

Records Keeping and Good Governance in Gboko Local Government Area Benue State

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the records keeping of Gboko Local Government Area of Benue State. The study also discussed the importance of records in governance. The study used a survey design. The entire population of 23 staff was used as the sample size. Questionnaires were the instrument used for data collection and were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings of the study revealed the major problems of records management to include; lack of trained personnel, insufficient funds, poor storage facilities, acute shortage of space. Based on the findings, recommendations were proffered to ameliorate the identified problems, such as; adequate funds should be provided, recruitment of adequate and qualified personnel, provision of storage facilities and adoption of ICT to enhance effective records management.

Keywords: *Records Keeping, Good Governance, Local Government*

INTRODUCTION

Information recorded in paper and electronic files help managers, particularly chief executives, to direct, control, communicate, plan, formulate policies and make decisions (Uwaifo, 2004). The availability of records is crucial in attaining organizational goals. Perhaps more important is the proper management of these records. To be of maximum value, records must be organized and properly managed.

Records in the view of (Cox, 2001) is an extension of human memory, purposefully created to record information, document transactions and communicate thoughts, substantiate claims, an advance explanation of justifications and provides lasting evidence of events. According to Kennedy and Schrader (2000) records is described as document or other source of information compiled, recorded or stored in written form or on film or by electronic process, or in any other manner or by any other means.

The Gboko Local Government Area records arise naturally from the functions, activities, processes and transactions, which are capable of creating local government records substantially. This explains the reasons why records are the fabrics with which the structure and functions of

a purposeful administration is built (Eferarakoja, 2005).

Local Government in Nigeria is the third tier of government within a state that has elected officials who are charged with the responsibility of administration of the people at the grass root and other specific matters that affect them. The administrative activities are usually conducted in the secretariats (Akor & Udensi, 2014)

Every governmental agency state or local is required by law to manage its public records in an orderly and systematic way. When this is done, records become a tremendous asset the evidence of past events and the basis for future actions.

Records management is the field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including the process for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transaction in the form of record, (ISO, 2001). In the same vein, Majama (2003) says records management is a way of looking at how records are created, used, maintained and ultimately disposed off.

Records constitute an essential instrument of administration without which operational processes and functions cannot be executed.

Records are imperative in the smooth running of organization be it public or private organizations. Records are valuable and powerful resource because of the information contained in them. Good government, sound policies and just decision-making demand that information is collated, stored, managed, used and disclosed wisely and appropriately. Maintenance of records increases the life span of records which invariably preserve records for future use in terms of reference, administrative and decision-making. The arrangement of records enhances orderliness, cleanliness and most importantly it saves time and energy required in sorting for records and reduces hand on records that are not needed which may also leads to damage by touching it quite often.

One method of achieving effectiveness in the process of arrangement of records is by filing. Filing is one of the most crucial jobs in any office. If records are not kept and filed so that they can be retrieved when they are needed, then they serve no useful function. According to Records Management Publications (1998), there are three basic methods for arranging files. These are:

1. Alphabetic – Using letters or names, subjects or geographic locations
2. Numeric – Using numbers in various combinations (including dates, in a chronological system).
3. Alphanumeric – using combination of letters and numbers.

Another important aspect of records management that will enhance effectiveness in the use of records is storage. There is need for proper storage medium, so as to facilitate easy access to the records when required. It is worthy of note that for records to be adequately care for, separate building and storage facilities have to be provided. There should be a secured room or a place for vital records. Creating records without proper plans for their maintenance leaves the records in shambles which causes chaos in an organization, (Iwhiwhu, 2005).

Advancing further on storage facilities for records, Beyers (2008) provides the following conditions for handling of storage facilities:

- i. Your storage facility will need to have adequate lighting available for people using the facility
- ii. Good ventilation will help prevent dampness, moles and pest infiltration

- iii. An alarm system that make sounds if an unauthorized person or user attempts to enter the storage facility should be installed
- iv. Proper temperature and humidity are essential for records both paper based and electronic records on digital media. A good temperature and requirement for storage facilities is as temperature below 60 and 69. Relative humidity between 35-45%.
- v. Protect your storage facility from pest infestation for example mice, cockroaches, silverfish, fire, smoke, and sprinkler Damage, water damage, either from leaky pipes and leak foundations, or from tapped moisture in the walls, etc.

Effective records management cannot be complete without mentioning the staff handling records. According to Ira and Grail (1992) for records management to be effective, it requires the professional knowledge of a record manager or archivist. They stressed that it must be a person of vast knowledge as follows:

- i. Storing, arranging, indexing and classifying records.
- ii. Facilitate the development of filing systems, and maintaining these to meet administrative, legal and financial requirement;
- iii. Devising and ensuring the implementation of retention and disposal schedules
- iv. Overseeing the management of electronic and /or paper-based information
- vi. Setting-up, maintaining, receiving and documenting records systems
- vii. Identifying the most appropriate records management resources
- viii. Providing a policy framework to guide staff in the management of their records and use of the employer's records system.

An effective records management programme in Gboko Local government area will ensure that records are created, and made available for use when needed, managed for privacy and confidentiality and redundant records are destroyed to create room for a new ones, which will go a long way in contributing to optimal service delivery in the secretariat.

The objective in managing public records is to make the records serve the purpose for which they were created as effectively and cheaply as possible, and to make a proper disposition of them after they have served those purposes.

Records are important because of the information they contain is essential for every activity to be carried out in any organization. Without proper information a decision maker is never certain about the outcome of his or her decision. The operations of an organization are based on a hierarchy of systems, each of which consists of a variety of activities or discussion points. It is imperative that each of these decision points receives appropriate information. Information must therefore flow throughout the organization in such a way that can be tapped where and whenever needed and at every decision point.

The records of an organization such as the local government constitute her corporate memory which supplements human memory and serves as a guide for effective planning. As a result of the absence of a functioning record management system in the local government, there are cases of failed strategic planning, poor accountability, and misappropriation of funds as well as massive corruption practices amongst others.

Information and records management are the bedrock of the local government administration activities. Poor records management practices result to rampant cases of misplacement or loss of vital documents (files and memos) as well as the slow pace at which records of the local government are being retrieved due to poor storage. Inaccurate or inadequate availability of records in a local government secretariat stalls administrative activities such as decision making and inquiry findings, delay in payment of personnel salaries as a result of inaccurate figures.

Well managed records are essential tools for good governance. They facilitate the achievement of transparency and accountability in public administration, as indeed in all other types of administration. When government records are easily accessible to members of the public at times when they want to verify actions and activities of public servants, a relationship on trust between the government and the governed is greatly strengthened. The public will then enjoy the confidence and the support of its citizens. Unfortunately, the state of records management has been unsatisfactory, especially in local government areas in Nigeria.

It is against this backdrop that this study set out to investigate into the management of records in Gboko Local Government Area in order to ascertain the free flow of information in the administration of the local government.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Specifically, the objectives of the study is to:

1. Find out the qualification of personnel handling records in Gboko Local Government Area
2. Investigate how records are appraised in the Local Government
3. Determine the methods used in arranging records in the Local Government Area
4. Verify storage facilities made available for records in Gboko Local Government Area
5. Find out how records are disposed in the Local Government under study
6. Fish out the problems militating against effective records management in Gboko Local Government Area
7. Identify the strategies to enhance effective records management in Gboko Local Government Area

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the academic qualifications of personnel handling records in Gboko Local Government Area?
2. How are records appraised in the Local Government?
3. What are the methods used in arranging records in Gboko Local Government?
4. What are the Storage facilities made available for records in the Local Government under study?
5. How does the Local Government dispose her records?
6. What are the problems militating against effective records management in the Local Government?
7. What measures could be taken to solve the problems of records management in Gboko Local Government?

METHODOLOGY

The study used a survey design. The population of the study comprises 23 staff of Gboko Local Government, comprising (7) heads of department, seven (7) clerical officers, eight (8) records officers and one (1) clerk of the legislative house. The entire population was used as sample size because it is manageable and accessible. Questionnaires were administered to all the sampled staff of the local

government. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive percentages to generate frequencies and percentages to answer the research questions.

Question 1

What is the academic qualification of personnel handling records in the Local Government?

Table1. *Frequency Distribution on Academic Qualification*

S/N	Educational Qualification	Frequenc y	Percentage (%)
1	O'level	2	8.7
2	Diploma	12	52.2
3	Bachelor's Degree	5	30.4
4	PGD	4	17.4
5	Master Degree	0	0.00
6	Ph.D	0	0.00

Table 1 indicates the caliber of staff handling records in terms of their academic qualifications. From the table, 12 diploma holders representing 52.2% are responsible for handling records in the local government. Other categories of staff include 5 Bachelor's degree holders, (30.4%), PGD (17.4%) and O'level holders (8.7%) recorded low response rate. While Master Degree and Ph.D recorded 0(0.00%) response rate.

Questions 2

How are Records Appraised in the Local Government?

Table2. *Frequency Distribution on Appraisal of Records*

S/N	Reasons for Appraisal	Frequenc y	Percentage (%)
1	Legal Value	14	60.9
2	Administrative Value	23	100
3	Research Value	8	34.8
4	Evidential Value	19	82.6
5	Information Value	20	86.10
6	Historical Value	11	47.8

Table 2, clearly show that Gboko Local Government appraise records for administrative value 23(100%), information value 20 (86.10%), Evidential value 19(82.6%) and Legal Value 14(60.9%) while research value 8(34.8%) and historical value 11(47.8%) recorded the least reasons for appraisal of records in the local government.

Question 3

What are the Methods used in arranging Records in Gboko Local Government?

Table3. *Frequency Distribution on arrangement of Records*

S/N	Arrangement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	By subject filing	17	73.9
2	By chronological filing	2	8.7
3	Alphabetical filing	4	17.4
4	By numerical filing	12	52.2

Table 3, represents results on how records are arranged in Gboko Local Government Area. From the table, it can be seen that records are arranged by subject filing 17(73.9%), by numerical filing 12(52.2%), alphabetical filing 4(17.4%) and chronological filing 2(8.7%). From the result, it means that the local government mostly arranged its records by subject and numerical filing systems, whereas arrangement of records by alphabetical and chronological is at the lowest ebb.

Question 4

What are the storage facilities made available for Records in the Local Government?

Table4. *Frequency Distribution on Storage Facilities*

S/N	Storage Facilities	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Wooden cabinet	18	78.3
2	Metallic cabinet	12	52.2
3	Steel Shelves	1	4.3
4	Filing cabinet	8	34.8
5	Filing drawer	15	65.2

Table 4 reveals the equipments that were used for storing records in Gboko local government area. The result indicates that the equipment mostly used for storing records were wooden cabinet 18(78.3%), filing drawer 15(65.2%) and Metallic cabinet 12(52.2%). While filing cabinet 8(34.8%) and steel cabinet 1 (4.3%) were the least used equipment.

Questions 5

How does the local government dispose her records?

Table5. *Frequency Distribution on Methods of Disposal*

S/N	Disposal Methods	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Burning	22	95.7
2	Incineration	0	0.00
3	Burying	1	4.3
4	Pulverizing	0	0.00
5	Selling	6	26.1
6	Dumping	18	78.3

Records Keeping and Good Governance in Gboko Local Government Area Benue State

Table 5 shows frequency distribution on how records are disposed. Results indicate burning 22(95.7%), dumping 18(78.3%), selling 6(26.1%), burying 1(4.3%) while incineration and pulverizing recorded 0(0.00%) respectively.

Question 6

What are the Problems militating against effective records Management in the Local Government?

Table6. Frequency Distribution on Problems of Records Management

S/ N	Problems of Records Management	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Lack of Trained Personnel	22	95.7
2	Poor storage facilities	20	86.10
3	Lack of space	13	56.5
4	Lack of funds	22	95.7
5	Absence of procedure manual	6	26.1
6	Lack of technology application	20	86.10

Table 6 shows the problems that are encountered in the management of records in Gboko local government area of Benue State. The table clearly reveals that problems such as lack of funds 22(95.7%), lack of trained personnel 22(95.7%), poor Storage facilities 20(86.10%), Lack of technology application 20(86.10%). Other problems encountered in the course of managing records are lack of space 13(56.5%) and absence of procedure manual 6(26.1%) were indicated on the result.

Questions 7

What measures can be adopted to overcome the problems of records management?

Table7. Frequency distribution on Measure to overcome the problems of Records Management

S/ N	Strategies to enhance records management	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Employment of qualified personnel	21	91.3
2	Provision of storage facilities	20	86.10
3	Provision of space	12	52.2
4	Provision of adequate funds	21	91.3
5	Provision of procedure manual	11	47.8
6	Adoption of ICT	17	73.9

Table 7 indicates measures that could be employed to solve the problems of record management in the local government under study. The result from the table shows measures to help tackle problems of records management to include; employment of qualified personnel 21 (91.3%) provision of adequate funds 21(91.3%) provision of storage facilities 20(86.10%), provision of space 12(52.2%) and adoption of ICT 17(73.9%)

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study were based on data analysis from the research variables that constitute the study. The findings revealed that those handling records are records clerks. The finding also shows that diploma holders is the highest qualification of those handling records in the local government.

The study also indicate that records are basically appraised in the local government for administrative, information and evidential value. Research and historical value were also revealed at a low rate.

The methods used in arranging records in the local government under study revealed is by subject and numeric filing systems. The storage facilities as indicated by the study is wooden cabinet, filing drawer and metallic cabinet.

Accordingly, the findings shows that burning and dumping were the major forms of disposing records in Gboko local government area.

The findings of the study equally unveils lack of trained staff, shortage of funds, poor storage facilities as major problems militating against effective records management in the study area.

Finally, strategies that could be taken to overcome the problems includes; employment of qualified personnel, provision of modern equipment for storing records, provision of adequate funds and adoption of information technologies were indicated by the study to ameliorate the problems identified. The strategies are in agreement with the view of Tower (2004) who suggested that adoption of ICT, adequate storage facilities and funds are generally recommended for good records management.

CONCLUSION

Considering the above, the study concludes that there exist problems of records management in Gboko Local Government Area. The problems arises from the fact that the personnel handling

Records Keeping and Good Governance in Gboko Local Government Area Benue State

records are inexperienced, inadequate funds, lack of adequate space and poor storage facilities among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were proffered.

1. Professional archivists or record managers should be recruited to manage local government records effectively.
2. Standard storage facilities should be procured, preferably insulated cabinets. This will help to safeguard records in case of fire disaster.
3. Adequate priority should be given to record management through adequate budgetary provision. This will help to procure the necessary materials.
4. Adequate space should be provided for proper arrangement of records. This will ensure easy filing, storing and retrieval as well as help in reducing piling of files on tables and floors in offices.
5. Records personnel should be encouraged to attend seminars, conferences and workshops. This will help in updating their knowledge and skills in records management.

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