

## **Full Length Research**

# **Records Managers' Capacity Building for Sustainable Information Management in Nigeria**

**Basil Enemute Iwhiwu, Ph. D (CLN, mSNA)**

Department of Library and Information Science, Delta State University, P. M. B. 1, Abraka, Nigeria.  
E-Mail:Ofegab@yahoo.com

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The study is on capacity building for records managers for sustainable information management in Nigeria. The study examined the present state of records and information management in Nigeria and the role records managers play in creating and managing public records. Without the concrete input and total control of the professionals in information management, such venture would be futile. Records and information are prerequisite in achieving government's goal of good governance and the capacity to manage public records rest in the hands of professionally trained records staff, led by the records manager. A descriptive survey method was used to carry out the study in selected ministries in Nigeria. Data was collected from respondents through a questionnaire and analysed using simple percentages. It was found that the federal ministries create and manage e-mail, word processed files, database records, internet information sources in addition to paper records. However, no trained Records Managers are employed in the ministries. It was therefore recommended that the federal government should recruit professionally trained records managers to ensure sustainable records and information management in federal ministries.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Records Management, Capacity Building, Information Management, Federal Ministries

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Various Nigerian governments have made efforts to actualize the much-touted potentials of our great country and it seems we are at a crossroad. After numerous false starts and inability to succeed, we are once again set on a journey to nowhere, bereft of well-thought out fundamentals of Nigeria's political economy. The goal this time around is touted as leapfrogging the country from the nadir of hopelessness and underdevelopment to the rarified group of the most developed economies of the world (Oyebode, 2008). In the year 2000, world leaders committed themselves to a millennium declaration tagged the "millennium developmental goals" (MDG) under the

United Nations, while setting key objectives for the 21st century to be realised by 2015. It is aimed at peace and security, development and poverty eradication, securing human rights, democracy and good governance among others.

The eight (8) goals so stated "eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development", are vital for national development and good governance worldwide. While nations are making frantic efforts to achieving these, the

Nigerian government strategically lunched the Nigeria vision 20:2020 agenda. The Nigeria vision 20:2020 statement avers that "by the year 2020, Nigeria will have a large, strong, diversified, sustainable and competitive economy that effectively harnesses the talents and energies of its people and responsibly exploits its natural endowments to guarantee a high standard of living and quality of life to its citizens" (Nigerian Vision 20:2020 Community, 2010). That is to say that Nigeria would be one of the top 20 economies in the world of nations by the year 2020.

This vision is focused on agriculture, information and communication technology, education, manufacturing, health, infrastructural development and the polity. As the years go by, the seeming inability of Nigerian government to achieve the set goals unfolds. Hence, the need to key into the UN 2030 agenda of sustainable development goals for a better and more sustainable future for all. However, the issue of records management for sustainable government information management is been undermined. The eight MDG goals was expanded into 17 to address all aspects of human endeavours, but the Nigerian experience leaves much to be desired. At a presidential retreat on "Public Private Partnership (PPP) Imperative for Infrastructure Development", the former President, Dr Goodluck Jonathan noted the backwardness of the nation's economy over the years, which he attributed to contract over-invoicing and other sharp practices that made execution of budgets almost impossible in the 50 years of the nation's history (Ailemen, 2010). Public leadership must guide decisions and actions for sustainable quality services from public institutions (Basheka & Sabola, 2015).

In the Nigeria's MDGs Countdown Strategy for 2010 – 2015, it was reported that currently, federal government ministries, departments and agencies, and state and local governments do not effectively plan and implement projects and programmes to achieve the MDG targets (FGN, 2012). While there are various reasons for this, lack of capacity is a major factor ([www.mdgs.gov.ng](http://www.mdgs.gov.ng)). Also, Benson, Anyanwu, Unuoha and Nwauwa (2016) posit that lack of reliable and accurate data, negligence of Library and Information Centres by governments, poor perceptions of the library profession, low level of private sector interest in library services, poor lobbying and advocacy skills amongst information professionals, paying lip services to library development programmes by government, etc. are challenges affecting the realization of SDG in Nigeria.

These challenges over these years is as a result of governments' officials not keeping, managing and using necessary records, information/data or ever made reference to available records for sustainable governance. It is worthy of note that achieving the set goals is hinged on the ability of government to build capacity in terms of *records managers* for the creation,

maintenance and use, dissemination and disposition of public records. The use of relevant records will help to create awareness / sensitizing citizens, support research, provision of educational information to improve quality of education, reduce poverty, improve on the environment, etc.

Therefore, building capacity to ensure sustainability in the capture, storage, use, conservation and preservation of national records and resources, and the exchange and sharing of information and experience among communities in the country (Maranga, 1999) cannot be overemphasised. Some information science researchers have begun to explore the dimensions of sustainable information services and technologies (The Scientific World, 2019; Stasinopoulos, Hargroves, Smith, Desha and Hargroves, 2008), which has become the order of the day, even in records creation and management. Building capacity in human capital development would be the process of transforming the nation's ability to effectively implement policies and programmes for sustainable information management. Hence, this paper examined the role of records and information piloted by records managers in the federal ministries, Nigeria.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Records Managers and Government Information Management

Public administration is the key to the delivery of public service. Public administrators comprise the bulk of government employment and activities (Peters & Pierre, 2013). They are responsible for providing services, implementing laws and influencing policy by advising the politicians responsible for making laws. There are various ministries in Nigeria were government policies are generated and implemented. Such government policy records among others are found in the public registries.

Registry personnel are involved in the day-to-day management of records and were therefore, in a position to provide relevant data relating to how records were managed throughout their continuum. Kemoni and Ngulube (2008) reported that in Kenya, public servants lacked the attributes of accountability, honesty, impartiality, quality of service, professionalism and motivation. These practices are not different from the Nigerian situation. The public service had been perceived as an obstacle to development and yet central in meeting various needs (Lanceu & Maket, 2012). These needs included security, formulation and implementation of policies, disaster management, dispensing justice, regulation of social and commercial activities and facilitating development. Kilelo (2015) opined that the declining social values such as honesty, integrity, impartiality and fairness amongst others affect the

dysfunctional attributes of the public service in Africa. As such, there are ineffective systems of control and discipline, disruption of organizational processes, poor work ethics, ethnicity and patronage in recruitment, promotion and personal advancement and breakdown of administrative hierarchies. Public sector reform programmes in Africa focused on reforming the public service by making it an effective tool for national development (Mutahaba & Kiragu, 2002). The reform programmes emphasized public service capacity building, planning, budgeting, performance improvement and human resource management.

From the foregoing, these vices in public services identified above could be checked with records management programme in place and professional personnel who administers the records. Therefore, the records managers are essential resource in government information management (Iwhiwhu, 2012). Some of the factors contributing to the current state of recordkeeping in government ministries included:

- i. neglected registry units in the ministries
- ii. lack of support from senior officers
- iii. absence of records management committees
- iv. registry staff had few opportunities for training
- v. records management was a neglected area in the ministries, and registries were viewed as dumping grounds for unproductive and undisciplined officers
- vi. inadequate record storage space
- vii. health and safety of registry staff was not taken into account.

All these revolve round the personnel used in the ministries and in records management in particular. Hurley (2005) pointed out that records keepers and accountability advocates seem to agree that in support of accountability, good record systems must exist which are complete, authentic and reliable (dependable), accessible and usable.

Records management is key to public sector management. Records constitute the basic administrative tools by means of which the work of a government is accomplished. Poor records management undermines civil service reform programmes, since the ability to retrieve information about government services was a major criterion of successful public sector management (Maranga, 1999). It was noted by De Mingo and Agustí Cerrillo-i-Martínez (2018) that without proper records management, accountability, transparency and efficiency in public service would be heavily compromised. In Ghana, Akotia (2003) argued that the provision for records management improvement marked a shift in the development management strategies of Ghana, since effective management of public sector financial information was a crucial factor in providing capacity for public sector efficiency and governance.

Iwhiwhu (2008) noted the bewildering volumes of records that must be properly and adequately managed to make for effective and efficient decision making and governance, and that mal-administration and lapses exist in Nigeria due to inadequate management and use of public records. Poor records management has hindered the implementation of public sector reforms in Africa (Thurston & Cain, 1996). These authors further noted that in developing countries, poor records management has also hampered the ability of governments to manage resources and effectively comply with international agreements and donor conditions and fulfill their responsibilities. Lipchack (2002) stressed that studies dealing with recordkeeping and good governance in Sub-Saharan Africa concluded that governments were unable to implement effective public sector reforms in part because of the following:

- i. not having information to develop and support reform policies and processes
- ii. not knowing what information was needed to undertake various government functions
- iii. not being able to rely on available information
- iv. not using available information in decision making or analysis.

Poor records management practices have adverse consequences for public service delivery. For example, officials are forced to take decisions on an ad hoc basis, without the benefit of precedence or historical memory. Resources are wasted, as unwarranted records continue to be stored. Fraud cannot be proven and meaningful reporting and audits cannot be carried out, government actions are not transparent and citizens cannot claim or protect their rights, nor can they be required to fulfill their duties and obligations, and citizens cannot make an informed contribution to the governance process (Roper & Williams, 1999).

The service provided by records management is vital to any enterprise and to every information-using employee. Its primary function is to facilitate the free flow of information, to ensure that information is available rapidly where and when it is needed. Carrying out this function needs an efficient, effective records management programme (De Wet & Du Toit, 2000).

### **Capacity building for Records Managers**

According to Ogunsola (2011), the concept of "capacity building" is a popular phrase in development discourse. It is one of the most urgent challenges facing sub-Saharan Africa today. It is indeed a challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as technologies and markets are being revolutionized, compelling Africa to seek for the right kind of professionally competent people and institutions to meet

the challenges. It must be realized that governments, non-state actors, and (foreign) donors all tend to invoke capacity problems to explain why policies fail to deliver, or why aid is not generating sustainable impacts.

Professional development helps build confidence through knowledge, experience, and skills necessary to practice effectively. This can be termed as capacity. Capacity building is a measurable improvement in an organization's ability to fulfill its mission through a blend of sound management, strong governance, and dedication to assessing and achieving results (Monson-Rosen, n.d). Nsouli (2000) simply refers to it as the development of skills and institutions. In the opinion of Dia (1996), capacity building is characterized by three main activities: skill upgrading (general and job specific); procedural improvements and organizational strengthening. Obadan (2003) defined capacity building as those deliberate and incidental endeavours through investment in people, institutions and practices, to enhance human abilities and institutional capacities in the pursuit of development. In essence, capacity building means the process of enhancing individual skills, or strengthening the competence of a particular organization.

It is crucial also to state here that capacity building as a concept is treated and understood in economic and social development contexts. Building capacity is about building an organization's ability to perform well. The concept of capacity has been defined as the power of something to perform or to produce. From the UNDP's perspective, it is the ability of individuals and organizations or units to perform functions effectively, efficiently, or sustainably. Capacity has both human (training and development) and institutional (organizational development) dimensions with the following components (Maredia, 2011 and Ogunsola, 2011):

- i. skilled human resources
- ii. leadership and vision
- iii. viable institutions
- iv. financial and material resources and
- v. effective work practices, including systems, procedures and appropriate incentives.

Human capacity in this case refers to the records manager's capability to perform the tasks necessary for ministries to achieve its goals. Adequate capacity engenders self-reliance, and provides a country and its people with the ability to make sound economic choices, create sustainable policies, and solve problems. Realistically, professional development or the concept of capacity building would be enhanced if it is linked to work situation. Convincingly, the greatest resource for any kind of development is people. Capability development and the management of talent are crucial to people management strategies because they act to improve

employee engagement and commitment, encourage high performance, and improve retention (Re:locate Global, 2020). Rare talent that is difficult to imitate is particularly crucial to organisational success, as it acts as a differentiator. Hence, identifying, recruiting, selecting, deploying and developing talent globally are a key part of the human resource and global mobility functions' remit.

For records managers to function successfully, he must be flexible enough to update his skills with the ever-changing technologies. Thus, there is the challenge of giving adequate priority to the development and utilization of capacity. It must be stressed that capacity does not only have to be built but also, has to be effectively utilized. There are trained records managers in Nigeria that are not been utilized. There is need to recruit skilled personnel, retain and use them by ensuring that they have productive jobs, satisfying work, and secured conditions. Effective utilization of capacity is better appreciated in successful development management and the attainment of development goals.

Adetoro, et. al. (2010) noted that capacity failures, most often, had been fingered for the continued development problems of poor countries; for the failures of policies or why investment and aids are not generating desired impact. There is no doubt that the essence of building capacity in all areas of human life, including the field of records management in Nigeria, is to enhance the ability of federal ministries to efficiently manage information on their own, in a smooth and sustainable way.

Capacity building is the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in the fast-changing world (Ann Philbin, Capacity Building in Social Justice Organizations Ford Foundation, 1996). Performance management is the practice of managing records service response time, consistency, and quality for individual and overall services. Performance problems are usually related to capacity. Ministries need to collect some capacity-related information and work consistently to solve problems, plan changes and implement new capacity and performance functionality.

### **Role of Records Management in Attaining the SDGs Agenda**

Records management ensures that all records made or received by Federal ministries that document its organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations and other activities, regardless of who created it or how the information was recorded, must be identified, classified, retained and disposed-off in accordance with authorized procedures. Records act as the 'voice' of an agency in legal proceedings. As such,

the information security of record-generating systems, and indeed, of the electronic records themselves, is paramount in assuring that records will serve as reliable evidence of agency's actions and that this reliability is guaranteed over time (i.e., authenticity). Failure to ensure such reliability, via suitable information security, can call into question the recordkeeping practices of an agency (i.e. arbitrary and capricious practices) presenting substantial legal risk to an agency (Kemoni & Ngulube, 2008).

Records management is a key component of information management. The reasons being that records management:

- i. Is one of the most disciplined and well-defined components of information management.
- ii. Brings critical business records under control of the agency.
- iii. Can provide a single point of access to important records previously controlled by functional areas or specific individuals.
- iv. Supports record authenticity and reliability.
- v. Permits access to records throughout their lifecycle for use and reuse, protecting their structure and context, as well as their contents from alteration or revision.
- vi. Permits the attachment of retention and disposition instructions to critical business records.
- vii. Can manage both hard copy and electronic records.

As a result, the following questions shall be considered:

- i. Does the current organizational placement of the RM staff in ministries make sense in the electronic record keeping (ERK) environment?
- ii. Do the ministries have an up-to-date listing of records?
- iii. Do the ministries have an enterprise-wide classification scheme or file plan?
- iv. Do all staff understand and know how to use the ministries' file plan?
- v. Do ministries have records schedules, which contain business rules regarding how records of value are maintained?

Providing answers to these questions would reveal the importance of using professionals in the business of information management and good records keeping practices in ensuring sustainable information management. Strengthening the public service and public service delivery programmes is essential for the development process (International Monetary Fund, 2003). It can therefore be argued that records management is vital for enhanced public service delivery and the attainment of UN SDGs in various sectors of national development (Kemoni & Ngulube, 2008). The achievement of SDGs can be hampered by limited access to government records. As a result, there is a

need to have in place good record keeping systems, which include the presence of legislation, properly classified records with appropriate access and file tracking tools, recruitment of trained staff, including measures to update their skills, and timely appraisal and disposal of records. The importance of complete and comprehensive record-keeping that would make better job efficiency cannot be overemphasized.

The value of these records for every aspect of human endeavour and for posterity has been greatly acknowledged (Johnson, 1991). Kemoni (2007) established that existing policies and practices for managing records in government ministries were not effective and that this negatively affects public service delivery. Thurston (1996) stated that "records management is a key component of any public sector reform programme, the efficiency of which includes enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service." Records management can play a role in addressing the political, economic and social challenges faced by a nation.

These challenges include overcoming corruption, reviving the economy, security and enhancing transparency and accountability. Mnjama (2003) avers that recordkeeping in the Kenyan public sector was not satisfactory and that "poor records management had devastating consequences" (Musembi, 2004). The benefits of effective records management, as listed by Blake (2005), include supporting efficient joint working and information exchange, facilitating evidence based policy making and supporting the administration of data protection principles and effective implementation of Freedom of Information and other legislation through good organization of records. Other benefits include supporting accountability by providing reliable records of actions and decisions and knowledge management across sectors of government by making reliable information available for sharing, extraction and summarization.

Wamukoya and Mutula (2005) emphasized the link between records keeping to the attainment of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) objectives, stating that "good record keeping practices would be the key to enhanced public service delivery and attainment of NEPAD's objectives." In the same vein, attaining the SDG in Nigeria is hinged on the keeping and management of accurate and reliable records. One of the key aspects of NEPAD was the African peer review mechanism, in which member states evaluated each other on their commitment to promote democracy and human rights.

## THE PROBLEM

Preliminary investigation has revealed that the federal

ministries in Nigeria do not have professionally trained personnel managing civil service records. Unavailability of, or inaccurate records due to poor recordkeeping practices could hinder government's efforts for economic recovery, providing basic services to citizens, good governance and ensuring the rule of law. It could also lead to delayed services to citizens and poor image, which could undermine efficiency and effectiveness in the public service. These seem to have characterized civil service operations in Nigeria. Records management in the public sector was in a very poor state, from the registries, where current records were found, to the records rooms, where semi-current and non-current records were stored. These are visible in the ministries.

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study is on capacity building for records managers for sustainable information management in Nigeria. It examined the present state of records and information management in Nigeria and the role record managers' play in preserving national memory in public records of value for posterity. Without the concrete input and total

control of the professionals in information management, such venture would be futile. The framework for enhanced information management and dissemination will be at abeyance in Nigeria and thereby hinder the attainment of the SDGs.

### METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey method was used to carry out this study in selected ministries in Nigeria. The executive and administrative staff, Information Technology staff and directors who were involved in records creation, use and maintenance, disposition and management of government records and their use in decision making were used as respondents. The ministries used are as follows; Office of the Head of Service of the Federation, Federal Civil Service Commission, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Lands and Housing, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Information and Communication. Data were collected from respondents through the questionnaire and the data obtained were analysed using simple percentages.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are hereby presented below. Table 1 shows the ministries and category of respondents used for the study. From the results obtained, it was found that 264 (62%) males and 159 (38%) females were involved in the study. The majority of the respondents' ages fall within 26 and 45 years (309, 73%). This indicates that the civil service workforce is made up of middle aged civil servants who would be able to cope with the rigors of managing civil service records. Also, majority of the respondents who are not below the rank of a higher executive officer or administrative officer have worked for between 1-10 years (151, 36%), except those at the director/permanent secretary's cadre whose work experiences fall within 16 years and above 26 years (90, 21%). These respondents have occupied these positions for within 6 – 15 years (64, 53%). In the same vein, majority of the records management staff has been managing civil service records for between 1 – 10 years (138, 63%).

**Table 1:** Ministries Used and Staff responses

s/n	Ministry	Questionnaires Administered	Records management staff	IT staff	Directors/Deputies	Total
1	Finance	55	25	5	15	46
2	Education	72	35	10	17	63
3	Information and Com.	57	26	10	11	48
4	Justice	51	24	3	14	42
5	Foreign Affairs	75	32	15	18	66
6	Science and Tech.	60	15	25	10	51
7	Head of service	71	36	10	15	62
8	Civil Service Com.	54	27	5	12	45
	<b>Total</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>423</b>

**Table 2:** Types of electronic records (n=220 for RM)

Types of E-Record	Yes	No	I don't know
Paper records	158 (72%)	44 (20%)	18 (0.8%)
E-mail	104 (47.3%)	85 (38.6%)	21 (14.1%)
Word processed files	107 (48.6%)	88 (40%)	25 (11.4%)
Graphics/Arial information	42 (19.2%)	119 (54.1%)	59 (16.8%)
Spreadsheet files	84 (38.2%)	76 (34.5%)	60 (27.3%)
Optical Image files	17 (7.7%)	125 (56.8%)	78 (35.4%)
Sound recordings (audio/video files)	47 (21.4%)	120 (54.5%)	53 (24.1%)
Web pages/documents (internet information sources)	118 (53.6%)	64 (29.1%)	38 (17.2%)
Database records	105 (47.7%)	75 (34.1%)	40 (18.1%)
Electronic reports	65 (29.5%)	90 (40.9%)	65 (29.6%)
Electronic publications	53 (24.1%)	91 (41.4%)	76 (34.6%)
Voice mail files	14 (6.4%)	110 (50%)	96 (43.9%)
Electronic records of directories	63 (28.6%)	98 (44.5%)	59 (26.8%)

From the result in Table 2, paper records (158, 72%), e-mail (104, 47.3%), database records (105, 47.7%), word processed documents (107, 48.6%) and internet information sources (118, 53.6%) were the major types of records created and used in the Federal ministries in Nigeria. However, voice mail files (110, 50%), graphic/Arial information (119, 54.1%), sound recordings (audio/video files) (120, 54.5%) and optical image files (125, 56.8%) were the records that were rarely created and used.

**Table 3:** Measure of Security for Records (n = 220 for RM and n=83 for IT)

Question Item	Yes	No	I don't know
Is the movement of e-records monitored or tracked in your office?	-	145 (65.9%)	75 (34.1%)
Are you aware of the official secrecy act?	35 (20%)	9 (4.1%)	176 (80%)
Are the requirements of the official secrecy act used in records management?	130 (59.1%)	49 (22.3%)	41 (18.7%)
Is there a data administrator in this ministry?	34 (41%)	19 (22.9%)	30 (36.1%)
Is there data management policy guiding the management of federal civil service data?	21 (25.3%)	33 (39.8%)	29 (34.9%)

From the results, it is revealed that shelves and cabinets (160, 73%) and flash drives were mostly used as storage devices (151, 68.6%), followed by compact disc (33, 15%) as indicated by the records management staff. The result also showed in Table 3 that majority of the respondents are neither aware of the tracking of records (145, 65.9%) nor the Official Secrecy Act (176, 80%), and the IT staff are also not aware of any data management policy guiding the management of Federal Civil Service data in the ministries (33, 39.8%). The respondents however, revealed in the result that the movement of records is monitored and tracked and that the Official Secrecy Act (130, 59.1%) is being used in the management of federal ministries' records and that there are data administrators (34, 41%) who provide security for electronic records (data).

Also, there is an off-site storage area, which serves as a record center for federal government records. This record center is under the Office of the Head of Service

of the Federation. The result revealed further that the records management and the IT staffs who are involved in the management of the records have qualifications, which are not in records management. There is no designation for records management staff like data administrators in the IT staff cadre. Though staff has undergone several and diverse trainings related to records management as indicated by 149 (67.7%) respondents. Such training cannot be equated to that of a professional records manager.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper clearly stated that records are key tools for decision making and facilitating economic development, which calls for efficient and effective records management practices in federal ministries. Building adequate capacity for records managers should be given

priority in Nigeria. Though records staff are presently trained in records management related issues on their job, it is not adequate. It is therefore, crucial that the government evolves an explicit strategy for capacity building on records and information management personnel in the federal ministries. There is the need to recruit professionally trained records managers to manage public records in federal ministries.

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