THE NEED FOR AN INTEGRATED RECORDS MANAGEMENT IN THE MUSLIM STUDENTS' SOCIETY OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the need for records management in the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria. The problems of records creation, control and management were highlighted and solutions advanced. As a way forward, the paper discusses the basic elements of records management members of the Muslim Students' Society need to know and master.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Different scholars have variously defined records. However, a more encompassing definition of records is provided by the National Archives Decree (1992). The decree defines records as all papers, registers, printed matters, books, plans, Maps, Photographs, Microfilms, Anematographic films Sound recordings, or other documentary materials regardless of physical form or characteristic made or received by public or state office or by business houses or companies, private bodies and individuals in pursuance of their legal obligations or in connections with the transaction of their legal obligations or in connection with the transaction of their proper business.

From the above definition, three basic characteristics of records could be identified as thus:

(a) Documentary materials created or received by an individual or organization.

(b) The created or received documentary materials have to be about the individual or organization, or some relationship having to be established.

(c) The Documentary materials created or received should be of help to the individual or organization in pursuing his or its legal obligation or objectives.

Records are therefore very important administrative, historical and legal tools. Apart from serving as sources for information, direction and instruction, records are used to justify official activities and to explain and record policy decisions. They are also used as useful sources for good decision-making, strategic planning and successful implementations, as well as good policy

formulation and implementation. In addition, records are primary sources of information for research. Above all, records are fortune, accountant and evidence.

Therefore, the need to ensure proper records creation, control, organization; evaluating aid dispositions in both public and private organization has received the attention of both libraries and archivist. For instance, Popoola (2000) investigated the records management systems in the civil service of Oyo State, while Ibrahim (1991) investigated record maintenance and organization in Bayero University Kano, and Its Implication for Decision Making. Both have concluded that records information is indispensable tool for good decision making, articulate policy formulation and successful implementation. They therefore called for a well defined record management programme in all organizations.

While much have been written on the need for record management in private and public organizations, from the literature perused, it seems nothing is written on the need for records management in professional association and societies, at least in the Nigerian context. Professional Associations/Societies abound in Nigeria. Apart from contributing in the development of individual professional association/societies no doubt contribute meaningfully to the national development. It is therefore significant to find out the problems of records creation, control and management in these organizations with the view to proffering solutions. It is the belief of this presenter that if professional associations/societies would imbibe the culture of record management, a lot of accusations, allegations, mistrust and other problems would be avoided.

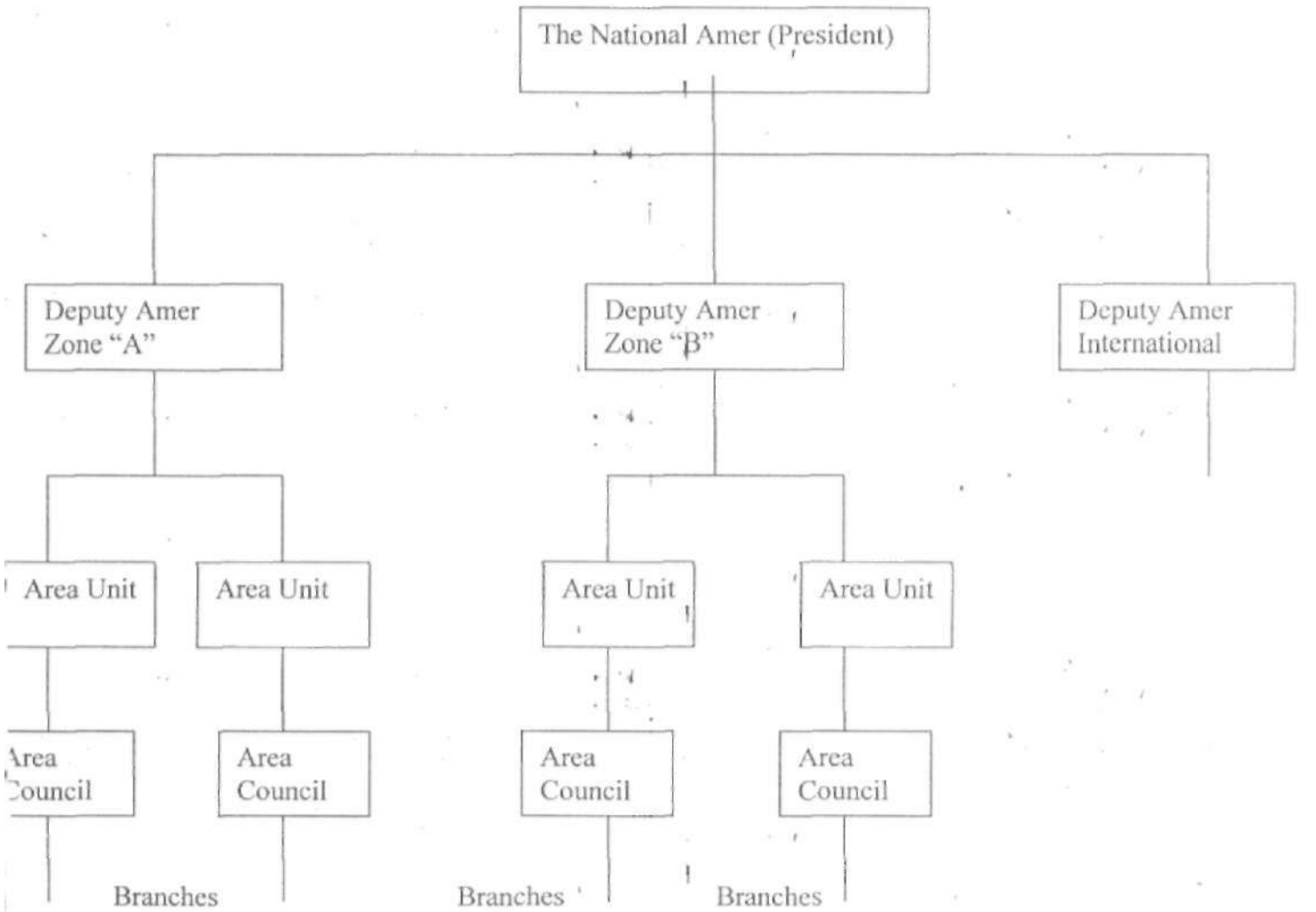
It is therefore in view of the above that this presentation discusses the need for records management in the Muslim Students' Society (MSS) of Nigeria. The society is no doubt one of the oldest society/association in the country. Apart from this it has national spread, it is not only

found in every state of the Federation, but also in all the two levels of education; post primary and tertiary institutions.

THE MUSLIM STUDENTS' SOCIETY AND ITS STRUCTURE

The Muslim Students' Society (MSS) of Nigeria is a society made up of people joined together by common belief, law, etc. for a particular purpose. The objectives for which the society is set up to achieve are usually well defined and stated, and the society work assiduously for the realization of the objectives. Figure 1 below shows the structure of the society.

FIGURE 1: THE STRUCTURE OF THE MSS



In order for this association to efficiently and effectively realize its set up objectives, the MSS is run through various offices. First of all the country is divided into two parts for easy administration; the northern part, called zone A and the south, called zone B. The association is headed by National the Amer (President), assisted by three Vice-Amer (Vice presidents); one International and the other two in charge for the two zones. Each zone is made up of state area units, area councils and branches. Each of these levels described above is managed by a set of officers which include the Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer or Financial Secretary, Assistant Treasurer or Assistant Financial Secretary, P.R.O. Assistant PRO, Editor-in-Chief, Librarian, etc.

2.0 RECORDS CREATION AND CONTROL

The MSS engages in all sorts of activities and events, which invariably constitute the major sources of information records they formally and informally create and keep in documented and non-documented formats. The various official mentioned above are involved in the writing of a lot of correspondences, memoranda, reports, etc. either intra or extra, or even both, occasionally the organization organizes lectures, seminars, conferences, workshops, and other ceremonies such as anniversaries, lunching, commissioning, etc. All these activities are information intensive. Therefore, the greater quantity of information required for the effective and efficient running of the society is contained in the internally generated records.

Although a lot of records are daily being created and received by the various offices of the society, it is obvious that their control and management seems to be invariably absence. Alegbeleye (1990), Bower and Albadi (1989) and Dawna and Biu (1993) averred that there is no formal way of controlling and managing records not only in professional association /society but

also public and private organizations. It is in the light of the above that many scholars, such as Unugbe (1990), Evborokhai (1990) and Esse (1992) lament the poor situation of record management in Nigeria.

Ukwu (1995) posits that the issue of records management is more apparent in this era when there is tremendous increase in paper work. The orchestrations and increase in records of incredible proportions as a result of the introduction and use of modern information and communication Technology (ICT) also call for radical changes in documentation, control and management of records.

3.0 PROBLEMS OF RECORDS CREATION, CONTROL AND MANAGEMENT

Although a lot of records are daily being created and generated from the various offices in the society, it is apparent that not all the offices care to properly create and generate records, even those that do, there appears to be no proper control, organization and management. Problems associated with non proper creation, control and management of records in the society have been identified as follows:

1. Lack of adequate knowledge and consciousness on the part of officials on the need, importance, functions, etc of records in their organizations. Also, sometime, officials are negligent and reluctant in creating and controlling records.
2. Lack of adequate funds: The MSS is sustained through membership registration fees, personal contribution and donations from individual and organizations. Very often, the little fund generated through these means is not always adequate to run the affairs of the associations, at times even stationeries become a problem.

   So because of lack of adequate knowledge and consciousness and because of lack of adequate funds, the society cannot employ professionals that can effectively and efficiently handle and manage their records.

3. Offices created to run the affaits of the society are Elective/selective and transitional. The tenure of officers usually last between 1-2 years. Although there are handing over whenever there is change of leadership, very often, many records are discovered to be missing, improperly organized and sometimes not even created.
4. Lack of permanent secretariat: The society does not have a permanent place that serve as it secretariat. In most cases, the secretariat moves with the new officials, especially the president or Amer. This constitutes serious problems not only in forms of records control and management but also other administrative problems.
5. Since there is no permanent secretariat for the society, there is absence of equipment for the storage and preservation of record materials.

4.0 OVERCOMING PROBLEMS OF RECORDS CREATION, CONTROL AND MANAGEMENT

In order to ensure transparency, accountability and continuity, and success in the Muslim Student Society (MSS), records must be readily and appropriately created, well processed, systematically organized, used, evaluated and timely disposed. For this to be achieved the following programme should be embarked by the society:

1. All members of the society should strive hard to acquire adequate knowledge, be conscious and diligent on the need, role, importance and functions of records creation, control and management in the associations/societies. It is in the light of this, that this presenter would like to commend the National Muslim Student Society (MSS), especially the leadership for organizing this timely workshop and for coming up with such an important topic as record management. There is no doubt to the fact that this gesture has demonstrated the uncontestable desire of the National leaders of MSS of the need to ensure accountability, transparency and prosperity. Above all, the need for record management at this time is the desire of the National leadership to propel the society into a greater height.

2. Becoming conscious of the need for records management in the society, official of the association should, out of the little funds generated, always make funds available for the creation and sustaining records creation and management. 'Adequate stationeries, such as papers and files should be provided to all the officials.
3. To ensure records created/generated are properly, documented and not missed during transitions, the following measures should be taken:
    (a) Any record created by any officer should be accessioned, documented and filed. A photocopy of such records should be sent to a central pool to be created in the organization.
    (b) An official among the executive officer, like the PRO, Editor-in-Chief or the library officer should be designated as the custodian of these photocopies documents.
4. The issue of lack of permanent secretariat is to some greater extent minimized in the MSS. On most campuses, MSS have a permanent t place that serves as its secretariat, sometime as small as the Amer's room, other times as big as a place in the Mosque. And some branches have even libraries. The MSS can therefore use these mentioned places for their records keeping. For branches that do not have permanent secretariat, effort should be made to have one where they could be sending their records, and other essentials for safekeeping.
5. For now the only important equipments that the society that might need for record keeping and preservation are the files and iron cabinets. Therefore, effort should be made to make these available.
6. Finally, effort should be made by the society to entrench the ethics of record management. Records management increases efficiency by providing speedy access to the right information at the right time. It also provides legal protection by reducing legal exposure. Additionally, record management increases effectiveness in conducting organized activities because the value and unique organization by resources is being fully exploited. Lastly and more importantly good leadership begins with the adoption of functional record management system.

5.0 ELEMENT OF RECORD MANAGEMENT

Records Management Society of Great Britain (1997) has summed up the various definitions of record management proffered by many scholars as: systematic control, organization, access to protection of an organisation's information in whatever format, from its creation, through its use, to its permanent retentions or legal destructions. The goal of records management is to ensure that only the right type of records are created, organized and made available. Thus records management consists of the following basic elements:

5.1. **ORGANISATION OF RECORDS**

One of the most basic elements of records management is organization. Systematic organization of records not only arranges record material in a particular order that will ensure quick and easy retrieval but also give a complete overview of records of an organization. Record organization in record management is achieved through description rather than cataloguing. Record description is the essential element of record management that led the record resources to proper exploitation by the users. The description produces the records finding list that confirm all the holdings of a record center. The description should give at least original title, subject, volumes, and dates. Other information could include nature and form, series, scope, etc.

FILING OF RECORDS

One way of achieving effective organization of records is through filing. Filing is a process of arranging and sorting records so that they may be found quickly when needed. It may also be defined as the classified and arrangement of collected records for reference and preservation. Many scholars such as Thomas, et al (1983) have identified three basic filing techniques as Alphabetical, Numeric and Alphanumeric. Olayemi (21998) added the fourth technique which is called Chronological.

While Alphabetical suggests arrangement in alphabetical order by the name or topic of a document, segregating records do Chronological by time sequence. In Numerical filing, each item filed has a number and allocation of the material is by numerical sequence. Alphanumeric is a filing system that combines both alphabets and numbers.

How are Alphabets, Numbers and Alphanumbers assigned to records? First of all the mode of arrangement and organizing should be determined. Three mode of organization have been suggested as thus:

1. The action to which the records relates within the Associations. In this case the various classes of activities performed by the association will provide the basis for establishing subject headings under which file Unit must be grouped, e.g. Da awah, lectures, IVCs, etc.
2. Organisational structure. In this case, the various offices of the Association would file records.
3. The third mode is by subject. This is mostly adopted for records that do not arise from the organizational activities.

Examples of all the three above are shown below:

	Alphabetical	Numeric	Alphanumeric
Public Enlightenment	P	3	P3
- Daawah	D.lcPD	11.c31	P31
- Lectures	L1.ePL	71.c37	P37
Training Programme	T	9	T9
- Leadership	TL	97	T97
- Tutorial Classes	TT	99	TT99

Each records Unit will bear the following:

MSS/ABU/P MSS/ABU/3 MSS/ABU/P3

STORAGE OF RECORDS

Records created should be properly stored in order to preserve and secure them. Most records created and received are kept in files which in turn are kept in iron cabinets. Although there are other filing equipments such as Mobile and Circular filing bays, Skand veyer, automated card file, etc. for filing records, the iron cabined could be sufficient this association.

6.0 **PRESERVATION AND SECURITY OF RECORDS**

Records should properly be guarded against any agent of destruction such as insects, rodents, fire and theft. Files and file cabinet should always be kept clean by constant dusting and fumigation. Records can be preserved and secured by making photocopies, binding and rebinding, jacketing and rejacketting, and retaggirg.

7.0 **RETRIEVAL OF RECORDS**

The volumes of records created, general and stored are immense that without the existence of finding aids, one could waste a whole day searching without being able to trace a singe required record. Such state of affairs would not only be time consuming but would be extremely unsatisfactory to both keeper and searchers. Therefore, apart from using the filing systems, which could be in class list, simple list, and special list to retrieval record information, others such as inventors, calendar, indexes and guides could as well be used.

8.0 **EVALUATION AND DISPOSITION OF RECORDS**

It is very important that the records of an organization should periodically be evaluated in order to reassess their historical present and future value. The whole essence of evaluation is to determine those records to be retained by the organization and those to be disposed or destroyed. UNESCO (1993) suggested that the type of records to be disposed vary from organization to

organization, but they generally include non policy making records; low level administrative records; low frequency of reference records; and records that do not have any historical and legal value

Many scholars pointed out that there is no need for organization to continue to keep records that are no longer useful and would not serve any purpose. Apart from occupying unnecessary space, these records contribute in increasing search time because of the volume of records to go through before the required record is retrieved. They also increase the cost of record management in terms of storage preservation and conservation. In a nutshell, the ultimate results of evaluation and disposition as observed by Ibrahim (1991) are fewer records, better records; more effective records, and more economical records.

CONCLUSION

The paper discussed the role, characteristics, function and importance of records in professional associations and societies in general and Muslim Student Society in particular. The problems of record creation, control, and organization management in professional associations/societies were highlighted and solutions proffered. The paper concluded that now more than ever, professional associations/societies need record management. As a way forward, the paper introduced and practically demonstrated the elements of records managing associations and societies members need to know.

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