



## **Harnessing Information and Knowledge in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Region for Economic Development**

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### **Paper:**

#### *Introduction*

Information (explicit knowledge), is one of the most vital, strategic assets any organization has. There are statutory, regulatory, and contractual requirements that oblige businesses and government agencies to properly manage their records and information. Businesses interact with records every hour of the workday. Each time an email regarding a transaction is written, a letter sent, or a purchase made, a record is created. But why are they important? Records tell us how, what, where, and when something was done, or why a decision was made. They also tell us who was involved and under what authority. In other words, records provide evidence of government, institutional, and individual activity.

Information is a strategic resource which allows for the integration of records and archives management into a unified programme, that should focus less on the medium in which information is stored, and more on the information itself, regardless of the carrier. Public and private sector organisations are also increasingly recognizing the benefits which may be derived from exploiting information in records and publications, while at a broader level, Member States are recognizing the value of the information held in records and archives as the basis for defining and nurturing a national identity, and building knowledge-based societies.

#### *Information and Knowledge Management*

Although all records convey information, not all sources of information are records. Where such knowledge is processed, distilled and expressed/captured, it may then be deemed a record. The

process of planning, controlling and using the information resources of an organisation in support of its business is known as 'information management'. Good information management underpins **good governance**, especially in helping organizations manage their information more efficiently in the face of rapidly changing information and communications technologies (ICTs). In an electronic environment, governments, organisations and enterprises throughout the world are recognizing that they face significant challenges with respect to developing and sustaining the infrastructure required to manage records and information effectively. Information necessary to support e-Government strategies is at risk because of the absence of supporting policies, the dependence of information on rapidly changing technology, the lack of effective tools and methods to manage information throughout its life cycle, and the failure to recognize how information can be exploited and reused to support government strategies and priorities.

Knowledge management has many definitions, however, within the context of this presentation, we will consider it as: the identification, optimization, and active management of intellectual assets, either in the form of explicit knowledge held in artefacts, or as tacit knowledge possessed by individuals and communities<sup>1</sup>.

Information and knowledge management are critical to institutional effectiveness, efficiency and accountability and most importantly, supporting evidence-based policy making by providing evidence of past actions and decisions.

### *Information and Knowledge Management across the Community*

All CARICOM Institutions are in the business of managing information<sup>2</sup>, and good information management is the bedrock of the decision-making process, and programme/ service delivery. The degree to how information as a resource is management effectively will determine how effective and efficient these programmes and services are delivered. The management of information by any one regional institution is not a distinct activity which sits on its own, independent of what else is going on in the Community. It is instead an integral part of the intellectual process by which a specific mandate is executed in the pursuit of the common objectives of the Community. At the same time, results-oriented development, which involves linking high quality decision-making and strategic planning and management with results and outcomes through monitoring and evaluation systems, requires well managed records which statistical data can be gathered, and accountability can be measured.

Greater collaboration is needed among CARICOM Institutions to:

- Realise improved information access across the Community;*
- Support evidenced-based decision making across the Community;*

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<sup>1</sup> Understanding Knowledge Societies, UNESCO 2005. (ST/ESA/PAD/SER.E/66)

<sup>2</sup> Information Management – Core Requirements: Guidelines for an Information Strategy for Records created by the CARICOM Secretariat and Community Institutions, E. Bryan, 2009.

- Improve results-based programming and service delivery across the Community;*
- Promote of good governance and greater accountability within Community Institutions;*
- Support Institutional Memory and Knowledge Management;*
- Preserve the Information Heritage of the Community;*
- Promote the Community's ICTs and E-Governance Agendas;*
- Improve resource sharing among Community Institutions;*
- Advance the Community's Single Market and Economy.*

In this time of scarce resources in an increasingly competitive global environment, here is an urgent need within CARICOM for a discourse and identification of a Community-wide approach on how to harvest knowledge, develop knowledge, use knowledge, share knowledge, and finally how to preserve knowledge throughout the information lifecycle<sup>3</sup>.

### *Information and Knowledge Management*

To this end, the use of Information and Knowledge Management will be used as a vehicle to promote further discourse in response to the realization that highly developed information along with the right people (talent/creativity/innovation) are the two main assets of the Knowledge Society. Therefore, if the current institutional arrangements for managing these critical resources (especially information), retards or inhibits their full potential, then these arrangements must change to respond to the current and expected future challenges.

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<sup>3</sup> Creation, use, storage, retrieval, dissemination, protection, disposal, retention and permanent archiving.