

# **RECORD MANAGEMENT IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SECTOR AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT: THE HORN OF DILEMMA**

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## **Abstract**

The importance of records and information management in the fight against corruption and promotion of good governance, transparency and accountability cannot be overstated; the three cannot be achieved without available, accurate and accessible records and information. To demonstrate transparency and accountability to its citizens, government relies upon policy documents, budget papers, procurement records, property and fixed assets, registers, accounting records etc. With the use of public management theory, the paper analyzed issues of records and information management and the role it can play in administrative efficiency and success of Freedom of Information Act 2011. Drawing experience from the developed and developing countries in this globalized era, it concludes that the Nigerian Freedom of Information Act cannot successfully address the challenges of corruption in high places, bad governance, lack of transparency and accountability, unless public servants embrace and cultivate global best practices in records and information management as x-rayed in the paper.

**Keywords:** Management, Records, Accountability, Efficiency, Effectiveness

## **Introduction**

All over the world government institutions are established to provide specialized functions and services to its citizens and international communities so as to satisfy their basic needs. According to Leach, Stewart and Walsh (1994:5), government institutions are service providers who aim to meet the demands, needs and aspirations of those for whom the service is provided. As human organizations, government agencies function through the Personnel/Human Resource Department, which is the custodian of rules, regulations, records and extra-ministerial circulars.

The ability of any institution be it public or private to carry out its mandate effectively depends on the availability of necessary and sufficient resources. Although it is always underestimated, information is one of the key resources in enabling the accomplishment of organisational goals. According to Van der Waldt, Van Niekerk,

Doyle, Knipe and Du Toit (2002:129), information is a fundamental resource to both government and the private sector alike. Van der Waldt et al (2002:129) further state that information can be maintained and enhanced through appropriate records management. Yet, effective records management is fundamental for good governance, effective and efficient administration. It forms the basis for formulating policies, managing resources and service delivery. It enables an organisation to find information easily and orderly efficient flow of information enables an organisation to perform its functions successfully and efficiently.

Corroborating the above submission, Dearstyne (1985), posits that records are essential to the administration of government institutions. Records contain the information that keeps government programmes functioning; they give government officials basis for making decisions, administering programmes and providing administrative continuity with past operations. Records increase accountability of government and its officials. It is therefore imperative that for the purpose of transparency and accountability, governmental institutions should create and maintain authentic, reliable and usable records.

The significance of records and information management cannot be over emphasized. Records play important role at any given stage in the life cycle of an organization. These include recruitment, training and development, promotion, transfer, implementation, monitoring, appraisal, separation, pension, organizational development etc, and they are therefore an essential informational resource. Records or information management is anchored on the premise that records require managing, in a like manner that other government resources need managing. Information should be regarded and managed as fully important as other administrative functions since records are at the center of governmental operations. For example, transparency and accountability can be achieved by giving the public the right of access to information and this can only be achieved through accessible and sound records management. Thus, effective information and records management is the key and foundation any responsible government needs to provide public goods and services, fulfill its obligation of transparency and accountability towards its citizens and protect their human rights and dignity.

Low productivity in the Nigerian public sector has been in the front burner for decades. Red-tapism, secrecy, inefficiency and ineffectiveness are all common features of the public sector in Nigeria. To give credibility to the fight on corruption, other social vices and unveil the secretive nature of government bureaucracy in line with global best practices, the National Assembly in 2011 passed the controversial "Freedom of Information Bill" subsequently signed into law by the President. However, it is highly regrettable that new a problem has since emerged in the area of poor records and information management in the public sector. Most public administrators are ill-trained. As a result, they lack in-dept modern managerial skills and approaches to public sector records and information management. Yet, information and records are not regarded as an important resource that could influence the efficiency of the organization as well as aid the success of freedom of

information Act. Inadequate records of personnel profile, materials and transactions are alarming despite the use of ICT. Although rules and regulation regulating the management of records exist, there is ignorance or total neglect on the part of certain public officials, and this could have adverse effects on the objectives of Freedom of Information Act and ultimately on public service delivery in general.

The ongoing probe in the Nigerian oil sector reveals that Austin Oniwo, the immediate sacked Group Managing Director of Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) has no idea of the daily production capacity of the existing functional refineries. Yet, the discrepancies in the documents presented by Petroleum Pricing Regulating Agency (PPRA) officials and that of the independent oil marketers over the fraudulent claims of oil subsidy, the pension scam, Nigerian judiciary and police are synonymous with missing case file while missing scripts and results are common features of the tertiary institutions in Nigeria etc. These are all manifestations of poor record management. This paper therefore examines the role of record management in the success of Freedom of Information Act and administrative efficiency in Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Paper**

The broader objective of the paper is to examine the impact of record management on effective administration of Freedom of Information Act in Nigeria with the view to create and enhance awareness and sensitize government and non-governmental officials on the fundamental role played by sound records and information management in achieving organizational goals. Other specific objectives include: To examine the relationship between record management and public service delivery; to examine whether the management of records, as one of the valuable resources for the success of Freedom of Information Act receives the attention it deserves in public sector; to create awareness and sensitize government officials on the contribution of effective records management towards the achievement of organizational mandate; to identify the challenges facing record management in the public sector; and to suggest the way forward within the context of the identified problems.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Clarifications**

In most social and management sciences research, in order to avoid ambiguity in the interpretation and understanding of certain terms, it is imperative that concepts used in the study should be clearly defined for a better understanding of the issue under interrogation; relying on the views of various authors, scholars and commentators as well as the way in which one's research is integrated into the body of existing theory and research. The key concepts used in this paper are defined as follows:

Although there are dearth of literature on the concept of record management; however, Shepherd (2006:6) defines a record as a recorded evidence of an activity that is of an action undertaken by an individual or a work group in the course of their

business, which results in a definable outcome. According to Agere, Lemieux and Mazikana (1999:16), a record is any medium in or on which information is recorded. Medium includes paper, magnetic tape and disc, microfilm, audio-tape, film, slide and photograph. Also, Cox (2001:2) defines records as an extension of human memory, purposefully created to record information, document transactions, communicate thoughts, substantiate claims, advance explanations, offer justifications and provide lasting evidence of events.

Makhura (2005) argue that the correlation between proper records management and improved performance of an organisation is to ensure competitive survival. He further argues that records constitute the most vital resource and are essential for the operation of organisations. Cloete (1998:285) refers to record-keeping as one of the auxiliary activities that are performed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency with which the other functions are performed or to make the performance of the other functions possible. This implies that by neglecting its auxiliary activities, an organisation may not be able to deliver on its core mandate effectively and efficiently. In view of this, records management should be given an equal status as other auxiliary functions because there is no organisation that can operate effectively and successfully without records.

According to Shepherd (2006:6), organisations use records to support accountability, when they need to prove that they have met their obligations or complied with the best practice or established policies. Transparency and accountability is a crucial aspect in enhancing service delivery. Records support more effective and efficient business, underpin e-government and service delivery, help to demonstrate accountability, transparency and corporate governance, and are the source of information for citizens in the context of open government and freedom of information (McLeod and Childs, 2007:216). Harries (2009:19) argues that achieving overall success is more than the sum of individual parts. It depends, very often, on a successful sharing of meaningful information between parts. Harries went further to state that a breakdown in the sharing of information between parts leads to a breakdown in service delivery. From these statements, it can be deduced that effective records management has a direct bearing on service delivery, and effective information and records management is a collective effort (Harries, 2009:19)

Harries citing Lemark's Training Manual on Records Management (2005:13), classified public records into four (4) major classes namely vital records, important records, useful records and non-essential records. Vital Records – This may include items like legal documents of an organization, title deeds, major contracts, property plans, minutes of certain meetings, insurance policies etc. These records should never be destroyed as they are essential to an organisation's existence and are often irreplaceable. Important records refer to those records that facilitate administrative and executive operations and may only be replaceable at huge cost and much delay. Examples are invoices, received accounts, quotations, financial statements, and others. Useful records – are those records that are required for short-term usage such as memorandums and bank statements. Non-essential records – include routine

enquiries, announcements and acknowledgements, draft notes from telephone conversations, and others. These records have a temporary value and may be destroyed after a short period.

Agere et al (1999:16) in their contribution classified record management into three (3) types, namely current records, semi-current records and non-current records. Current records are records which are in active use; Semi-current records are records whose use have declined and are used only from time to time. In other words they are semi-active. Non-current records are records which are no longer in active use and are being kept in order to fulfill other secondary uses such as legal and audit requirements or for research value.

According to Dearstyne (1985:14) records are created for some purpose and can have either a short term or enduring (archival) value. The value can be, inter alia, administrative, fiscal, legal and informational. Records with an enduring value should be preserved because they provide a framework for an understanding of the past. In a nutshell, the concept "record" can be defined as the information captured for re-use at a later stage as evidence of an activity or action undertaken, and a basis on which future decisions are made. Records are important and it is difficult to imagine life without them, particularly in the running of an organisation.

A public record includes practically any type of information received or created during the process of official government business. This refers to paper documents such as correspondence, memos, ledgers, agendas and minutes, and deed books, as well as information recorded in newer forms such as sound or video recordings, microfilm, and computer disks or tapes. Other examples of important public records are gazettes, regulations, policies and procedures, reports including audit reports, strategic plans and many more (Dearstyne, 1985:13).

Dearstyne (1985:4) went further to state that public records are public property owned by the people in the same sense that the citizens own their courthouse or town hall, and funds in the treasury. Public records are held in trust for the citizens by custodians, usually the heads of departments in which the records have been accumulated, but sometimes by other officers to whom custody has been officially transferred by the governing authority. Public records may not be sold, given away, destroyed, or alienated from custody except through an official act of the governing authority in accordance with provisions of any state law relating to their care and disposition.

In essence, public records are as important as other public resources such as assets and finances, and should thus be awarded the same status as other public resources. What distinguishes public records from other public resources is that public records are not easily replaceable; hence proper care should be exercised on them.

The above analysis of a public record shows that governments would come to a standstill without records which are, in effect, its institutional memory. All government officials depend on records from their own files for the information needed for day to day performance of their work.

Having examined various classes into which records are categorized, it becomes imperative to state that the values of records differ, from one record to another. The determination of the retention period of a record will therefore be informed by the value of that particular record. For example, a vital record should be retained for a longer period than a non-essential record.

As mentioned earlier, individuals or organisations create records to support the activities that they carry out. However, if these records are not managed properly, they will not provide the necessary support and information might be lost causing problems for the organisation. To provide an efficient and effective administration that ensures government business runs as smoothly as possible, there should be proper management of records.

Records management is increasingly becoming an important instrument for good management; it helps any organisation to deal more effectively with information. Agere et al (1999:1) define records management as a term used to refer to the way official records (correspondence, files, information) are organized in such a way that they have meaning and can be used continuously by the users such as managers, records professionals, educational institutions, legal authorities and any other interested parties.

Records management is the systematic and confident control of all records throughout their life cycle (World Bank, 2009). According to Dearstyne (1985:6), records management is about overseeing the creation and use of forms, correspondence, and other records, setting up filing and indexing systems and other means of ensuring easy, rapid access to the information in records; adopting and using modern technology in information creation, storage, and manipulation, particularly micro-film and automated data processing systems; microfilming of selected paper records for security, ease of access, disposition of the bulk paper records after microfilming, and long-term preservation of important information, and systematically disposing of records.

Notwithstanding the different definitions of the term "records management", the meaning underlying them is the same. Records management is a way of looking at how records are created, used, maintained and ultimately disposed of. The objectives in managing public records are to make the records serve the purpose for which they were created as cheaply and effectively as possible, and to make a proper disposition of them after they have served those purposes.

To scientifically and theoretically examine the issues raised in the paper, we situate our discussion within the ambit of public management theory because of its advantages in analyzing the subject of the paper. Public management theory is the transition from traditional public administration theories to an arrangement that is workable, practicable and result oriented. It places emphasis on good governance, technological innovation and democratization. Public management theory is a relentless effort in the direction of greater transparency and accountability in resource allocation and performance management through the quality of service (Pollit, 1996). Public management theory therefore, captures the basis of institutional

and organization restructuring as an attempt to raise its performance by improving the quality of service delivery. It is result focused rather than the process of result. Public management theory came up with different concepts for performance and principles to achieve it (Hood, 1991). Consequently, Hood identified the principles as ' accountability and efficiency; reduction of public sector expenditure; improvement in resource use through labour discipline; flexibility in decision making; competition in the public sector through decentralization and emphasis on result and not procedure.

Public management theory centre's on accountability, transparency, democratization and citizens' participation. Public management theory is an effort to improve government service delivery to the citizenry because of the expectations of the people. The main thrust of public management literature is not with what to do but how to do it better. The emerging trend on client orientation and results-based accountability is encouraging public sector organizations to innovate in many parts of the world. As a deviation from the principles of new public management, the civil service abysmal performance in Nigeria can be viewed and understood as a carryover effect of this deviation.

### **Advantages of Effective Records Management**

Dearstyne (1985:10), identified the benefits of records management include the following: Records management saves money by discouraging the creation of records that really aren't needed in the first place. Records management reduces future costs by ensuring that expensive new equipment, such as microfilm cameras and computers, are not purchased unless these tools will help organisations manage their information much better. Records management saves space by removing inactive records from busy, crowded offices where space is at a premium, and sending them to storage, and by ensuring the timely destruction of records that are no longer needed. Records management saves time by ensuring that records are well organized and maintained. Records management promotes good governance by making it easy for programme administrators to locate and use information needed to monitor programmes, ensure administrative continuity, and make informed policy decisions. Records management protects the government by ensuring that contracts, agreements, and other records of the government's legal rights and responsibilities are securely protected, well organized, and easily located when needed. Records management serves the cause of history by identifying and preserving important research records.

Corroborating the above submission of Dearstyne (1985), Shepherd (2006:10) states that records which are managed as part of an appropriate records management programme will help the organisation to conduct business in an efficient, accountable manner, deliver services consistently, support managerial decision making and transparent policy formation and ensure continuity in policy execution, management and administration. In summary, an effective records management will ensure that records are available for use when needed, that privacy

and confidentiality are maintained, that redundant records are destroyed and that records ultimately contribute towards sustaining service delivery.

### **The Interface between Record Management and Freedom of Information Act**

Globally, public management stresses the business management perspective in the working of government institutions. The thinking behind this view is that the established principles used in the private sector, have accounted for the success recorded in the sector, therefore such management principles, skills and techniques could equally be appropriated and applied for activities and actions in public administration. Hence, the pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness in record management should equally be fit for public organization.

Sound record management supports democratic transparency and accountability. Lawton and Rose (1994:19) define transparency and accountability as a process where a person or groups of people are required to present an account of his or their activities and the way in which they have or have not discharged their duties. Transparency and accountability can be linked to the concept of responsibility as one cannot be transparent or accountable to anyone unless one has responsibility for doing something. Lawton and Rose (1994:19) further indicate that transparency and accountability can be achieved by compliance with the law and internal and external regulations; fulfilling auditing requirements; and response to challenges.

Records are clearly a key element in supporting democratic transparency and accountability. Yet, effective information and records management underpins many of the vital aspects of corporate governance. Management of records enables government and its institutions to operate in a transparent manner and being able to account to the public who brought it into power (Orr, 2008:165). In the words of Shepherd (2006:6), one of the major reasons for keeping records is that organisations use records to support transparency and accountability when they need to prove that they have met their obligations or complied with best practices of established policies.

It is in support of the above views that Agere et al (1999:7) argue that for the instrument of governance to be effective, it must have records and information available for the users to assess for themselves the extent to which the state is being transparent and accountable to society. One of the pillars of transparency and accountability in a democratic state is the extent to which people have access to information to assist them in evaluating whether the government is transparent or not. Hence, the promulgation of Freedom of Information Act of 2011, which gives the public the right of access to public records. The Act is an assurance by government to reflect and protect the will of the people.

Cox and Wallace (2002:67) express a similar view by stating that transparency and accountability cannot be achieved in an environment where information is not available. Records management underpins transparency and accountability. Good

record keeping ensures open government which, in turn, promotes more confidence in public officials and more accountability in the use of public funds (Dearstyne, 1985). Information flow is meant to keep the public informed on government activities and processes as well as a measure of its responsibility to the people who brought it to power.

From the above discussion, it is evident that information is at the centre of the relationship between government and the public. Without the availability of information, the public cannot understand how and why decisions are made on their behalf. Records are therefore reflective of the activities undertaken and the processes that have or are being initiated on behalf of the public; hence information and records should be properly managed.

Yet, promoting good governance has been emphasized. Governments all over the world are often praised for good governance or rebuked for bad governance. A typical example is the good governance tour organized and embarked upon by the Nigeria Federal Ministry Information under President Goodluck Jonathan's administration. For an organisation to be praised for good governance, there are many contributing factors, of which availability of records and its effective management thereof is one of the critical elements. It has been argued that good governance is predicated on the adoption of functional records management and the enactment of Freedom of Information Act by government (Sebina, 2004:45). Transparency is another major feature of good governance. Transparency means that information is freely available and accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their endorsement means that enough information is provided and that it is provided in easy forms and media. Good governance can only be achieved where records management is operational. Indeed, for good governance to exist citizens must be empowered to participate meaningful in decision-making process as well as right to information. For good governance to be sustained, good records management programmes need to be introduced and practiced. Information is crucial to good governance as it reflects and captures government's activities and processes. Open, transparent and accessible government is an essential requirement for good governance. For this to happen there must be a free flow of information, accurate and reliable records.

Keeping of records and storing of information in an organisation has in recent years become critical not only for historical purposes but more importantly, for current and future managerial and policy development (Agere et al, 1999:1). Records are being used as tools and instruments with which to understand organisations and as a basis for improvement. They went further to state that in reviewing the performance of the entire public sector machinery, it has always been necessary to review the objectives, functions, rules and regulations, procedures and practices (Agere et al, 1999:4). The overall outcome of these reviews would be the development of organisational manuals, policies and procedures which would guide staff towards best practices and ways of doing things. These outcomes are to be

underpinned by recorded information which is properly stored with potentials of being retrieved easily.

Contributing, Dearstyne (1988:5) posits that records document the origin, evolution, and operation of government and show how it responds to citizens' needs and service delivery. Effective officials routinely consult records in order to plan, to analyze and track programmes. Sound records provide officials with the right information for decision making. Records have an impact on the administration and management of government departments. The forms and stages of policy formulation are based on the records that are available and retrievable. All policy processes, practices and procedures rely heavily on well-organized and managed information and records which can easily be retrieved for further use. Therefore, for good governance to be sustained, good record management programmes need to be introduced and practiced. For example, good management of procurement records, financial records and other records demonstrate government's commitment to promotion of good governance.

Also, the relationship between record and information management and continuing service delivery has been established. The effectiveness and efficiency of government functions generally depends upon the availability of and access to information held in records (World Bank, 2000:3). For instance, development projects are often difficult to implement and sustain effectively in the absence of well managed information and records. Records document past policies, decisions and alternatives. By consulting records, officials do not waste time and resources when they encounter similar issues and challenges meaning that when records are readily available and accessible, delays in decision-making affecting service delivery can be avoided.

A well designed records management system helps protect an organisation legally. Records are one of the basic litigation support tools, without them there can be no litigation as they provide information through which evidence is derived and decisions are made. Almost all organisations, including governmental departments, will experience some type of litigation during their lifetime. It is therefore imperative for organisations to devise mechanisms of ensuring their preparedness should a need to protect themselves in a court of law arise as witness in the oil subsidy scam between some oil importers and government regulatory agencies in Nigeria. Effective record keeping is among the many strategies that can be used by organisations to ensure preparedness for litigation.

If records such as contracts and agreements, essential for documenting the government's legal obligations to pay or receive monies are well organized and protected, they can be referred to as and when needed (Dearstyne, 1985:8). Keeping accurate and accessible records is therefore imperative to enable organisations to legally defend themselves where and when the need arises. Without information and relevant documents, government and anti corruption agencies such as Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), and Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Commission (ICPC) will continue to be defeated in

courts of law thereby wasting money that ought to have been channeled into service delivery in fruitless court cases.

Corruption in Nigeria is a serious problem, especially in the public sector. It drains the country's resources and weakens the government's capacity to provide infrastructural development that could guarantee its mandate of service delivering to the public. The number of ghost positions and workers in government organisations cannot be ascertained and the exact expenditure cannot be traced if there are no proper, accurate and accessible records. This statement indicates that corruption will continue to thrive as a result of 'inter alia', a lack of proper record keeping. Effective records management practices are essential to ensure that there are no loopholes in the system.

Procurement is one component of financial management where corruption thrives, this can be attributed to the fact that most expenditure occurs here. It is against this backdrop that Visser and Erasmus (2002:169) argue that one important aspect of procurement is that accurate records of all state store purchases and issues must be kept. Keeping of procurement related records is not only important for store purchases, but for day to day procurement and procurement through bid processes as well. The importance of maintaining procurement records is central to avoiding corrupt deals and practices.

Palmer (2000:65) states that the role of a records management system is that it acts as a control system that reinforces other control systems such as internal and external auditing. The records themselves can serve to detect fraud and recover the loss. For example, discrepancies can be detected mostly in the process of scrutinizing records. Since corruption creates an environment that allows opportunities to commit fraud, once fraud is detected, records can provide a trail for investigations to track the root of corruption. However, for records to be useful in this capacity, they must be well managed and accessible.

Where public figures or civil servants are under scrutiny for breaches of systems or regulations or even corruption, much of the evidence will be provided by records. According to Palmer (2000:65), authentic and reliable records can serve as evidence to identify abuse, misuse and non-compliance with financial institutions and other laws and regulations. The value of state records derives among others, from the information they contain and evidence they provide. Records provide verifiable evidence to fraud that can lead investigators to the root cause of corruption. State records not only document past decisions, they often establish and protect the current rights and responsibilities of both the government and the governed. Yet, records document the fundamental rights of communities and obligations of government (World Bank, 2009).

Finance and audit laws generally require ministries and departments to ensure that financial and accounting records are adequately kept and managed and to empower the audit body to obtain access to all financial records (World Bank, 2009). An effective records management system is a critical element in the preparation of an institution's financial statements. It will allow for verification of the completeness

and accuracy of data reported in financial statements and assist in the compilation of the audit process.

An effective records management system should ensure that financial records are maintained throughout the life cycle in a consistent and structured manner, that the audit function and external accountability of the organisation is supported, that the organisation is able to meet its obligations under law and to access records for fiscal policy and planning purposes, that the integrity and accuracy of the records are protected and that the records can be retrieved.

It is now widely recognized that improvements in the management of government finance are essential to bring a halt to the global escalation of corruption. Yet, unless the records resulting from the conduct of financial management activities are managed effectively, this goal cannot be achieved. The World Bank (2000:6) states that poor record keeping affects the entire accounting function, with the result that reporting and auditing may become virtually impossible. Fraud becomes difficult to detect and debt management also suffers. Good records management systems are therefore essential to support financial management. Public sector information and record management in Nigeria is faced with a number of constraints, the section below examines some of them.

### **Challenges facing Record Management in the Nigerian Public Sector**

Effective record management, whether in the public or private sector, involves creation, storage, retrieval, maintenance, disposition and the use of compact and other manual or electronic means.

However, most of the roles envisioned for record or managers have not been performed effectively in Nigeria. This could make the realization of freedom of information Act 2011 objectives difficult or if not impossible. A number of reasons could be responsible for this state of affairs; however, some of them are discussed below in this section.

Inadequate record keeping policy is a major constraint in information and record management in Nigeria. It has been established in literature that there is a significant correlation between poor records keeping practices and corruption. People always look for loopholes in policies and the systems when they want to commit fraud. Among other root causes of corruption is the lack of good records keeping practices and failure by government to initiate measures that could ensure that information and records are well managed

In its efforts to combat corruption, Nigerian government established a number of anti corruption agencies. These agencies are assigned with the responsibility of detecting, investigating and fighting corruption, as well as promoting ethics. Government and the civil society's efforts are often directed towards strengthening these agencies such as the newly enacted Freedom of Information Act 2011. Surprisingly, little or no attention is being paid to the fact that the success of these

laws, measures and agencies depends on the accessibility to complete, reliable and accurate records.

As overwhelmingly and complex as these constraints may appear, they are not insurmountable. Indeed, they can be managed and possibly be ameliorated. In the following section, we turn our attention to how this can be achieved.

### **Public Sector Record and Information Management: The Way Forward**

The poor state of records in Nigerian public sector has proved to be a major hindrance in the prosecution of corruption offences due to a lack of tangible reliable evidence. In Nigeria, it is known fact that corrupt officials often arrange for files to disappear to avoid prosecution but where there are stringent records management practices and integrity, disappearance or total loss of important documents could be prevented. An effective records management system is fundamental and crucial in combating corruption. Hence anti-corruption measures and agencies should be redesign to checkmate, detect and prevent corrupt activities by public officials rather than prosecution.

World Bank (2000:5), claim that well managed records provide a cost effective deterrent to fraud and corruption. It can be deduced that the establishment of effective records management system is an important tool in combating corruption. To minimize corruption, government should redirect its efforts to promoting good records management practices as one of the corruption prevention strategies, instead of pumping public funds on investigating and prosecuting corruption with little or no result achieved. Thus, when records are well managed, it will reduce the number of corruption cases to investigate. This is supported by the maxim 'prevention is better than cure and much cheaper than prosecution'.

Heads of government institutions should designate a member of staff within the rank of management cadre as records managers to whom they can delegate the responsibility of ensuring that effective records management practices are implemented and maintained. Also, the records managers should develop and implement records management policies, which are endorsed by the head of the government institution and their top management teams, in line with National Archives and Records Service. Adherence to these policies should be continuously monitored and the policies should be reviewed on an annual basis.

There should be a classification of records into file Plan – which is a plan by which documentation is arranged and stored to facilitate efficient retrieval and disposal. It also guides officials on how to allocate file numbers. Secondly, schedule for records other than correspondence files – which enables government institutions to manage records other than correspondence, for example, plans, agendas and minutes, microfilms, diagram's, CDs, and others.

The public sector should adopt records control mechanisms such as: Register of files opened – which contains a description and opening dates of all files that were actually opened according to the subject provisions in the filing system; register of disposal authorities – which contains copies of all disposal authorities issued by the

National Archives, to specific such government institution; and destruction register – which contains information on the year in which non-archival records (short term records) are due for destruction. Records managers should determine retention periods for all records in line with National Archives rules. Excessive retention of records could cause difficulties in retrieving records when needed and may result in space problems.

Records managers and records office staff should be equipped with the necessary skills to enable them perform their functions optimally. It is still difficult for some public sector workers to change from their old ways of doing things as they believe in status quo. Yet, the world today is dynamic and civil servants must move with the speed of the time because for public servants to cope, they must be well equipped with modern management techniques which can only be acquired through training and retraining. This is rightly supported by Igbokwe-Ibeto (2012) quoting Adeleke, that “training is the means and process of imparting special skills which equip individual to perform specific jobs. Although it is a supplement to education, it can be acquired concurrently. Introduction of records management as part of induction course for newly recruited staff will be of help. Management should ensure that all staff members of the organization are conversant with proper registry procedures and documentation so as to able to read the filing system and allocate file numbers.

## **Conclusion**

It can be deduced from the above discussions that records are inextricably entwined with increased transparency, accountability and good governance. It also became apparent that fraud cannot be proven, meaningful audits cannot be carried out and government actions are not open to review when records are not properly managed. Records provide verifiable evidence of fraud and can lead investigators to the root cause of corruption. Effective information and records management are therefore at the heart of increased transparency and accountability and good governance, it is one of the major weapons in fighting corruption, it will play a crucial role in the application and success of Freedom of Information Act in Nigeria and advancement of human rights as well as ensuring sound financial management.

Therefore, records management should be given priority and be considered as important as other organisational resources, such as finance, materials and staff. This paper argues that effective records management is not a matter of choice, but compulsory if Nigeria is to successfully lunch herself into club of world developed economy. Advocating effective record management as an organisational and societal benefit is therefore not an activity to be taken for granted. Ignorance on records management can have adverse effects to the realization of governmental objectives and can drain financial resources which will invariably affect service delivery.

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