

# The Role of Archives in National Development: National Archives of Nigeria in Perspective

**Yusuf, K. F.**

*The Library, Lagos State Polytechnic, Ikorodu, Lagos, Nigeria*

*E-mail: giyas\_apenna@yahoo.com*

## **ABSTRACT**

*The paper examines the role of archives and its advantages in national development. It discusses the establishment of National Archives of Nigeria (NAN), its functions, organization, programmes and highlights its contributions to national development. Finally, some problems confronting National Archives of Nigeria were explored. Suggestions were proffered for the effective management of Archive to transform them into information power houses fit for the information society. Thus, government should take all necessary steps to preserve our written and unwritten (oral) heritage and to improve the holding capacities of and the facilities in the archives in the various parts of the country.*

**Keywords:** *Archives, Record, Records Management, Archival Resources, National Archive, National Development*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The desire to use and keep records of knowledge and information, for reference and preservation can be traced back to the earliest time of human civilization. In the olden days, thought and experiences of man were recorded in such items like cuneiform tables, papyrus, parchment, clay tables, etc. Due to societal development, things like photographs, video tapes, sound recording, magnetic tapes and related machine-readable forms were used as means of recording and preserving information for human consumption. All these, regardless of their physical characteristics are considered records and therefore potential archives. The written records of a nation are the raw materials for its history and development. If these documents, which are the main source for the study of the past, are not well organized and preserved, the nations may be lost.

Amune (1995) observes that the archives of an organized society are not only one of the institutions, but one of its basic information resources, that is, its primary source of information. It is based on this fact that every government has basic right to organize and maintain National Archive. Information is of such value and is potentially, so influential in what society does, it is very important for decision making in education, government and industries to have access to the most authoritative information. It is important that guidelines be found that will provide direction for the development of society. Otutru (2000) quotes a

legal scholar, who once commented as follows" while conceive of a state without a navy, for example, it is impossible to imagine one without a currency, without a treasury, without funds and without archives... which constitute... those kinds of state property, which are most essential, and most widespread, so much so, that they can be, said to derive from the very existence of the state". Considering this quotation, the importance of archives cannot be overemphasized, if archives can be equated with things like currency, which form part of the identity of a nation, there is the need for recognition of archives by the government as an instrument for national development.

### ***DEVELOPMENT OF ARCHIVES***

Looking at every society all over the world, development of archives has been linked to the history of human civilization when man started to keep records of his transactions in the form of record rooms for example in places like Egypt and China. To justify this, Encyclopedia Britannica (1999-2000) traces the origin of archives to the earliest history of records where it was noted that record room could be said to have existed for almost as long as such record has been kept. It was also noted that, as at that time, there was no distinction between a record room (or archives) and a library.

Bahmer (1978) states that the term Archives was derived from a Greek word "Archeon" meaning office building. George-Otutru (1995) as cited in Otutru (2000) notes that the history of archives can be traced to the clay tablet age, where both the created and use of materials was restricted to the agencies that created them, for example religious institutions. He noted that the modern day archive assumed its present role towards the end of 18th century, when archives opened their doors not only to government officials and researcher but also to the general public. George-Otutru (1999) states that modern archives can be traced to the activities of the United Nations for Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) especially from 1946 to date, in terms of support for archival systems and services Otutru (2000).

Among these is the development of modern archival and records management systems and services. A programme design "Records and Archives Management Programme" (RAMP) is geared towards creating an awareness of the value and use of archives as a necessary tool for national development. Enwere (1995) shed more light, when he observes that there was a tremendous increase in the activities of the governments and their agencies, which affected virtually all facets of human existence after World War II, this led to increase in recorded information. He also notes that the concept of archive, as a public service agency, was fully developed by the French Revolution in 1790. Today, almost every country has made some provision for a National Archival Service,

adapted to its particular government structure and corresponding to the nature of the state. This is because global initiatives to improve performance in the public and private sector, to enhance accountability and to inhibit corruption or indiscipline are based on the assumption that reliable evidence exists in the form of archives. The term “archives” has so many definitions. It is pertinent to consider some of these definitions for general understanding of the term. Bahmer (1978) defines archives as the records of any institution, public or private preserved because of their value. Harrod (1990) defines archives as:

1. Public records or historical documents kept in a recognition repository.
2. Document which formed part of an official transaction and were preserved for official reference; these include documents specially made for and those included in an official transaction.
3. The repository itself
4. Colloquially of old books and documents
5. A collection of original records assembled in the course of the normal activities of a person or persons, or of a public or private organization, or such records from a number of different sources, and kept together to ensure their preservation.

National Archives Decree (1992) defines Archives as records, which have value for permanent preservation or have been selected for transfer or have been transferred to an archival establishment. Evans (1986) observes that archive has constituted to one of the world's primary information sources that aroused and grown uniquely out of the activities of any organization, institution, a family or an individual. With this observation, Evans (1986) defines archives as records of an entity that have been selected for preservation, because they possess enduring value. According to Kent (1986), the term “archives” has been used to designate:

- i. An agency or administrative unit, responsible for identifying, appraising, accessioning, preserving, arranging and providing reference service on archival material and for approving the destruction of records of transitory value (Gwarzo, 2005).
- ii. A building or part of a building housing archives materials and providing office space and facilities for both archivists and those engaged in the administration of archives and users (Gwarzo, 2005).

Considering, all these definitions, it can be deduced that, firstly, archives can be regarded as records selected and preserved because they have certain values. Secondly, as a building or unit responsible for servicing of the records and finally the need for the administration and management of archives.

### ***ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS***

Harrod (1990) defines archival document as a document which is expected to be kept permanently, as near as possible in its original form, for the evidence, which it might afford both in itself and within its context. It is an axiom that archival resources when used effectively contribute to the development of individuals, who eventually develop the society. With the background knowledge of what an archive is, it is necessary to explain the term record which form the basis of materials in the archives, so also its management. Without this information, it may be difficult to appreciate its contribution to the society.

Records, according to Auyo (2007) are recorded information regardless of form or medium, received and maintained by an agency, institution, organization or individual in pursuance of its legal obligations or in the transaction of business of any kind. These include any paper, book, photography, microfilm, map, drawing, chart, magnetic tape or any copy or print out there of. Tsadik (1991) classifies records into three major groups (Textual records, Cartographic records and Pictorial record). A textual record includes letters, reports, diaries and the likes. Cartographic record comprises cadastral, geological, topographic and other kinds of maps; they also include hydrographic, aeronautical and other kinds of charts and various types of diagrams.

A pictorial record includes photographic prints and negative painting and drawing, lithographs, engraving and the likes. The nature, types and volumes of materials discussed above demand that proper management of records is necessary to create easy accessibility to them. Bahmer (1978) states that record management is the "field of general management that deals with the creation, maintenance and disposal, archival building and storage facilities, record presentation and rehabilitation, archival arrangement; archival description, reference service including historical editing and the administration of personal papers". Record management is the administration of current and semi current records prior to their appraisal and designation for permanent preservation or for immediate or ultimate destruction and for micro filming prior to destruction.

### ***SIGNIFICANCE OF ARCHIVES***

Those who are involved in the government process cannot effectively govern nor be responsible for any lapses unless their action is made available through organized sources and easily accessible means. To achieve this, consistent provision of reliable documentary evidence, in the form of records/archival resources must be ensured. Records are indispensable foundation of the governance process because without reliable and authentic documentary evidence, guiding all essential governance processes, government, governance and accountability cannot be achieved. Maidabino (2002) noted that the importance of record to organized societies cannot be over emphasized, since

the history of older civilization and the advantages of its knowledge would have landed the present generation at a great loss, if records of significance have not been created, preserved and used. Enwere (1999) states that the primary reason the government establishes and maintains archival institutions has always been the practical one of administration continuity and for legal purposes. He notes that records and manuscripts are the basis for the reconstruction of a country or a nation. Without archive, the quality of official records would erode steadily, leaving an inadequate evidence base. Recorded information is the cornerstone of any entity's ability to fulfill its responsibility for good management. Because without reliable, verifiable, authentic records decisions and official actions and transactions cannot be traced, rules would not be known and cannot be enforced, transparency does not exist, and nobody can be held responsible for his or her actions.

Archival materials provide the evidence of events and transactions used as reference to support decision-making and document compliance when analyzing risks. Choongo (1998) justifies the need for archive when he notes that most federal government ministries are faced with the problem associated with large accumulated document which over the years have never been sorted out or in any way classified. As a result of which, it has hindered the making of the document available for administrative, legal and historical purposes. Hence, there is need for archive. To this end, there are different types of archives, which include: Manuscript or Personal Paper, Private Archive, Public Archive, Local Archive, State Archive and National Archive.

Harrod (1990) argues that National Archive is that which is responsible for identifying, preserving and making available to the Federal Government of a country and to the public, all forms of government records not restricted by law, which have sufficient historical, informational or evidence value to warrant preservation. The importance of archives is so numerous. These include improve operational efficiency. It improves communication in support of good governance. It facilitates decision-making, evidential significance, research value, information value, and legal significance. Nwosu (1995) stresses the value of archives in the overall development of a nation, when he argues that, archives are national resources and community, which need to be effectively acquired, processed, preserved and utilized for national development.

### ***NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT***

It is necessary to note some development and rolling plans that the Nigerian Government has formulated and executed. Each of the plans covered a period of four to five years. The first Nigeria National development plan according to Otutru (2000) was that of 1962-1968, and involved an expenditure of N2.2billion. The second plan, which covered 1970-74, was later extended to

include 1974-75 fiscal year which, involved an expenditure of N3billion. The third National Development Plan covered 1975-1980 with a capital expenditure of N30billion. However each of these plans contained National objectives, for example in the Second National Development Plan, the objectives outlined were "to establish Nigeria firmly as a united strong and self reliant Nation, a great and dynamic economy, a just and egalitarian society and a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens and free democratic society". In the third National Development Plans, the following plan of actions was put in place for the achievement of the five objectives stated in the second National Development Plan.

1. Increase in per capita income
2. More even distribution of income
3. Reduction in the level of unemployment
4. Increase in the supply of high level of manpower
5. Diversification of the economy
6. Balance development
7. Indigenization of economic activity

With these, it can be deduced that the third development plan meant to diversify the benefits of economic development, which will reduce unemployment, promote self-reliance, enhance educational and skill acquisition, hence, improve the standards of living of the citizens. Dike (1954) states that the need for the conservation of the National Archives of Nigeria was recognized by the Colonial Office as far back as 1914, when the Secretary to the Colony in England indicated interest in the preservation of official documents in the colonies and protectorates. The secretary suggested that steps should be taken to ensure that effective provision was made for the safe keeping and preservation of the documents as indicated in various circulars dispatched within 1914, 1929, 1936 and 1948 to the colonial administrator.

On 1st April 1954 National Archive of Nigeria was established as a unit in the Federal Ministry of works with the name "National Record Office" headed by Kenneth Onwuka Dike. On 14th November 1957, the Nigeria Public Archives Bill was passed into law as public Achieves Ordinance 12(a) 1957 (Ordinance No. 43 of 1957. In 1992 a new decree know as National Archives Decree was enacted which has significant improvement over 1957 Ordinance. The National Archives of Nigeria has been moving from one Federal Ministry to another notably among them are Federal Ministry of Education in 1957, Federal Ministry of Social Development, Youth, Sport and Culture. It is now under the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture. As at now, the National Archives of Nigeria (NAN) operates offices in Ibadan, Kaduna, Enugu, Benin, Sokoto, Akure, Ilorin, Owerri, Calabar, Port-Harcourt, Jos,

Abeokuta with headquarters at Ikoyi Road, Lagos. Looking at the Ordinance of 1957, it provided the bases for the development of archives since without archival legislate, the National Archive would not have been in existence, but the National Archives of Nigeria, defines its duties and gives its statutory backing. The Ordinance 1957 simply granted NAN the power to examine records in public offices and render advice concerning their care, custody and control. The power of the Director of NAN are no longer limited, he now enjoys executive powers.

### ***FUNCTIONS OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF NIGERIA***

Based on National Archives Decree 1992, the Archives is charged with the responsibility of collecting, registering and preserving worth memorials of the past and making these available for reference and research. These resources include books, documents, photographs, maps, manuscripts and newspapers.

Otutru (2000) observes that four categories of documents are preserved in the National Archives of Nigeria (i) records of the Federal Government, (ii) records collection from various local government areas, which include administrative, constitution, and legal records throughout the country, (iii) records of private bodies and individuals who deposit them on voluntary basis, and (iv) audio-visual records. These materials are kept in the National Archives of Nigeria for policies, decision procedures, operations and so on for continuity and consistency. Apart from the above mentioned records, there are other records which are preserved, such as Agreements, Proclamations, Treaties, Orders-in-council, letters, patents, royal instructions, conventions etc.

Others are records of the colonial activities covering 1884-1914, records of both World Wars I and II (1914-1918 and 1939-1945) and records of the church missionary societies. The functions of NAN are purely supervisory and the depositors of the documents have the right of ownership and access to their documents as at when needed. The operations of NAN, according to Otutru (2000) include:

***Location of archival resources and advisory services:*** The staff of NAN render advisory services to depositors on the disposal of their records, and to record creating agencies on what to create.

***Preservation and technical services:*** NAN effects repair on defaced and deteriorating documents by modern techniques, it also provides reprography services to researcher while the original documents are kept.

***Research and reference services:*** NAN provides reference and document finding services for users, answering of specific legal and administration enquiries.

**Training:** NAN involves in the training of personnel from government departments and other agencies in the rudiment of archives and records management. For example, in 1976 Otutru (2000) states that a ten week training seminars on Archives/Records management was organized by NAN. In attendance were 30 officers drawn from Kaduna, Rivers and Sokoto States of Nigeria. It was noted that one of the participants in the seminar was a UNESCO sponsored candidate. Similar programmes have been organized for different kinds of organizations and groups for example the Nigeria Police Force, Centre for Black and African Art and Civilization, to mention just few.

**Participation in the realization of the National objectives:** Apart from these functions, the National Archives of Nigeria has embarked on various programmes, such as participation in the realization of the National objectives set in the second development plan. Otutru (2000) notes that one significant aspect of the third plan was that it was the first to be prepared by a body of planning experts working in the central planning office of Federal Ministry of Economic Planning and the body gathered relevant information from various information units including the "mother of all information resources, the archives. This shows that for any meaningful national development to take place, reference must be made to the country's documented records, because they contain much of the relevant information, that are needed and necessary for basic planning.

National Archives of Nigeria has been very useful in fostering national unity. It has helped in the re-assessment of historical value. For instance, Nigeria battling with many competing interests including the problem of the minorities, which has proved to be a veritable source of trouble, National Archives has been able to diffuse the tension generated through its educational programmes, which include staging of exhibition, with such themes and materials that bring about unity and promote the attainment of national goal. Enwere (1995) stated that, National Archives has engaged in so many educational programmes, long before the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) brought out its policy of the "long education" in the 1977-1982 medium term plans.

When staging exhibitions for either government or individual, Enwere (1995) states that the themes of such exhibitions are so chosen. Documents that highlight the similarities in the cultures of the various ethnic groups that make up the country were also displayed, so as to reflect the desire of the Federal Government to keep the country together. Furthermore, in 1988, the Honourable Minister of Information inaugurated a National Committee on the "Guide to sources of Nigeria is History". This project was encouraged by UNESCO as part of the programme for the decade for cultural development



in the West Africa sub-region. The main objectives of the project is to have under one publication, with as many volumes as necessary, all the primary source materials relevant to the history of Nigeria. The project was to cover not only documents held in public institutions but those held by commercial and industrial concerns, religious organizations and private individuals. Using the types of documents in the National Archives of Nigeria and all other available sources, according to Enwere (1995), all these programmes contributed to National Development.

### ***CHALLENGES OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF NIGERIA***

The Archives is an integral part of the society and as such, share some of the problems of the society. The problems facing National Archives of Nigeria include lack of awareness, poor infrastructure, lack of enough qualified staff, under funding, condition of services and improper preservation of records. Potential users are not aware of the benefits they can derive from the use of Archives. It becomes imperative for the Nigerian Government to step up its public enlightenment efforts on the availability of this service and privilege, so that many institutions and individuals will benefit from this information resources which will help individuals in their development efforts.

The National Archives of Nigeria lacks necessary infrastructure that can make them perform to the best of its ability. Enwere (1995) notes that even the government who are the greatest beneficiary of the archives do not appreciate the value of archive, hence the low level of infrastructure provided. Enwere (1995) observes that there was few-trained archivists in Nigeria due to lack of enough facilities in the country to train and educate archivists. He notes that some Universities offer as elective, course in Archives Administration as part of requirement for a degree in librarianship, but the contents of the course are far from being enough for an archivist.

The National Archives of Nigeria is poorly financed, which limits its development in terms of staff, accommodation, equipment for preservation and services such as oral collection. The conditions of service for archivists are generally poor in Nigeria, this makes the job unattractive. Improper preservation of records provides a favorable condition for insect, rodents, etc. to penetrate and destroy some documents. Lack of comprehensive policies on what to keep and what to weed, what to destroy and non-charlant attitude of staff to create access to the records also hinders the development of archieve in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

It is generally believed that memory is short, records especially archived documents, constitute unique and irreplaceable sources of reliable information, without which human being cannot develop to their fullest potentials. Maidabino (2004) notes that an archive is a vital factor in the preservation and presentation of the cultural heritage and National identity as well as tool for administrative efficiency. Then National Archives of Nigeria should intensify efforts to systematically collect, appraise, organize, preserve and manage effectively archival materials as created by individuals and organizations for their use particularly that of the public. Ukpaki (1995) states that no country aspiring to greatness could ignore that part of its National heritage, which is preserved in old papers and ink for immortality. It is suggested that the National Archives of Nigeria (NAN) should be more pro-active in the provision of services such as exhibition; this should be done from time to time so that the citizens can be more enlightened about the existence of archives, also its potentials.

Archives as a social agency should move from the old pattern of waiting for user to come and patronize them to "market" the services to the people in order to achieve better result. Furthermore, the Federal Government of Nigeria should make more funds available for effective running of the Archives. The importance of archives needs to be understood by many if not all, so that proper care can be given to records. It is clear that records are exposed to natural and man made disasters, hence, should be protected. The government needs to provide the facilities for adequate storage and management of resources. The government should take all necessary steps to preserve our written and unwritten (oral) heritage and to improve the holding capacities of and the facilities in the archives in the various parts of the country. An informed Nation is a transformed Nation!

## REFERENCES

- Amune, S.** (1995). A written source: Inside Nigeria History, Political Parties and Elections in Nigeria: 1950-1970, Ibadan: The Presidential Panel on Nigeria, since independence history project.
- Auyo, M. A.** (2007). The role of records management in achieving organizational objectives: Tertiary Institutions of learning in focus. Being a paper presented at a seminar on uniform practices and standards among institutions affiliated to Bayero University, Kano at Mambayya House, Kano, February 16, 2007.
- Bahmer, R. H.** (1978). *Archives Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*, Vol. 1. New York: Marcel Dekker Inc.
- Choongo, M. W.** (1998). Justification to setting up an archive at the University of Zambia: Problems and Prospects. *African Journals of Library, Archives and Information Science*, 8, 2

- Dike, K. O.** (1954). *Report on the preservation and administration of Historical records and the establishment of a public record office in Nigeria*. Lagos: Nigeria Government Printer.
- Encyclopedia Britannica** (1999-2000). Libraries: the history of libraries down loaded form the Encarta CD-Rom Encyclopedia Britannica: British Council Library.
- Enwere, J. C.** (1995). *The National Archives: Its Role, Responsibilities and Limitation inside Nigeria History, 1950-1070*, Ibadan: The presidential Panel on Nigeria. Since Independent History Project.
- Evans, B. F.** (1986). *Managing Archives*. In Brasher Gregory (ed). London: Mansell Publishing Ltd.
- Gwarzo, S. R.** (2005). Differences and similarities. Being a paper presented at a workshop on records keeping and information management strategies at local government level, ministry of local government, Kano.
- Harrod, L. M.** (1990). *Harrod's Librarians' Glossary: of terms used in Librarianship, Documentation and the book crafts and reference books*. United State of America: Gower Publishing Company.
- Maidabino, A. A.** (2002). *The management of information resources in public archives in North West Zone of Nigeria*. Unpublished, M.L.S. Thesis, Bayero University Kano.
- Maidabino, A. A.** (2004). *The management of Archives: Nigeria National Archives in perspectives*. A paper presentation at a symposium organized by National Association of Library and I formation science Students (NALISS) B.U.K. Chapter Kano. March 25th 2004.
- National Archives Decree 30** (1992). Lagos: Federal Ministry Government.
- Nwosu, O. C.** (1995). *The role of Archival Legislation National Development. The Nigeria Archives*. 2, 1
- Otutru, G.** (2000). *The role of the National Archives of Nigeria in National Development. Nigeria Journal of Library and information service*, 3, 4.
- Tsadik, D. G.** (1991). *A National Archives for Ethiopia what hopes? African Journal of Library, Archives and Information science*, 1, 2
- Ukpaki, S. C.** (1995). *National Crisis and the Civil War: Identifying and recovering the sources material on the Federal and Biafra experiences. Inside Nigeria History (1950-1970)*, Ibadan, the Presidential Panel of Nigeria. Since Independent History Project.