

The Development and Uses of Archives as a Branch of Information Management in Nigeria

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Abstract: This study considered the issues of the development and use of archives as a Branch of Information Management in Nigeria. Historical research was the primary reason for the establishment of archival institution. The development of archives started with restrictive measures and now to liberalization which brought about the National Archives Concept. The introduction of new technologies coupled with mass production of records from the Federal and State Government and other agencies helped in the development and growth of archives in Nigeria. Mention was made of the purpose of having archives and the services, it renders to the society vis-à-vis and its huge volumes of past records. Finally, the researcher made some specific suggestions or recommendations on how to create public awareness of the archival services in the country.

Key words: Development, use, archives, information management, branch, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Office records have always had a dual role of preserving and making their holdings available to users. The preparation and publication of indexes and search aids to records have been going on for a very long time.

Many do not know what archives are even the educated elites. Archives are public or government records and the place for keeping them indicating that the word has a dual meaning of being public or government records as well as been the place where such records are housed (Oduagwu, 1995).

Furthermore, it will be seen that not all records qualify as archival materials even though all archives are records. It means that archives are special type of records preserved permanently for reference and research purposes. According to Nigeria Public Ordinance, archives are all public records, documents and other historical matters of every kind, nature and description which are in the custody of any public office or which many be transferred to or acquired by the National Archives of Nigeria.

It is quite unfortunate that despite the numerous educational, historical and traditional significance of archives, not much is known about it in Nigeria, especially as a Branch of Information Management, hence the need for this research interest in the development and uses of achieve as a Branch of Information Management in Nigeria with the objectives of highlighting its development and outlining its uses as a Branch of Information Management in Nigeria.

The researchers hope, this will go a long way not only to create its awareness and development but to express its importance as a Branch of Information Management.

BRIEF HISTORY OF UNIVERSAL DEVELOPMENT OF ARCHIVES

Archives is a greek word, Archeion, meaning that which belongs to an office and originally was applied to government record. Until recently, archive and library materials were preserved in the same place. Osifeso (1989) explained that early civilization made no distinction as to source or type of documentation and so the Sumerians, the Hittites and the Egyptians for administrative conveniences often combined archives and libraries. For many centuries, the Greek term biblothea was used as repositories holding of what is today called archival material.

The distinction between repositories of archival and library materials dates from the 15th century and also within this period, there was the creation of separate archival agencies as administration techniques for the records of a particular government department. During the past 2 centuries, almost every country has made some provisions for a system of national archives services adopted to suit its particular governmental structure. It is an established maximum that in civilized state or country, there should exist a system of archives administration corresponding to the nature of a country (Akogun, 2003).

Okilo stated example from the Corporation of London Records office (CLR) which housed the Municipal Archives of the city of London and is regarded as the most complete collection of ancient municipal records in existence. He continued by saying that the stock of this Municipal Archives includes: Charter of William the Conqueror, Henry TJ and Late kings and queens up to 1957, ancient customals, e.g., Liber Horn, Dunthorne, Customarum, Ordinacionum, Memorandum, Albus and the collections of statues. Other archival materials in the London Municipal Archives (LMA) include continuous services of judicial rolls and books from 1252 and council minutes 1275, records of the Old Bailey and guildhall sessions from 1603 and financial records from the 16th century, together with the records of London bridge from the 12th century and numerous subsidiary series and miscellany of historical interest.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF ARCHIVES

Evans (1989) stated that archival development dated back with the introduction of writing which permitted the building up to systematically organized and bureaucratically administered societies. This history can be traced to ancient time going to the 4th BC and the oldest archives found therefore were the clay tablets of Ugarit. Making a case for archival development in Nigeria, Raji (1993) said that she is convinced as an Arabic paleographer archivist that any history of archival development which does not touch on the development of Muslim archives is incomplete. This is moreso for the development of making and preservation of records in Nigeria where the oldest available written sources of our history are by Muslims in the Arabic character and languages.

Adeosun discovered that an archival building is one of the most essential facilities needed for the operation of the archival profession. Without archival building, the archivists and other professionals connected with archive work will not be able to function effectively. The difficulty of tracing public records was faced by some state governments. This was because the records were kept in several offices and by different functionaries in such a way that when a particular document is needed, it is difficult to find out where it could be traced but it was certain that such a document existed sometime. He went further to say that to solve this problem, there is the need to set aside some contiguous buildings that are converted into complex for the purpose of establishment of archives. This shows that the state are indeed committed to assembling properly all records of public interest that may be found here and there within the state and to endeavour

to retrieve similar document kept outside the state presently. Documents should therefore have a home as human beings.

Measures to ensure that real development and improvement of archive are taken in by the Federal Government through the National Archives Advisory Council (NAAC) is therefore very necessary Sowoolu explained that these required improvement on the expansion of existing repositories, the establishment of Zonal Branch and of the Federal Records Centers throughout the country, the transfer of the National Archives Headquarters to the Nation's new capital, Abuja and the institution of local facilities for the training of the archival professionals and technical staff. Alegbeleye (1997) noted that the ability to collect, organize, preserve and make available, the records of the nation depends on the caliber and professional competence of the personnel who are to handle such records.

THE ROLE OF ARCHIVES IN NATION BUILDING

Enwere (2004) on the role of archives in National building recollected the attempt made by the late Director of the National Archives of Nigeria. He believed that the theory of empiricism could be found as a good reason why archival institutions should exist. Empiricists believe the experience rather than abstract reasoning which is more essential in furthering knowledge and progress, noting the very important role which non-governmental archives can play in the economic, social and cultural development of a nation. Sowoolu said that we also call on the industrial, commercial, ecclesiastic and other private organizations in the community to treat as an urgent matter, the establishment of archives and record management services in their respective organizations and make their archival materials available to searchers in the wide interest of the scholarship and nation. Archives are not merely preserved for the nation's sake, rather, the main concern of archivists is to maintain the unlimited archival materials which are known for their permanent and historical values constituting the irreplaceable sources of original information and making these available to the researchers and other users.

Verhoevan, commenting on the preservative role of an archival institution, said that archives are active in tic icing and transforming archival records which are essential from the administrative, historical and national angles. He also maintained that important documents like government records, business and private records are archives. He applied that archives by the nature of their collection should play an important role stimulating historical and national interest in its treasures. He

recommended that this can be achieved by organizing exhibitions especially for pupils of the higher classes or secondary schools and university students and teachers.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

- Momoh (1984) explained that the archives are the store house of public records and publication which are derived from manuscripts and other written documents produced in the day to day activities of the institutions and government whether political, economic or social
- Archives are acquired mainly through organized tours of collections from various agencies, library holdings are built up mainly by purchase but this is not to say that other various forms of enriching the collection such as depository, gift and exchange are not important
- An archive kept the original document while library keeps copies of books or other printed materials
- While, the work of archives starts from the creation of records that of the library starts from when the materials are acquired through one form or the other and placed in the library
- While libraries are essentially collecting agencies, archival institutions are basically receiving agencies
- Because of the origin and character of archives, the principle and technique governing their arrangement and description are necessarily different from those generally employed in the classification and cataloguing of library materials

THE NEED FOR RECORDS MANAGEMENT AND ARCHIVES IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Momoh (1984) observed that the turn of the 80s has started to show signs of a bright future for archival profession in Nigeria. Thus, the problem of public apathy to archives may be washed off by the interest of the public in the functions and responsibilities of the National Archives of Nigeria as agent for the preservation of the country's cultural heritage.

Some university dons appear to be leading the crusade for the development and preservation of archives. For instance, the people of the Rivers State was called upon to make use of the archives and stressed that such documents would not only assist the generation in knowing the history of the past but would also contribute immensely towards better understanding of the past developments in the country. There is need to establish

branches of national archives of Nigeria in some state capitals to help research work done at the universities. The decentralization of the archives as was done in the pre-war days was a period when nobody attached any importance to archives. There is the need for the careful documentation and recording of the colloquium proceedings for preservation in the archives for the benefit of researchers and generation to come.

A political party in Nigeria which contested the 1979 Presidential election, the Great Nigeria People Party (GNPP) fell into an open disagreement with the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) whose Executive Secretary was quoted as saying that the commission would soon destroy the last election document. Rather than wait for the National Archives of Nigeria to issue a statement, the party promptly picked bones with the commission and demanded that the electoral documents was vital to the political development of Nigeria and should be preserved for posterity.

THE USES OF ARCHIVES

Archives provide first hand information about the past. They are valuable to museum researchers, scholars, students, journalists, lawyers and others who want to know about people, places and events in the past.

Archives in the Museum of American History supply information to staff and other researchers. All state governments and many local governments, universities, businesss, libraries and historical societies, maintain archives. About >4,500 are listed in the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the USA 2nd edition, 1988 (Babalola, 2000).

The use of archives as materials for historical research prompts the cause of scholarship, curiosity and intellectual growth and also the exploitation of archives for official precedents ensures that decision of high policy are based on the most incontrovertible evidence available. He observed that one of the most visible aspects of archives management is the facilities provided for the use or exploitation of its records materials by searchers.

Durn (1997) pointed out that the use of records in the National Archives of Nigeria is not restricted to the educated elites. Every Nigerian, from the village chief to others is desirous of an authoritative knowledge of his chieftaincy rights or land ownership to the political pundit, has something to gain from the archives. Let alone the academic, the journalist and the litigant who have everything to benefit from the records permanently preserved in Nigeria's custody of history.

All the collections are for the use of searches and other information seekers, also all professionals like lawyers and politicians make use of them, so also the research student from all Nigerian universities. The purpose of having the national archives is to locate, preserve and make available for public use, different types of historical records.

Momoh (1984) noted that the National Archives of Nigeria is not sufficiently funded by the Federal Government of Nigeria. He recommended that it is high time the authorities appreciated the organic nature of archival materials which in effect, demands an equally organic development of the institution and the services it provides. This growth, therefore justifies congruent increase in financial allocation to the establishment for both capital recurrent expenditures to enable it to meet its professional obligation to the nation.

CONCLUSION

Archives from all ramifications play a vital role in the information storage and gathering thus there is need for its provision and storage in all places since information is power. Attention of government is very much needed in all archival activities, practice and development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The various tiers of government in the country should show more commitment in funding of archives throughout the country
- Provision of facilities; it is one thing to erect edifices called archives, it is another thing to furnish these buildings with necessary facilities for effective discharge of their responsibilities. There is need for government financial assistance in all archival practice
- Archives are institutions that play distinct role such as information storage, preservation and dissemination as such the personnel of archives must possess specialized competence, training and skills needed for their efficient management

- There should be reinforcement of security measures in archives to avoid mutilation and stealing of documents
- Public orientation program should be put in place since many people are not aware of the role and relevance of archives in the information gathering, storage and distribution

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