



THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF NIGERIA AND THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC RECORDS: A PROPOSED REPOSITIONING MODEL BASED ON DIGITAL AGE REQUIREMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have permeates all facets of human life including the generation/creation, receiving, transfer, use and management of public records. Public records are records created by public institutions. Such records can be used by individuals, organizations, and as well for societal development. The National Archives of Nigeria is mandated by law to ensure proper acquisition and management of records created and maintained by public institutions or bodies within and outside the country. This paper examines the concept of records and archives and their significance for societal development. The management practices involved in the custody and care of national records have also been highlighted. The paper also describes the statutory mandate of the Nigerian National Archives and how the institution can be repositioning in line with the digital age requirements. The paper concludes by proposing a model for the management of National Archival Institutions for effective records and archival management. The model emanates from the critical analysis of the existing body of knowledge. It is hope that the proposed model will assist stakeholders through serving as a guiding tool for effective management of public records in the National Archival Institutions in Nigeria and beyond.

Keywords: Records, Archives, Records management, National Archives of Nigeria, Digital age

Introduction

Records, generally defined as any documentary evidence in paper or electronic form, created or received by an organization in the pursuance of its legal obligations or in connection with its businesses, are important carriers of information. The business of governance entails the generation, management and use of information from records, which are also considered as vital tools for governance, research, scholarship and civics. “Information contained in public records and archives concerns every citizen in one way or another”, according to Ngulube and Tafor (2006), who also posited that public records have a direct impact on individuals’ lives and are cornerstones of the ability of governments to provide basic services to citizens, without which holding governments accountable would be impossible.



By their nature, public records are of substantial value for research, scholarship, information, evidence, governance, recall or memory, legal defence and diplomacy. Their potential users include administrators, researchers, diplomats, scholars, politicians, technocrats, policy analysts, armed forces and intelligence personnel, journalists and the curious ordinary citizens. Obviously, therefore, access to public records is of immense value to the quest for freedom of expression and information, without which the public does not have the evidence needed to hold public officers accountable or to insist on the prosecution of corruption and fraud. Public records also provide legally verifiable sources of evidence of decisions and actions and document compliance or non-compliance with laws, rules and procedures (Adams, 2006).

Access to public records is best ensured through appropriate legislations, laws and records infrastructures. Access laws have direct impact on the way in which people create and use records since, in virtually all parts of the world, records form the basis for legal evidence (Okello-Obura, 2011). In most countries, the responsibility for the acquisition, management and provision of access to public records is vested in the national archival institution. Nigeria is not an exception to this requirement. The National archival institution with its branches remained the most centralize agency for official records in the country. It is mandated to facilitate the proper management of public records so that the information contained in them remains accessible. This paper investigates the role of the National Archives of Nigeria (NAN) and the Management of public records and proposes a repositioning Model in line with the digital age requirements.

The National Archives of Nigeria and its Statutory Mandate

The first critical step in managing records effectively is to ensure the development and maintenance of a strong legislative and regulatory framework for record keeping with the. Without consistency in the practice of creating, keeping records and managing same; there can be no accountable or transparent mechanisms for the provision of access to records. An essential part of this accountability is to assign to the National Archives or to the Department of Records Office, formal legislated responsibility for the management of records throughout their life cycle. In Nigeria, the National Archives of Nigeria is the sole national archival institution responsible for the management of public archives of the federation. The NAN derives its powers and mandate from the National Archives Decree 1992. The Decree itself is a replacement of an earlier 'law' known as the Public Archives Ordinance of 1957. The Ordinance was enacted by the then House of Representatives and signed as a bill by the then Governor General and Commander-In-Chief, Federation of Nigeria, Sir, James Wilson Robertson on 14th November, 1957.

Other factors that shape and reshape the emergence and function of the National Archives of Nigeria includes the 1960 independence, which entails a lot of political and administrative changes in the country. Subsequently, the creation of states leads to the expansion of the operations in public affairs and



the private sector and this led to more records and archives emanating from such activities. The NAN have traditionally assumed the mandate of managing public records of enduring value and making them available to interested users. In fact, the Nigerian Archival legislation stipulates the functions of national archival repository to be responsible for the permanent custody, care and control of all archives of the Federal Government and of such other archives or historical records as may be required, from time to time, pursuant to this Decree, (National Archives Decree, 1992.)

Literature Perspective

The concept of record interestingly, had attracted a share of definitional divergence. Shepherd, (2011) considered record to be information documented in any form created, received and maintained by an organization as evidence of its daily transactions. Similarly, records are considered as documented evidence in paper-written form or in electronic form which of course, is generated or received by an organization to pursue its legal obligations with regards to business (Auyo, 2015). Accordingly, the Record Management Glossary (2013) described record as a recorded information produced or received in the initiation, conduct or completion of an institutional or individual activity and that comprises content, context and structure sufficient to provide evidence of the activity. This entails that records are necessary conveners and custodians of information about the transactions of an individual organization, either between intra or inter organizational, and, or with some other individuals. In this context, records are considered as evidence of recorded transaction preserved for the current and future use of the information content.

The International Council of Archives, (ICA) (2009) reported that a record must possess content, structure and context and be part of a record keeping system. Records are products of the activities of which they form a part or that which is created and kept as evidence of agency or individual functions, activities and transactions. Records comes in different physical formats or characteristics such as papers, registers, printed matters, books, maps, plans, photographs, microfilms, cinematographic films, sounding recordings, and or other documentary materials.

One of the key ways public organisations or governments agencies are held accountable for their actions is through evidence of business transactions in the form of records. As such, public records provide platform to access information about the transactions of public institutions by researchers, scholars, students, journalists, lawyers and others individuals who want to know about people, places, and events in the past. Okello-Obura (2011) noted that records are valuable business asset and the lifeblood of the organisation's business and therefore should be treated with utmost concern.



The significance of public records had been summed up by Parer (2000) who stated that no government can operate without records, because they document its actions. Government institutions therefore must protect the rights of its citizens, the environment, land rights and territorial integrity through strategic documentation of decisions. Hence, it would be impossible for government to be accountable without records or if government records were non-existent and poorly managed.

However, for public records to be utilised effectively for societal transformation such records must be effectively managed. Boonstra and Broekhuis (2010) noted that records need to be managed to ensure proper access to information for keeping users informed. This is significant because when users are informed, they can easily realise the need for certain services and seek for the service or intervention from workers. Informed users may also seek alternative service or second opinions from relevant people if they are not satisfied with the current service. Furthermore, the researchers' viewpoint is that records management is an organisational collective responsibility and many organisational officials need to be partnered and be involved to play their role in ensuring permanent authenticity of the records especially in public organisations.

Millar (2003) opined that records should be managed throughout their life cycle. She then proceeded to outline the stages of the records life cycle thus:

- i. From their creation as a tool of business and their management in the office of the records creator as current records
- ii. To their appraisal for continuing primary value as evidence of government activities and their management in a records centre as semi-current records and finally,
- iii. To their disposal if no longer needed (as obsolete record) or preservation as archives if they have enduring value.

According to Lalotra and Sangita (2010), records are indispensable to the efficient and economic operation of nations, as they serve as organizational memory by giving evidence of past events and basis for future action. When created, maintained and disposed of in a systematic and orderly fashion, records are tremendous assets to an organization. They added that records can be used as an information resource for strategic planning purposes since they provide value for reference and management decisions. Also, keeping complete records from the beginning can save time and money whilst ensuring accuracy of records will also prevent excessive residues by ensuring that withdrawal time has been met. In essence, the primary function of records management is to facilitate the free flow of records throughout the entire organization.



Records Management Strategies and Requirements in the Digital Age

One of the most elaborate attempts at explaining the concept of records management was made by the Louisiana State Archives (2002) which refers to the concept as the systematic application of management techniques to the creation, utilisation, maintenance, retention, preservation and disposal of records. Record management is thus concerned with the whole life span of records. It strives to limit their creation, control over their current use, assists in determining which of them should be move for archival consideration. For effective management of public records in the NLA there is need for utilization of modern day technological advances. The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) will no doubt enhance effective management of public records.

Management of public records in the digital age should aimed at evaluating records management strategies with a bid to ensuring the best practices in records management. Such best practice applies to records irrespective of any format or media, created or received by public organizations during the course of their activities (ISO, 2001). In this regard, the focus should include but not limited to looking at the: creation and capturing of electronic records; selection and appraisal of records; retention and disposal of records; organization and classification of records; storage and preservation of records; ensuring security and access as well as disaster mitigation and preparedness. Johnston (2010) noted that the significance of electronic records management is for the purposes of providing evidence of business activities. Public records creators can maintain electronic records as a tool for internal control measure, as evidence confirming organization's activities. Furthermore, records management whether electronic or paper based ensures the free flow of records throughout the entire organization.

One of the key features of records management requirement in the digital environment is the need for a conducive public records information environment and or system. This kind of environment will provide for records to be created and managed in a digital format and shared with other stakeholders within and outside the country across networks. Some of the benefits that can be realized from implementing and using an electronic records management system for nations include improved public service, accountability and transparency of government administration; and; evidence of the authenticity, integrity and reliability of public records (Queensland State Archives, 2007).

Shehu (2008), submitted that, the management of archival records in Nigeria is aimed at an accurate and complete documentation of the policies and transactions of an organisation (public or private) and at controlling and simplifying records, and at the judicious preservation and disposal of records in line with the digital age requirements. Parer (2000) suggested that archival management activities in the digital age should make reference to digital appraisal; disposal; scheduling, transfer, destruction, custodial



arrangements; arrangement and description, deposit, preservation, right of inspection, and powers of enforcement.

Keakopa (2003) submitted that recent trends in records management emphasized on the use of ICTs in both government and private sector administration. Such technologies though had created new challenges for records managers and practitioners but had also helped greatly in creating, storing and preserving such records as well as ensuring the ultimate use of the records. Lalotra and Gupta (2010) described information as an important resource, a valuable input and power for societal development and the basis for all planning and all activities, and agreed that fast-paced technological developments have changed the way user's access and retrieve information.

Policy formulation and implementation is also another important requirement for effective records management in the digital age. In order for the institution to properly develop or create effective records management policies they need guiding documents such as local and/or international standards and acts of their country of operation (Ndenje-Sichalwe, Ngulube & Stilwell, 2011). In many African countries there is still a lack of understanding of modern and international standards for records management in the digital age (Asogwa, 2012). Furthermore, the standards may serve as benchmark in customizing effective policies and procedures. Records management policy is needed to ensure that public records are traceable or identifiable, documented, managed and use effectively.

Challenge for Effective Records Management

Effective management of public records in the digital age also requires that records managers address some challenges that are associated with the management of public records Chachage and Ngulube (2009) reported that there are legal, technological and organisational matters that records managers have to contend with to effectively manage electronic records. In their words;

Technologically speaking, electronic records are machine readable, the storage medium is fragile and transient, and the longevity of the hardware and software is not guaranteed. Organisational matters in the management of electronic records include processes such as staffing, accessioning, indexing, retention, scheduling and preservation of records and related policies. The legal side of managing electronic records may include providing evidence of the integrity of an electronic document through the use of metadata and managing records compliance with laws.

Asogwa (2012) attest that, in African countries, relevant and proper records management laws existing are not enforced for proper records management. Hence, that is the sign of poor planning or lack of planning in records management programme implementation. In addition, Ngoepe (2014) discovered that in most government bodies, records management strategies, policies and procedure were either not



existing or not implemented. He also discovered that there was no implementation of approved filing plans in line with the organisational structure. Keakopa (2003) was equally of the view that increased use of ICTs in government administration has impacted on record keeping systems and that the new technological environment is making the present records and archives management moribund. In particular, he posited that the accelerated phase of technological advancement is forcing many ephemeral technologies into oblivion.

To address those challenges, according to him, archives and related agencies require a skilled workforce, adequate ICT infrastructure, especially in poor and rural areas, innovative methodologies and practical tools for the management of electronic records. He further recommends “continual vigilance” to ensure that such records are accessible over time and remain authentic on the part of records administrators. Similarly, the study on the management of public records in the ESARBICA region in Africa by Ngulube and Tafor (2006) revealed challenges in the following areas of records management:

- i. Legislations: Some national archival institutions were not managing records throughout their life-cycle partly due to weak legislative mandates”, (weak institutional capacity).
- ii. The absence of comprehensive records management policies, guidelines and practical standards
- iii. Inadequate or the absence of preparation for an imminent shift from the use of paper-based to electronic records in the conduct of public businesses.
- iv. Breakdown of the registry system in many countries
- v. Funding records management programmes
- vi. Records management personnel and professional development
- vii. Inadequate knowledge and use of archival and records management standards
- viii. Records appraisal and scheduling practices
- ix. Records preservation
- x. Care of electronic records, audio-visual materials and photographic materials
- xi. The accessibility of records
- xii. Ethics (archival) – its awareness and use.

Theoretical Perspective and the Proposed Model

There are a number of theories that constitute the theoretical basis for records and archival studies of this type. The study is guided by the Record Life-Cycle Theory, Trusted Digital Repository (TDR) Theory and the Continuum Model. However, the study is framed based on the theoretical assumptions of the Records Life-cycle Theory and Trusted Digital Repository (TDR) Theory. The two models were adopted in order to explore how they cater for the proliferation of ICTs in the public records sector of today’s Nigerian society.

The records life-cycle theory is generally regarded as the most appropriate and used in records management studies across the world. The theory is also universally accepted among archivists and records management professionals as the most integrated and comprehensive approach to records management



(Ngulube & Tafor, 2006). The basic assumption of the theory is that, like biological (living) organisms, records have life that consists of stages that are progressively sequential, from conception through creation, processing, distribution, organisation, storage, retrieval to ultimate disposition. Popular literature in this regard views the lifecycle of records as consisting of basically three stages – current or active, semi-current or semi-active, and non-current or non-active; as reported by Chachage and Ngulube (2013) who added that some commentators have presented these stages more elaborately and differently.

Goodman (2013), for instance, identified ten stages of the life cycle concept which include: Design and creation of records, Identification, Authorisation, Verification, Validation and auditing, Circulation, Access, Loan and use, Backup procedures and disaster recovery plans, and Retention schedule and destruction. The understanding of these stages is necessary for effective management of public records. It is therefore based on this assumption that the researchers are proposing the adoption and use of this theory for effective public records management in Nigeria. From the preceding discourse, it is hereby made cogent that the Jenkinsonian model of the life-cycle theory is chosen as most the appropriate framework for this study. This is especially because, as amply reported in the literature in the preceding paragraphs of this section: The second theory that guided this study is the Trusted Digital Repository (TDR) Model underscores by Cho (2012). Its attributes are necessary factors of consideration to ensure that digital resources are provided to its end-users in a manner that they are reliable and trustworthy over a long period of time. Many approaches have been attempted in TDR implementations.

These implementation attempts include the identification of mandatory requirements that characterise digital repositories (DRs) trustworthiness and evaluation of proper keeping of the requirements by organisational DRs. In the context of this theory, digital information administration requirement includes registration, classification, retention, preservation and access provision, skilled and competent staff, maintenance and control technology (Cho, 2012). In addition, other requirements include international standards, archival system architecture, metadata requirements, functional requirements and managerial practices.

An analysis of the existing body of knowledge has provided a significant lead into the understanding of records and archival management theories prevalent in most parts of the world. From the review it is clear that for many years now, archival and records managers have struggled with the management of records from creation to destruction or preservation. Consequently, the adoption and use of the two theoretical models by records managers in Nigeria will ensure effective management of public records both the paper formats and those in the digital forms. The adoption of the theories is based on the premise that it is possible to divide the life of a record into some distinct, separate stages for effective management of public records.



Conclusion and Recommendations

The understanding of what constitutes the definition of the concept and its benefits to public records managers is necessary for effective records management. The literature has indicated that, in general, records management in Nigeria is solely coordinated by the National Archives of Nigeria, which is legally mandated with the responsibility of ensuring the effective management of public records. In addition, the literature further indicated that, in general, records management in Nigeria is beset with some challenges. Atulomah (2011) was of the view that records management in developing countries, and indeed Nigeria, is yet to attain the level of attention and support that it has received in countries of the developed world. The challenges include inadequate knowledge of the life-cycle of records and inertia in implementing a form of a system of information for the management of records in digital forms.

Thus, this paper recommends that for effective management of public records in Nigeria, records managers must consider the use of ICTs for enhance management of public records in the digital age. One of the key feature of records management requirement in the digital age is the need for a conducive public records environment. An environment that will provide for the use of modern technological records system. Understanding of such environment is desirable for effective management of public records. In addition, records managers and stake holders should aim at evaluating records management strategies with a bid to ensuring the best practices in management of public records in the country. Hence, policy formulation and implementation is also another important requirement for effective records management in the digital age.

As such, public records keepers and managers should understand the need to properly develop and implement effective records management policies. Effective management of public records in the digital age also requires that records managers address some challenges that are associated with the management of public records. Such challenges were highlighted to include both technologically based challenges such as hardware and software issues. Also, the organisational matters in the management of electronic records should be considered. This challenges include staffing, accessioning, indexing, retention, scheduling and preservation of records and policies related issues. The paper recommends also the adoption of the Record Life Cycle Theory and Trusted Digital Repository (TDR) Model as the basis of understanding the strategic management requirements for the management of public records in Nigeria.



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