Records Management and Open Governance in Kenya: Challenges, Opportunities, and Policy Directions

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Abstract

Open governance has emerged as a fundamental principle for promoting transparency, accountability, citizen participation, and evidence-based public administration. Its effectiveness depends largely on the availability of authentic, reliable, and accessible public records. In Kenya, devolved governance, expanding digital government initiatives, and progressive access-to-information legislation have heightened the need for effective records management systems to support institutional accountability and public trust. Despite these developments, persistent weaknesses in records management continue to impede the realization of open governance objectives. This paper examines the role of records management in advancing open governance in Kenya using a qualitative document analysis design. Data were drawn from legislation, policy documents, government reports, and peer-reviewed literature published between 2010 and 2025 and analyzed using thematic content analysis. The analysis revealed existing records management practices that support open governance, four interrelated challenges that constrain their effectiveness, and emerging opportunities for strengthening records governance through legal reforms, digital transformation, professional capacity development, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. The four challenges identified include: institutional and regulatory implementation gaps; inadequate digital infrastructure, interoperability, and information security; limited professional capacity and organizational support; and inadequate financial investment for sustainable records governance. By synthesizing evidence across legal, policy, and scholarly sources, the paper positions records management as a strategic enabler of open governance rather than merely an administrative function. The findings demonstrate that strengthening records management systems is essential for enhancing transparency, accountability, citizen participation, and evidence-based decision-making in Kenya. The paper contributes to the growing body of knowledge on records management and governance by providing an integrated conceptual framework and practical policy recommendations for strengthening legal implementation, institutional coordination, digital records governance, and professional capacity to support sustainable open governance reforms.

Keywords: *Records Management, Open Governance, Transparency, Accountability, Public Sector, Kenya*

1.0 Introduction

Open governance has emerged as a global governance paradigm that promotes transparency, accountability, citizen participation, and collaboration in public decision-making. Governments increasingly rely on digital technologies, open data initiatives, and access-to-information frameworks to enhance service delivery and public trust. The success of these initiatives depends on the availability of authentic, reliable, and accessible records, making records management a fundamental enabler of open governance (Lee & Kwak, 2011). Effective records management ensures that information is systematically created, maintained, preserved, and retrieved to support evidence-based decision-making, institutional accountability, and public access to information (Katuu, 2022; Mosweu & Rakemane, 2020). Across Africa, governments have adopted reforms aimed at promoting transparency and digital governance. However, the implementation of open governance remains constrained by weak records management systems, inadequate technological infrastructure, limited financial and human resources, and fragmented policy implementation. These challenges compromise the availability and accessibility of government information required to support transparency, accountability, and citizen participation (Mnjama & Wamukoya, 2020; Katuu, 2022). In Kenya, the government has established a supportive legal and policy framework for open governance through the Constitution of Kenya (2010), the Access to Information Act (2016), the Data Protection Act (2019), participation in the Open Government Partnership, and the Government Digital Transformation Strategy (2022–2032). While these initiatives seek to improve public service delivery and accountability, their effectiveness depends on robust records management systems capable of ensuring the authenticity, accessibility, and preservation of public records (Government of Kenya, 2022; Ministry of ICT, 2022). Nevertheless, many public institutions continue to experience challenges related to records creation, organization, access, preservation, disposal, and digital records management, limiting the realization of open governance objectives. Kenya provides a particularly relevant context because devolution transferred significant administrative, financial, and service delivery responsibilities to 47 county governments, making effective records management essential for transparency, accountability, citizen participation, and evidence-based decision-making at the local level. Although previous studies have examined records management, e-government, and access to information, limited empirical evidence exists on how records management practices collectively influence open governance within Kenya's devolved county governments. Addressing this gap, this paper examines records management and open governance in Kenya through a qualitative document analysis, with the aim of generating evidence to inform policy and strengthen governance through improved records management practices.

Problem Statement

Effective records management is fundamental to the realization of open governance because it ensures that government records are authentic, reliable, accessible, and preserved to support transparency, accountability, citizen participation, and evidence-based decision-making. In Kenya, this ideal is reflected in the Constitution of Kenya (2010), the Access to Information Act (2016), the Data Protection Act (2019), and the Government Digital Transformation Strategy (2022–2032), which collectively seek to promote transparent, accountable, and citizen-centred public administration.

However, despite these legal and policy frameworks, records management in many public institutions remains constrained by inadequate policy implementation, limited technological infrastructure, insufficient professional capacity, and fragmented institutional frameworks (Kamau, 2020; Maseh & Mutula, 2017).

Empirical evidence indicates that these challenges continue to undermine governance outcomes. Successive reports of the Office of the Auditor-General (2021/2022) have identified unsupported expenditures, incomplete financial documentation, missing records, and material misstatements in county government financial statements attributable to weak recordkeeping practices, thereby compromising financial accountability and transparency. Likewise, reports by the Commission on Administrative Justice (2023;2024) have highlighted persistent challenges in compliance with the Access to Information Act, noting that weak records management systems impede the timely retrieval and disclosure of public information. Consequently, despite progressive legal reforms, weaknesses in records management continue to undermine transparency, accountability, and meaningful citizen participation (Nyamberi et al., 2023; Osebe et al., 2018). Although previous studies have examined records management, e-government, and access to information in Kenya, they have paid limited attention to the influence of records management practices on the realization of open governance, particularly within county governments. This knowledge gap limits the availability of empirical evidence needed to inform policies and interventions aimed at strengthening open governance through improved records management. Therefore, this study examines records management as a catalyst for supporting open governance.

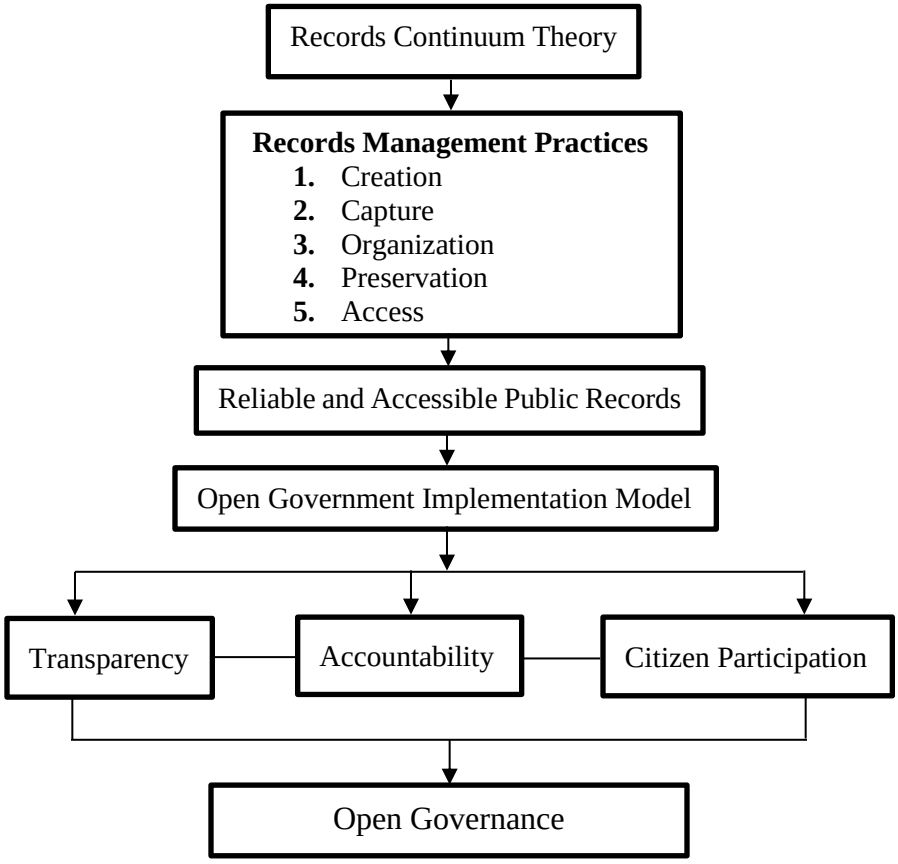
"This study highlights records management as a critical pillar of open governance in Kenya"

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the Records Continuum Theory and the Open Government Implementation Model. The Records Continuum Theory explains how records should be managed continuously from creation through capture, organization, preservation, and use to support accountability and institutional memory. In contrast, the Open Government Implementation Model explains how transparency, participation, and collaboration are achieved through the availability and use of reliable public information (Lee & Kwak, 2011). The two theories are complementary because the Records Continuum Theory explains the mechanisms through which records become reliable governance resources, while the Open Government Implementation Model explains how those records facilitate open governance outcomes. Taken together, the Records Continuum Theory explains how reliable records are created and preserved throughout their lifecycle, while the Open Government Implementation Model illustrates how such records enable transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. The conceptual relationships among the two theories are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Integrated Conceptual Framework



Research Questions

1. How do existing records management practices in Kenya's public sector influence the implementation of open governance?
2. What challenges in current records management systems hinder transparency, accountability, and citizen access to information?
3. What opportunities exist for strengthening records management as a driver of open governance in Kenya?

Study Purpose

The study sought to examine the role of records management in promoting open governance in Kenya by assessing existing practices, identifying key challenges, and proposing strategies for strengthening records management systems to enhance transparency, accountability, and citizen participation.

Study Limitations

This study relied exclusively on documentary evidence obtained from legislation, policy documents, government reports, and published literature. Consequently, the findings reflect existing documented evidence and do not incorporate primary data from records management practitioners or county government officials. Although triangulation of multiple documentary sources enhanced the credibility of the findings, future studies employing interviews, surveys, or case studies could provide deeper insights into institutional practices and contextual

factors influencing records management and open governance in Kenya.

2.0 Materials and Methods

This study adopted a qualitative document analysis design to examine the role of records management in promoting open governance in Kenya. Secondary data were obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, policy documents, legislation, and publications from international organizations. Documents were identified through Google Scholar, Scopus, JSTOR, and institutional repositories, including those of the Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service (KNADS), the Office of the Auditor-General, the Commission on Administrative Justice (CAJ), and the Open Government Partnership (OGP). The search used keywords such as records management, open governance, transparency, accountability, access to information, and digital governance, focusing primarily on publications produced between 2010 and 2025.

Documents were selected using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria based on relevance, authority, credibility, and alignment with the study objectives. The review included peer-reviewed studies, official government publications, policy documents, and legal instruments addressing records management and open governance, while duplicate, irrelevant, and non-authoritative sources were excluded. Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, whereby information was coded, categorized, and synthesized into recurring themes related to legal and policy frameworks, institutional capacity, ICT infrastructure, governance challenges, and opportunities for strengthening records management.

To enhance analytical rigor, findings were triangulated across multiple documentary sources, and only credible and verifiable publications were included to ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis. As the study relied exclusively on publicly available documentary sources and did not involve human participants, ethical approval was not required. The principal documentary sources reviewed are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Key Literature Reviewed

Author(s)	Focus	Key Findings	Relevance to the Study
Upward (1996)	Records Continuum Theory	Records should be managed continuously from creation through capture, organization, preservation, and use to ensure authenticity, accessibility, accountability, and institutional memory.	Provides the theoretical foundation for records management.
Lee & Kwak (2011)	Open Government Implementation Model	Transparency, accountability, participation, and collaboration depend on the availability of reliable government information.	Provides the theoretical foundation for open governance.
Mnjama & Wamukoya (2020)	Records management in Africa	Weak records management systems undermine accountability, transparency, and e-government initiatives.	Provides the regional context and highlights challenges in African public institutions.

Katuu (2022)	Digital records management	Professionalization, digital preservation, and institutional capacity strengthen governance and records management.	Supports discussions on capacity building and digital transformation.
Ambira et al. (2019)	Electronic records management	Electronic records management improves information accessibility, service delivery, and accountability.	Supports findings on existing records management practices.
Osebe et al. (2018)	Records management in county governments	Weak records management practices reduce accountability and affect service delivery in county governments.	Provides empirical evidence from the Kenyan context.
Nyamberi et al. (2023)	County records management	Institutional weaknesses, inadequate infrastructure, and poor policy implementation hinder transparency and accountability.	Supports discussion of records management challenges.
Majani et al. (2022)	Digital governance	ICT enhances records accessibility and service delivery, although inadequate infrastructure limits implementation.	Supports findings on digital transformation opportunities and challenges.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Existing Records Management Practices Driving Open Governance in Kenya

The analysis revealed that Kenya's public sector has progressively adopted records management practices that support transparency, accountability, and service delivery. These include the implementation of electronic government platforms such as the Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS), e-Citizen, Huduma Kenya, and digital registries, which have improved the creation, storage, retrieval, and dissemination of government information (Majani et al., 2022; Wanyama et al., 2023). The Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service (KNADS) has also issued records management guidelines and standards to support records creation, classification, retention, preservation, and disposal across public institutions, while ongoing digitization initiatives have strengthened access to public information and administrative efficiency. The implementation of the Access to Information Act (2016) has also encouraged public institutions to strengthen records organization and retrieval systems in order to facilitate timely disclosure of government information.

From the perspective of the Records Continuum Theory, these initiatives demonstrate efforts to manage records throughout their lifecycle to preserve their authenticity, reliability, and accessibility for governance purposes. Collectively, these initiatives have enhanced financial reporting, information accessibility, and service delivery, thereby contributing to transparency and accountability. These findings are consistent with Ambira et al. (2019), who reported that electronic records management systems strengthen e-government by improving information accessibility, and with Wanyama et al. (2023), who found that digitization enhances transparency and accountability in Kenyan public institutions. Nevertheless, documentary evidence indicates that implementation remains uneven across national and county governments because of weak institutional capacity, fragmented policy implementation, inadequate funding, and limited ICT infrastructure. Consequently, the contribution of these initiatives to open

governance has not yet been fully realized, giving rise to the challenges discussed below.

Challenges of Records Management Hindering Open Governance in Kenya

Records management in Kenya's public sector faces several challenges that continue to undermine transparency, accountability, and citizens' access to information.

Institutional, Policy, and Regulatory Implementation Gap

The findings indicate that weak institutional capacity, fragmented regulatory frameworks, and inconsistent implementation of records management policies remain major barriers to effective records governance in Kenya's public sector. Although Kenya has established legal instruments, including the Access to Information Act (2016), the Data Protection Act (2019), and the Public Archives and Documentation Service Act (Cap. 19), their implementation across government institutions remains uneven. From the perspective of the Records Continuum Theory, ineffective management of records at the stages of creation, capture, organization, and preservation compromises their evidential value and limits their ability to support accountability, institutional memory, and public access to information.

Evidence from Isoka (2022), the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (2024), and the Auditor-General's Report (2021/2022) demonstrates that weaknesses in records management continue to undermine transparency and accountability within Kenya's county governments. The EACC identified the absence of approved records retention and disposal schedules, unlawful destruction of public records, and significant backlogs of unmanaged records, while the Auditor-General reported material misstatements in county financial statements arising from incomplete documentation and inadequate recordkeeping. Similar challenges have been documented in Laikipia, Kisii, Nyamira, and Narok counties, where inadequate records management policies, poorly equipped registries, and shortages of trained personnel have constrained service delivery and accountability (Osebe et al., 2018; Maina & Maseh, 2023). Collectively, these findings demonstrate that poor records management is a systemic governance challenge with direct implications for financial accountability, public oversight, and citizens' access to information.

The absence of a coordinated national records governance framework has created inconsistencies in standards, compliance monitoring, and accountability mechanisms. Similar challenges have been reported in other African contexts, where overlapping mandates and weak coordination structures have limited effective information governance (Adusei & Mensah, 2022). These findings suggest that strengthening open governance in Kenya requires not only legislation but also effective institutional coordination, regulatory enforcement, and clearly defined responsibilities among records management stakeholders.

Digital Infrastructure, ICT, and Information Security Challenges

The analysis demonstrates that Kenya's transition from traditional paper-based records management to digital records systems has been slow and uneven due to inadequate ICT infrastructure, limited digital preservation capacity, unreliable connectivity, and emerging cybersecurity concerns. Although government platforms such as IFMIS and e-Citizen have enhanced service delivery and access to information, many public

institutions, particularly at county level, continue to rely on manual recordkeeping practices (Majani et al., 2022). These technological limitations affect the availability, reliability, and accessibility of public records, thereby weakening transparency and accountability mechanisms. Lessons from countries such as South Africa and Botswana demonstrate that effective digital records management requires sustained ICT investment, adequate funding, and strong institutional collaboration (Mnjama & Wamukoya, 2020).

The absence of integrated electronic records management systems also contributes to duplication, data fragmentation, and difficulties in maintaining authentic and complete records. These findings reinforce the Records Continuum Theory by demonstrating that ineffective records capture and preservation compromise the authenticity, accessibility, and evidential value of government records, thereby weakening the transparency and accountability functions that underpin open governance. Furthermore, increased digitization has introduced concerns relating to data security, privacy, and ethical information management. Experiences from initiatives such as the National Integrated Identity Management System (NIIMS/Huduma Namba) demonstrate that inadequate cybersecurity safeguards and unclear data governance arrangements can reduce public confidence in digital government systems. Comparative experiences from South Africa and Rwanda show that successful digital records transformation requires sustained investment in ICT infrastructure, interoperability, cybersecurity measures, and institutional capacity. These experiences suggest that Kenya's digital transformation agenda should prioritize interoperability and long-term records governance rather than focusing solely on technology adoption.

Human Capacity, Professionalization, and Organizational Change Challenges

The findings indicate that limited professional capacity, inadequate recognition of records management, and resistance to technological change continue to constrain effective records governance in Kenya. In many public institutions, records management responsibilities are assigned to staff without specialized training, resulting in poor classification practices, misfiling, delayed retrieval of information, and weak compliance with records management standards (Obunde et al., 2022).

The limited professional recognition of records management as a strategic governance function further reduces institutional commitment to effective records practices. Rather than being viewed as a foundation for accountability and decision-making, records management is often treated as an administrative support activity. According to the Open Government Implementation Model (Lee & Kwak, 2011), transparency and citizen engagement depend on timely access to reliable government information. This demonstrates that professional records management capacity is not merely an administrative requirement but a prerequisite for implementing the transparency and citizen participation dimensions of the Open Government Implementation Model.

Therefore, weaknesses in records management directly affect the ability of citizens and oversight institutions to participate effectively in governance processes. Katuu (2022) argues that strengthening records management requires institutional support, professional accreditation, and structured training programmes. Enhancing

the professional status and capacity of records managers would improve service delivery, accountability, and compliance with records management standards.

The findings also indicate that resistance to organizational change and limited awareness among public officers hinder adoption of digital records systems and open data initiatives.

Addressing these challenges requires continuous professional development, leadership commitment, standardized training programmes, and recognition of records professionals as key contributors to institutional accountability.

Financial Constraints and Sustainability Challenges

The analysis demonstrates that inadequate financial investment remains a fundamental challenge affecting the sustainability of records management programmes within Kenya's public sector. Limited budgetary allocations have contributed to outdated technologies, inadequate records storage facilities, insufficient staff training, and delays in implementing electronic records management systems.

These financial limitations affect both national and county governments by restricting their ability to acquire appropriate technologies, maintain digital infrastructure, and establish sustainable preservation mechanisms. The findings further demonstrate that records management initiatives often compete with other institutional priorities, resulting in underinvestment despite the critical role of records in supporting accountability, transparency, and service delivery.

The relationship between financial capacity and governance outcomes suggests that effective records management should be treated as a strategic investment rather than an operational cost. These findings suggest that sustained financial investment is fundamental to maintaining reliable records systems capable of supporting transparency, accountability, and evidence-based governance. Without adequate financing, even well-designed legal and technological reforms are unlikely to achieve their intended governance outcomes.

The findings demonstrate that the identified weaknesses are systemic rather than operational and therefore require coordinated legal, technological, institutional, and professional interventions. The following discussion highlights the opportunities for strengthening records management to support open governance in Kenya.

Opportunities for Strengthening Records Management to Enhance Open Governance in Kenya

The results of the study show that Kenya has a lot of potential to leverage records management to promote open governance. These opportunities reflect Kenya's growing commitment to accountability, transparency, and participatory governance through strengthened records management. Leveraging these opportunities can transform records management into a strategic resource for evidence-based decision-making, transparency, and citizen participation.

Strengthening Legal, Policy, and Institutional Frameworks for Open Governance

The findings indicate that Kenya has established a strong legal and policy foundation that provides opportunities for strengthening records management and advancing open governance. Key frameworks, including the Access to Information Act (2016), the Data Protection Act (2019), and the Public Archives and

Documentation Service Act (Cap. 19), provide mechanisms for promoting transparency, accountability, and citizens' access to reliable public information. These frameworks require public institutions to create, preserve, and provide access to authentic records, thereby aligning records management practices with democratic governance principles.

The ongoing review of the Public Archives and Documentation Service Act presents an opportunity to modernize Kenya's records governance framework by incorporating digital records management requirements, preservation standards, and stronger compliance mechanisms. Effective implementation of these reforms would address existing gaps between policy formulation and practice, which continue to affect transparency and accountability within public institutions (Erima & Maseh, 2024). The principal legal and policy instruments underpinning records management and open governance in Kenya are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Legal and Policy Frameworks Supporting Open Governance in Kenya

Legal/Policy Framework	Purpose	Contribution to Open Governance
Constitution of Kenya (2010)	Right to information	Promotes transparency and accountability
Access to Information Act (2016)	Public access to information	Supports citizen participation
Public Archives and Documentation Service Act	Management of public records	Ensures authenticity and preservation
Data Protection Act (2019)	Protection of personal data	Balances transparency with privacy
Government Digital Transformation Strategy (2022–2032)	Digital public services	Promotes electronic records and digital governance
Kenya Open Government Action Plan	Citizen engagement	Strengthens openness and accountability

Comparative experiences demonstrate the value of effective legal frameworks in supporting open governance. In South Africa, the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) 2000 has strengthened citizens' ability to access government information and enhanced accountability in areas such as public finance, procurement, and service delivery. Similarly, Kenya's Access to Information Act (2016) provides a foundation for openness; however, its impact depends on institutional capacity, effective records management practices, and compliance mechanisms (Mnjama & Wamukoya, 2020). Strengthening coordination among institutions responsible for records governance, including the Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service (KNADS), ICT Authority, and public institutions, would further enhance implementation and accountability.

Kenya's participation in international and regional initiatives, including the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and the African Union Digital Transformation Strategy (2020–2030), also presents opportunities for improving records governance.

These frameworks provide guidance on digital transformation, information accessibility,

cybersecurity, and citizen participation, while enabling knowledge exchange and adoption of international best practices (African Union, 2020).

Digital Transformation and Integrated Electronic Records Management Systems

The findings demonstrate that Kenya's digital transformation agenda provides significant opportunities for improving records management and strengthening open governance. The adoption of electronic government platforms such as IFMIS and e-Citizen demonstrates the potential of technology to enhance service delivery, financial transparency, and evidence-based decision-making. Digital records systems can reduce dependence on paper-based processes, minimize information loss, improve retrieval efficiency, and increase accessibility of public information (Majani et al., 2022).

From the perspective of the Records Continuum Theory, digital technologies provide opportunities to strengthen the continuous creation, capture, organization, preservation, and accessibility of records throughout their lifecycle. Reliable electronic records systems ensure that government information retains its authenticity, integrity, and evidential value, which are essential for accountability and public trust.

The expansion of ICT infrastructure, including broadband connectivity, cloud computing, and electronic document management systems, provides opportunities for developing integrated records management platforms across government institutions.

National policy frameworks such as the Government Digital Transformation Strategy (Ministry of ICT, 2022), Vision 2030, and the National ICT Policy Guidelines (2020) support the development of secure and interoperable digital systems that promote information sharing and long-term preservation (Republic of Kenya, 2019). These developments reinforce the Records Continuum Theory by demonstrating that interoperable digital infrastructures support the continuous creation, preservation, accessibility, and long-term usability of public records required for transparent governance.

Experiences from countries such as South Africa and Rwanda demonstrate that successful digital governance requires more than technology adoption; it requires interoperability, institutional collaboration, cybersecurity measures, and sustained investment in human and technical capacity (Mnjama & Wamukoya, 2020). Therefore, aligning Kenya's digital transformation initiatives with comprehensive electronic records management strategies presents an opportunity to enhance transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement.

Professionalization, Capacity Building, and Organizational Transformation

The findings indicate that developing professional capacity in records management provides an important opportunity for improving governance outcomes. Existing training initiatives undertaken by institutions such as the Kenya School of Government (KSG), the Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service, and universities offering information and records management programmes provide a foundation for strengthening professional competence within the public sector.

Continuous professional development, standardization of qualifications, and integration of information governance modules into public service training programmes are necessary to ensure that records management becomes recognized as a strategic governance function

rather than merely an administrative responsibility. Katuu (2022) emphasizes that effective records management requires institutional support, professional recognition, and continuous skills development to ensure that records remain accessible, reliable, and usable for decision-making.

The analysis further demonstrates that organizational transformation and leadership commitment are essential for overcoming resistance to change and promoting adoption of modern records practices. According to the Open Government Implementation Model (Lee & Kwak, 2011), transparency and citizen participation depend on timely access to accurate and reliable information. Therefore, strengthening the capacity and professional status of records managers would directly contribute to improved accountability, service delivery, and public participation.

Comparative experiences from Namibia and Botswana demonstrate that structured professional training and recognition of records management personnel can transform records management from a routine administrative function into a strategic component of governance (Katuu, 2022).

Open Data Integration and Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

The review shows that integrating records management into open data initiatives and strengthening collaboration among government institutions, civil society, and academic organizations provide opportunities for advancing open governance in Kenya. The Kenya Open Data Initiative (KODI) and the Kenya Open Government Action Plan (2018–2022) demonstrate the potential of structured public information systems to support transparency, research, innovation, and citizen participation (Government of Kenya, 2022).

Effective integration of records management with open data platforms ensures that information released to the public is accurate, complete, traceable, and supported by appropriate metadata standards. Proper records management therefore provides the foundation upon which open data initiatives depend, since reliable datasets originate from well-managed records systems.

Collaboration with civil society organizations, academic institutions, and accountability bodies such as Transparency International Kenya and other governance stakeholders provides opportunities for strengthening oversight, policy innovation, and citizen engagement (Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission, 2024). Experiences from Ghana and Nigeria demonstrate that multi-stakeholder partnerships can improve transparency by strengthening information access mechanisms and promoting participatory governance (Adusei & Mensah, 2022).

For Kenya, embedding records management within open data and information access initiatives provides an opportunity to transform government records into strategic governance assets that support accountability, public participation, and evidence-based decision-making.

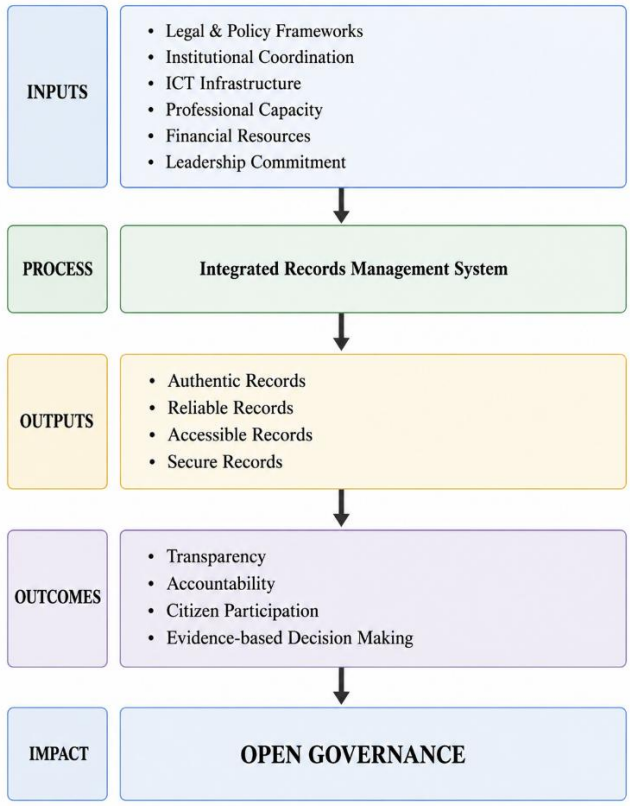
Overall, the findings demonstrate that records management is both a governance challenge and a strategic opportunity for strengthening open governance in Kenya. Weak institutional capacity, fragmented policy implementation, technological limitations, inadequate professionalization, and financial constraints continue to undermine transparency and accountability.

At the same time, ongoing legal reforms, digital transformation initiatives, professional capacity development, and multi-stakeholder collaboration provide practical pathways for improving records governance. Collectively, these findings affirm that effective records management is not simply an administrative function but a strategic governance resource that underpins transparency, accountability, citizen participation, and evidence-based decision-making.

Based on the synthesized findings, the study proposes the Records Governance Model (Figure 2) to demonstrate how enabling institutional factors strengthen records management and ultimately support open governance outcomes.

Figure 2

Proposed Records Governance Model for Strengthening Open Governance in Kenya



4.0 Conclusion

This study highlights records management as a critical pillar of open governance in Kenya. Although strong legal frameworks exist such as the Public Archives and Documentation Service Act (Cap. 19), the Data Protection Act (2019), and the Access to Information Act (2016) their implementation remains inconsistent. Key challenges include weak ICT infrastructure, limited digital preservation capacity, staffing shortages, poor interagency coordination, and cultural resistance, all of which undermine the creation, maintenance, and accessibility of reliable records. Concerns over data security, privacy, and ethics further weaken public trust in government information systems.

While Kenya can draw lessons from regional and global experiences, its context-specific challenges require tailored reforms. Existing initiatives such as open data platforms and digital systems like IFMIS, e-Citizen, and Huduma Kenya offer opportunities for improved governance, but their effectiveness is constrained by structural and institutional limitations. Strengthening records management therefore requires comprehensive reforms spanning technology, human capacity, and policy implementation.

Opportunities exist to enhance transparency and accountability through professional training, capacity-building, collaboration with academic and civil society actors, and deeper integration of ICT innovations. To fully realize these gains, Kenya must harmonize legal frameworks, improve interagency coordination, invest sustainably in digital infrastructure and human resources, and professionalize records management across the public sector.

Ultimately, the paper demonstrates that strengthening records management is essential for achieving transparent, accountable, and participatory governance in Kenya. Records management should therefore be recognized as a strategic governance capability and embedded within national digital transformation and public sector reform initiatives.

5.0 Recommendations

The recommendations presented in this study have significant policy and practical implications. Their implementation would strengthen transparency, improve institutional accountability, enhance citizens' access to information, and contribute to evidence-based decision-making. Furthermore, these recommendations provide a roadmap for integrating records management into Kenya's broader digital transformation and open governance agenda. Based on the challenges and opportunities identified in this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen records management as a driver of open governance in Kenya:

1. Develop and implement a National Records Management Policy supported by a National Records Governance Council responsible for oversight, compliance monitoring, interoperability standards, and implementation. This will standardize recordkeeping, increase compliance, and boost openness and accountability.
2. Strengthen ICT Infrastructure and Digital Preservation**:** Provide consistent financing for interoperable digital platforms, broadband growth, and ICT enhancements.
3. Records accessibility, service delivery, and evidence-based decision-making would all be enhanced by integrating records management into e-government platforms like Huduma Kenya, IFMIS, and e-Citizen.
4. Professionalize Records Management**:** Implement organized professional development and certification programs, as well as hire and retain qualified records managers. Elevating records management to a strategic function will increase institutional accountability and support open government.
5. Enhance Data Protection and Cybersecurity**:** Enforce data protection laws in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2019) and put in place thorough cybersecurity measures. This will preserve critical information while retaining transparency and public trust.
6. Strengthen Multi-stakeholder Collaboration and Awareness**:** Encourage collaboration between academia, civil society, and government organizations. Educate officials and the public on the strategic importance of records management for openness, involvement, and evidence-based policymaking.

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