

Poor governance which has emerged as one of the principal causes of the succession of crises that Burundi has experienced, has in large part been due to the strong centralization of executive power and the exclusion of the vast majority of the population from decision-making processes. Thus, in turn, has resulted in a lack of transparency, accountability and respect for the rule of law, widespread impunity and massive violations of human rights. Today, the decentralization process has been identified as an important response to these challenges.

Archives support good governance and accountability by offering reliance on and confidence in the authenticity, worth and reliability of the information in its charge.

Those responsible for the custody and care of such information demonstrate their commitment to archival science by advocating ethical and professional processes, developing standards and gaining international acceptance of the methods and practices.

Transitional justice

The obstacle of transitional justice mechanism in Burundi is due to lack of political will. The challenges of the transitional justice in developing and post conflict societies like Burundi are thus many, and handling these challenges needs resources but also research.

«Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers» (Universal Declaration of Human rights, Art.19). Access to information and public records are thus of crucial importance, in the reconstruction of a post conflict society, and is recognized as a right for citizens in a democratic society in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human rights. Despite the general recognition of access to human rights information as corner-stone of truth, little attention has been paid to its function in the process of truth and rebuilding of a civil society, in post conflict region.

The role of records and documentation of atrocities committed against the people has for instance been addressed by a few researchers through NGOs as an effective way of exposing such deeds to the public and to international scrutiny and criticism. To record human rights violations provide a lasting accountability of the actions of the perpetrators and in the past where justice has not been delivered. United states Department noted that in general the human rights record remained poor, with concerns regarding government security forces, impunity and prison conditions.

Conclusion

African archives are under utilized as information sources. This is partly due to professional problems like lack of recognition of archives by governments, obsolete legislation, lack of professional training, inadequate service, and inadequate or non existent access tools. Another impacting factor is lack of appropriate hardware and software and user-friendly systems, lack of knowledge using information technology, costs, and the vulnerability of digital information.

SUMMARY

The paper discusses the situation of Burundi Archives in the present day society, their role, development and future. It provides an overview of the current socio political and economic environment after the civil war that prevailed in Burundi in well known periods of time since the independence in 1962 up to 2005. Four decades of civil war not only negatively impacted on human lives, but also affected the archival materials: some of the archives have been stolen while others have been burned. Retailers unconscious of the importance of the archives used them to wrap their items in markets. Furthermore, some others were stored without care due to the lack of experience in terms of archives safe guard. Corollary to this, is the gradual disappearance if no well oriented conservation policy is put into place. Recent research findings regarding current recordkeeping initiatives in Burundi public and private sector and their effect on service delivery are presented. The key characteristics of development are transparency, responsibility, accountability, participation of the whole people, both men and women, and responsiveness to the peoples' needs. The general assumption behind this presentation that development is to a large extent effectuated by the documentation of decision processes and actions, and making the resulting documentation accessible to the citizens. For example the creation, management and dissemination of trustworthy records, which will further be referred to as recordkeeping. Trough access to information, people can assess the performance of government, call for responsibility and accountability, demand compensation for injustice and enhance their knowledge and freely evolve opinions. The paper concludes by positing that Burundi archives are under utilized as information sources. This is partly due to professional problems like lack of recognition of archives by governments, obsolete legislation, lack of professional training, inadequate service, and inadequate or non existent access tools. Another impacting factor is lack of appropriate hardware and software and user-friendly systems, lack of knowledge using information technology, costs, and the vulnerability of digital information.

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