

CHAPTER 16

HOLDINGS AND CHALLENGES OF ARCHIVES IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Not many know about the current deplorable state of records in the National Archives of Nigeria. Although the institution was established in 1954, the policy thrusts of the organization have continued to attract challenges, which have remained unresolved decades after its inauguration. The attempts made by stake holders that would have translated into concrete development have, more often than not, resulted in near successes or abysmal failures. This is because institutional structures which were intended to leverage and place her on a firm footing have only succeeded in serving both the interests of the stock holders within and outside the department. This paper argues that the National Archives records would remain under threat for as long as the organization remains subsumed under a federal ministry arrangement. Implementing the Records Management Programmes with a view to enhancing storage, preservation, protection and retrieval would continue to fail as a result of opportunism, insincerity, ineptitude and self centeredness, which remain the bane of archives administration in the National Archives of Nigeria today. Consequently, our national heritage will continue to slide and sink into wretched state. The paper advocates that the idea of retaining the National Archives of Nigeria under the federal ministry arrangement should be jettisoned without further delay while the commissioning process be revived and fast tracked.

It concludes that if the National Archives is to continue to enjoy the patronage of its documents by both local and international scholars, then, irregularities associated with using the archives must be addressed. If not, scholars may begin to look for alternative sources of writing.

Origin of the National Archives of Nigeria

The origin of the National Archives of Nigeria is not obscure; it was established in 1954. The story of the process which finally climaxed in its establishment actually commenced in August 1949 when Professor Kenneth Onwuka Dike, an eminent historian, was awarded a fellowship by the Colonial Social Research Council, London, to carry out a field work in connection with his Doctoral research. It was in the course of his field work for his doctorate thesis that he came across valuable historical records exposed to decay and destruction in government offices and others half ruined by insects and damp.¹

On his return to Nigeria after obtaining his Doctorate, Dr Dike offered to work for the recovery of the documents without any salary! In 1951, he undertook a survey of existing records with a view to drawing out plans for the establishment of the Nigerian Records Office. His report - a 27 page booklet titled: "Report on the Preservation and Administration of Historical Records and the Establishment of a Public Record Office in Nigeria", which was accepted by the Governor-General in Council, Sir John Macpherson, was published by the Nigerian Government in 1954. The gist of professor Dike's recommendation was that all the records of the Nigerian government, which were no longer being used for the day-to-day administration, should be housed in one Central Record Office.²

Indeed, before Dike's intervention, documents were unbound and kept in record rooms and filing cabinet of each government department.³ The National Archives of Nigeria, then known as the Nigerian Record Office, was therefore, established on 1st April, 1954 by an administrative order. Thus, Professor Kenneth Onwuka Dike

was able to find adequate and permanent solution to the problem of storage and preservation of the bulk of Nigerian government records, which were (till that period) kept in the custody of each creating department or the government agency.⁴

The significant development to note during this period was the enactment of a constitutive legislation, the Public Archives Ordinance No. 43 of 1957, which took effect on the 14th November, 1957. This act empowered the National Archives of Nigeria to establish as many branches as might be deemed necessary and convenient. It led to the establishments of a permanent building at Ibadan in 1958, Kaduna in 1962 and Enugu in 1963. These were significant pointers to the birth of the National Archives of Nigeria. Dr. Dike headed the department in an ad hoc and honorary capacity until 31st December, 1963. We recognize this great Nigerian as the founder of the National Archives of Nigeria and salute him for his vision and dedication.

Functions, Nature and extent of its Holdings

An Archive is an organic institution charged with the responsibility of preservation of records. In other words, 'Archives' is a place or buildings where record are kept, cared for and made accessible for use. Perseveration of records is the most important function of an Archival institution. It is the duty of an archival institution to survey, locate and acquire public records and arrange for their reception, processing, description, storage and rehabilitation. The records are also protected from dust, insects, direct sunlight, theft etc. In the final analysis, the function of an archival institution remains that of acquiring/ safeguarding the cultural heritage of a nation and allowing access to the records so preserved.

The second meaning is an academic one. Archives, in the words of Jenkinson, the British Archivist, "are the documents accumulated by a natural process in the course of the conduct of affairs of any kind, public or private, at any date, and preserved thereafter for reference, in their own custody by persons responsible for the affairs in question

or their successors". In other words, Archives are records created by one organization or the other during the transaction of their legal business. Schellenberg, the American Archivist, submits that records are 'all books, papers, maps, photographs or other documentary materials regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by any public or private institution in pursuance of its legal obligation.' etc.

All archives are records, but not all records are archives

There is a difference between records and archives. Records which have been processed and have "matured" are referred to as 'Archives'. The point is that archivists give different meanings to archives in order to suit the purpose of their respective countries. For instance, in the National Archives of Nigeria, 'Archives' is defined in the Nigerian Public Archives Ordinance of 1957 as "all public records, documents and other historical matter of every kind, nature and description, which are in the custody of any public office or which may be transferred or acquired by the National Archives of Nigeria".

The National Archives of Nigeria is not only responsible for the 'preservation of the Nation's Heritage', its duty includes that of regulating archives administration and records management in Nigeria, public and private. That is why we say that an archival institution is established "to collect, register and preserve those memories of the past..."⁵ Archives are an organized body of records of any private or public agencies or institution, which are adjudged worthy of permanent preservation for administrative or research purposes. Precisely, one could say that the functions of the National Archives of Nigeria include the following:

- Acquisition and transfer of records, including the repatriation of the archival heritage of the nation.
- Preservation of records in their original forms to maintain their sanctity.
- Preservation of Archives through physical repairs, rehabilitation

and security.

- Implementation of Records Management Programmes to enhance storage, preservation, protection and retrieval of records.⁶

Specifically, an archivist primary duty is concerned with the safe custody, protection and rehabilitation of documents entrusted to his care.⁷ The records could be maps, plans, photographs, diaries, reports, letters etc. They could also be files, loose sheets or bound volumes. Records are usually in different sizes and shapes, depending on the nature of business performed by the individual or organization that produces them. The significant point to note here is that for any record to become archives, they must be adjudged worthy of permanent preservation from the point of view of the archivist and the agencies that created them.

The holdings of the National Archives of Nigeria are spread across various zonal and branch offices. As noted above, an ordinance to establish the National Archives of Nigeria was passed in 1957. In 1958, the first purpose-built archives structure in tropical Africa was erected on the University College Ibadan campus in Nigeria,⁸ and for over five decades, it has remained the responsibility of the National Archives to acquire and care for the archival records of national significance. The vast collections constitute not only the integral part of our national records, they also reflect the process of our development and the richness of our heritage. The National Archives in Ibadan, Kaduna and Enugu, which constitute the zonal offices, are in permanent buildings with about 3,000 linear meters of archives in each office. In all, the three zonal offices holds 9000 linear meter of records. The rest of the archives in our custody are in rented accommodations in the branch offices and some are in the Federal Secretariat buildings in the states. The additional branches established were opened in Akure and Ilorin in January 1985, Port Harcourt and Calabar in 1986, while Owerri was opened in 1987. Abeokuta and Jos were also opened in 1989.⁹ Branch offices were

also established in Benin, Calabar, Sokoto and Bornu with the headquarters in Abuja.

The holdings of the National Archives in the three major zonal repositories in Ibadan, Enugu and Kaduna include consular dispatches, records of the protectorate administration, records of the Chief Secretary Offices, Provincial and District Office Records of local governments. There are also Civil War collections comprising printed matters, tapes and discs. In addition, there are records of various ministries and parastatals. The zonal offices' records also include those of the defunct public institutions such as the Federal Electoral Commission, Code of Conduct Bureau, Nigerian Grains Board, Presidential Liaison Offices and records of some political parties in Nigeria. In addition to this, rare Africana series and printed materials such as the annual reports and gazettes are found in the archives libraries.

Ibadan, in South-west Nigeria, served as the National Archives headquarters between 1954 and 1986. Its holdings include records of the Central Administration, (Consular era, (1849-1899), the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, Ministries and Parastatals), the Western Provinces and Western Region, individuals, private organizations, corporate bodies, newspapers and government publications.¹⁰ Part of the holdings of the Ibadan National Archives include records of the Federal Ministry of Education, dating back to 1928 and those of the Federal Ministry of Labour/Ministry of Health, which were both created in 1954. The records of the Ministry of Transport and Aviation, which was created in 1954, and which in 1955 eventually became Civil Aviation Department are also in the custody of the National Archives, Ibadan. Apart from that, the Ibadan Archive has the records of the Department of Marketing and Exports, which was established on September 1, 1948 in her custody. Records of the Federal Department of Commerce and Industry, Federal Department of Antiquity, the Public Works Department, Federal Police Department etc are domicile in the Ibadan Archive.¹¹

The National Archives, Ibadan, also houses copies of newspapers from the beginning of journalism in Nigeria when *Iwe Irohin*, the first indigenous newspaper, was published in 1859. It is also significant to note that the First Edition of Nigerian Tribune was published on the 16th November, 1949, while the first Nigeria TIV Newspaper, *Mwanger u Tiv*, was published in September, 1949.¹²

There are also records of the Western Provinces and the Western Region, which now comprise Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo, Delta and Edo States. There are records of individuals, private organizations, newspapers and government publications. The records of the Chief Secretary's Office (CSO), which include records of previous administrations prior to the amalgamation dating from 1849-1859, (Admiralty Despatches to and from the Consuls) are also kept in the Ibadan Archives.¹³ The National Archives of Nigeria not only hold Newspaper Publications from 1859, it also has among its holdings Intelligence Reports on the socio-anthropological history of Nigeria communities. It holds Nigeria Gazette from 1903 to date and over 5000 photographs of pre and post-colonial activities in Nigeria.¹⁴ The list of records in the Ibadan office cannot be exhausted here.

But most of the records of the pre-consular period, such as the Admiralty dispatches to and from the Consuls are available at the Public Record Office in London among the Admiralty dispatches and the Foreign Office papers (FO2 series). These dispatches form the best source material for the study of the political and economic activities of the coastal towns in Nigeria (1899-1949).¹⁵ Although the Royal Niger Company administered parts of Nigeria from 1886 to 1889, only few documents relating to the activities of this company are available in other record groups. The Royal Niger Company records are, however, available at the U.A.C headquarters in Liverpool! This is not to be wondered at; one could say that it was a deliberate policy on the part of the colonial administration to take away even the documentary treasures of the colonial enterprise it

ran on departure.

Kaduna National Archives in the north-western *Nigeria* houses the department's oldest records dating back to the 12th century A.D. These collections include records of colonial and post-colonial governance in Northern Nigeria, the secretariat of Northern Provinces, Premier's Office, Ministries and Parastatals, Arabic manuscripts, activities of Muslim traders, missionaries and adventures. Although contact with the Europeans dated back to the first half of the 15th century, there are no records in the National Archives of Nigeria depicting this period of Nigerian history.

Enugu in South-eastern Nigeria began hosting the National Archives of Nigeria in 1958. Among its holdings are Consular Dispatches, records of the Protectorate Administrations, the Civil Secretary, Provincial and District Offices, Local Government and Native Administration, Judiciary and Ecclesiastics, Civil War Collections, Ministries and Parastatals.¹⁶ In fact, it could be said that the National Archives of Nigeria has the following group of records in its holding:

- (a) Official records from 18th century to date.
- (b) Holds Nigeria Gazette from 1903 to date.
- (c) Holds over 5800 photographs of pre and post-colonial activities in Nigeria.
- (d) Holds Newspaper publication from 1859.
- (e) Holds intelligence reports on socio-anthropological history of Nigeria communities.

The growth in the holdings of the National Archives, especially in the early days of establishment, vastly increased its public utilization over the years. But this growth has not really endured as the expected development in the management of the Nigerian Archival Institution is suspect and being questioned by scholars in recent times. Even in the area of staff attendance to searchers, questions are being raised. It is also being said that there is no uniformity in the cost of

registration being charged by some zonal offices.¹⁷

Challenges and Prospect

The National Archives started in a small way unlike other new establishments, and it would seem that by policy or design it has remained so all these years. This fact was borne out of the ignorance of the proper functions of archives departments in development. As a peculiar area in the information science, early pioneers or executors of archival programs in the fifties did not understand the actual demands of an archival establishment. The growth of the archival institution therefore has not only been at a slow pace and in a piecemeal fashion, its practices continue to run on a hit and a miss basis at both the federal and state levels,¹⁸ except in Lagos State where Lagos State Records and Archives Bureau (LASRAB) is increasingly becoming a major stakeholder in the archival industry, not only in Nigeria but in the entire Africa continent.¹⁹

The granting of independent status to federal and state archival establishments in this country has led to the promotion of the deepest commitment to programmes that are translating to the enhancement and preservation of vital documents in both public and private sectors of this country for the benefits of the people. We are all living witnesses to what is currently going on in Lagos State Records and Archives Bureau (LASRAB) under the leadership of the first Director General, Bolaji Uthman. LASRAB was established in May, 2007 to take permanent custody, regulate and control records and archives of the Government of Lagos State, the Local Government and other documents of value within or outside the State as may be acquired by the State.²⁰ It is important to note that LASRAB was commissioned on the 28th of February, 2012.

Even now, the functions and objectives of the federal and most state archival agencies have not been properly defined. It is not even an exaggeration to state that some state governments in Nigeria do not still recognize the need for the establishment of an archives department

in order to preserve the people's heritage. The inadequacies existing in the federal archival law and state regulation tends to limit the power of these important agencies of government in the disposal of the public record. The flow of information, which is vital for efficiency and economic development of the state, is consequently limited. Since the archives law and regulations are merely obligatory functions, their performances are invariably haphazard and limited in scope. Thus, by omission or commission, we deny the citizenry and other institutions the right to information and the privilege of getting much needed data for planning and development.

Significantly, the issue of funding has continued to limit the prospects and relevance of the National Archives of Nigeria. It could even be said that inadequate funding from the Federal Government has become the bane of the Archives. It is important to emphasize that archival agencies are established to preserve the documentary heritage of a people. When all is lost the archives are our last hope. It is the collective memory of the people. The archival institution, unlike the library, keeps heritage materials such that when lost, they are lost forever.²¹

Records in the holding of the National Archives of Nigeria include intelligence reports on the socio-anthropological history of Nigeria communities. Unfortunately, the activities of the archives are still being grossly misunderstood while the overall result of archives administration remains in the low priority rating of most, if not all the governments in Nigeria. The needs of the National Archives in the federation are put at the bottom of the heaps while in many cases, these passionate demands for proper administration of the public archives are met only after extreme pressures from a courageous Director who knows his onions or sympathetic consideration from the Information Minister or the Permanent Secretary of the ministry under which the National Archives is expected to be funded.

Hitherto, in order to give due emphasis to the objectives of archives institution in administration, the plea was that budgetary allocations

(recurrent, capital and other charges votes) should be reflected in the yearly approved budget of government with a view to making the Nigerian Archival institution functional and vibrant. Part of the plan was that programmes, implementation and performance should be reviewed from time to time to meet the needs of the clients and the administration. In preparing the sectorial budget, consideration was to be given to new problems that arose from government departments, such as in the area of electronic data processing micrographics—the current mediums used by administrative departments. Above all, there was a need to design a policy of funding archives administration at both state and federal levels. Those were part of the objectives then. Lately, at the beginning of each year, zonal and branch heads are required to send their Action Plans for the year to the headquarters. Such Action Plans usually contains a list of their needs and intended expenditure for the year. At the end of the year, very little or nothing would have happened as requests for Action Plans are treated and used for mere administrative routines only.

But such funding problems persist even today and that explains why within the Nigerian archival institution, evidences abound depicting the continual physical decline and degeneration of archives. Sadly, the archival profession continues to be plagued by issues which were already there at its inception as some of the organizational problems and difficulties which exist today have been with our profession since its establishment 57 years ago. The Public Archives Ordinance of 1957 was not adequate for the proper administration and management of archives in the public service of Nigeria. Today, this inadequacy and funding difficulties have continued to hamper further progress in respect of creating data centers for information management and services in this country.²² The Commissioning process, which was intended to transform the National Archives into a parastatal, is currently stuck. This would have meant sufficient autonomy and improved funding for the institution. Digitization too cannot continue for lack of funds for the zonal and branch offices.

In fact, I can tell you that the prospect that funding will improve for the National Archives of Nigeria in this fiscal year is uncertain. This is because the National Archives Director was *not* 'physically unavailable' to defend "Archives budget"²³ when the heads of other ministries and parastatals were defending their budgets early in 2012. I was expecting to but did not see or hear my Director defend 'Archives Budget' on the air during this period. One can only conclude that the Federal Ministry of Information, under which the National Archives of Nigeria is currently subsumed, does not appreciate the importance of the archives and therefore does not reckon with her needs. Hence, the question of preparing, presenting and defending a budget at the National Assembly did not even arise for the Director, National Archives of Nigeria. What this translates into is that there can be no funding for both the zonal and branch offices of the National Archives in the current fiscal year. This funding issue is bad news for the archival records as the prospect for respite for the threatened/damaged records is further reduced. Thus, the security of the archival documents in the custody of the National Archives of Nigeria remains under threat for as long as funds remain unavailable for administrative and maintenance purposes.

The funding issue is also related to the lack of functional micrographics in the reprographic sections of the National Archives. It would be recalled that Mr. Momodu Umoru, a United Kingdom trained Archives Photographer, severally tried to call the attention of the authority to the unacceptable archival administration in the Enugu and Ibadan Archives. In fact, in his petition to the Hon. Minister, dated 4th December 1991, he referred to the "un-archival situation" that was prevalent in the National Archives of Nigeria and the overriding needs to have that basic "millimeter format micro films functional by the full provision of those basic infrastructure and not just haphazardly".²⁴ It is important to note that although Mr. Umoru strident calls ultimately led to the provision of functional micrographics and their disposables for the Ibadan zonal office. These facilities were only marginally used and were soon completely

jettisoned by the Ibadan Archives, apparently for lack of fund to sustain the microfilming of records.

Although microphotography and conservation should be indispensable in the day to day management of an archival set up, regrettably, our reprographic sections across the nation are currently far from being functional by any stretch of imagination and that is unfortunate! Mr. Umoru held that our National Archives was not functional because of the inability of successive managements of the department to get the attention of the power base so that some basic infrastructure can be provided. His demand then was that the 35 millimeter format, which was the standard in any Archival institution anywhere in the world, and which pride itself with the following hard and software, were then non-existent in the National Archives:

1. 35 millimeter micro films,
2. Test strips Pre-exposed,
3. Chemicals,
4. Other expendable

Hardware required included:

1. Microfilm machine
2. Processors
3. Transmission Densitometer
4. Readers/ Reader Printer
5. Negative Splices
6. Diazo or Vesicular Roll to Roll Duplicating Machines.²⁵

All functional archival institutions must have on its drawing board a simple micrographics programme designed to microfilm all records that have found their ways into the archives. These are records that must have been examined and adjudged worthy of permanent preservation. In Europe or America, original copies of archival documents are never given to searchers. Searchers can only access the duplicate microfilm such as 'diazo or vesicular'. We have not

been able to attain that level yet in the National Archives of Nigeria though it was established in 1954.

Honestly, Umoru believed in 1991 that there was absolute need to put the records on "microfilm before they deteriorated to a point of no return". Today, we are inching closer and closer to 'the point of no return', which Mr. Umoru referred to over two decades ago. Even today unfortunately, the digitization programme of the National Archives of Nigeria has run into a hitch as funds cannot be accessed. We can only cry to God to help us in this 'David and Goliath struggle'.

Indeed, the survival of archival materials and access to them for historical research depends largely on the conservation and preservation efforts of heritage institutions. The organic nature of most documentary materials and the not-too-friendly tropical environment in which they are housed make heritage preservation a daunting challenge which these institutions in Nigeria have to grapple with. One cannot but fully agree with Loveridge, the great English political writer, who said: "to learn from past experience is not an admission of failure, it is rather an addition to wisdom." I appreciate the unconditional need to ensure that the nation's heritages are well preserved.

There is no gain-say in the fact that historical discourses have always depended greatly on the archival sources. Although it would be wrong and even ridiculous to assume that historical discourses and writings should depend exclusively on the archival sources, there is no doubt that the archival source remains a veritable source of historical construction and reconstruction. The National Archives of Nigeria is replete with valuable historical information and data which have aided and have continued to serve as a viable source of information for historians and other scholars from the world over.

I believe that it was the necessity to continue to sustain these invaluable heritage materials in our custody and maintain the office generally that prompted some zonal and branch

offices to embark on a policy of sourcing for fund aggressively. Unfortunately, the cost of registration of searchers, which has lately began to constitute a source of maintenance for the zonal and branch offices of the National Archives, is beginning to engender disharmony between the historian/researcher and the search room staff of the National Archives. Some foreign scholars are now asking questions as to why there is no uniformity in the cost of registration being charged by the National Archives branch and zonal offices monthly.

Lately, undergraduate and post graduate students (particularly those from History Department) often complain about having to register on a monthly basis and pay exorbitantly for registration and photocopying. For instance, an undergraduate researcher from the University of Ibadan recently opined that the current drop in patronage in Ibadan Archives can only be explained by the high cost of registration and photocopying. On a similar note, not a few stakeholder of foreign origin have alluded to the exorbitant registration cost and have complained about the imbalance in the cost of registration between two zonal offices.²⁶ One may not be able to attribute the current drop in patronage by scholars to the unstable security climate and dwindling economic fortune that we are currently contending with in Nigeria. Even local students who should enjoy the benefit of concessionary rates are also brazenly denied such benefits. I think there should be uniformity in the cost of registration in the 3 zonal and the branch offices nationwide.

Virginia Woolf has noted that 'nothing has really happened until it has been recorded', but a situation where one daily witnesses the erosion of our recorded national heritage as a result of human negligence and error leaves a sour taste in the mouth. It is also important to bring to the fore the concern of United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization (UNESCO) regarding the world archives. While acknowledging the importance of the Archives, it captures its challenges as follows:

Documentary heritage reflects the diversity of languages, peoples and cultures. It is the mirror of the world and its memory. But this memory is fragile. Every day, irreplaceable parts of this memory disappear forever.²⁷

Although the above positional quote by UNESCO was made in respect of records outside the domain of an archival institution, it is important to note that a lot of documents within the National Archives of Nigeria are also in danger of going to rot unless something is promptly done to arrest this dangerous trend. This is not intended to alarm the public but as an insider, one should be concerned about what is going on within. It is disheartening to note that even within the National Archives of Nigeria, one could still see many endangered archival documents. Unfortunately, we are doing very little to rescue these very valuable endangered heritage materials from total destruction because of fund issue. The conservation, restoration and photographic units of the National Archives do not possess modern day facilities/equipment that could be used to rescue the records from their threatened state, which then means that the professionals in the National Archives of Nigeria are not adequately equipped to carry out their duties effectively. I can also tell you that where the equipment exists, the disposables required are not available.

The Abeokuta branch office of the National Archives of Nigeria has not been funded since 2008. The allocation from the headquarters in Abuja has remained zero since that time to date. How then are we to maintain the office and take care of the archives in our custody when we are starved of funds required for fumigation of repositories and other maintenance? Generally, archival programmes cost money, but the issue of funding has unfortunately become one of the several areas of challenges in the National Archives of Nigeria. Funds are needed to prosecute records survey exercises, purchase shelving materials, reprographic, binding, restoration and conservation needs. Fumigation exercises/storage equipment as well as the

emoluments of the personnel and general staff also requires funding.

"The appreciation and exploitation of archives has never been greater. But there is an awareness that archival material around the globe is in danger"²⁸ and that, I think, explains why international organization such as the British Library continue to fund programmes such as the Endangered Archives Programme, which is targeted at salvaging potential archival documentary materials that are presumed to be threatened. Even at the Abeokuta branch office of the National Archives, I found that endangered archives from Abeokuta South, which were acquired and initially deposited at the Ake Depository, finally got processed and were brought into the branch office. These acquired documents are Egba Council records, consisting of Ake, Owu and Gbagura records. We also have in our custody some records of the British Colonial Governments' activities and those of the early post-independence periods. Indeed, the covering dates of the acquired records falls between the 1890s and 1976. The 'endangered records' so acquired in 1993 by the Abeokuta branch of the National Archives have since formed part of those housed by the branch office and are being consulted by searchers from across the world today.

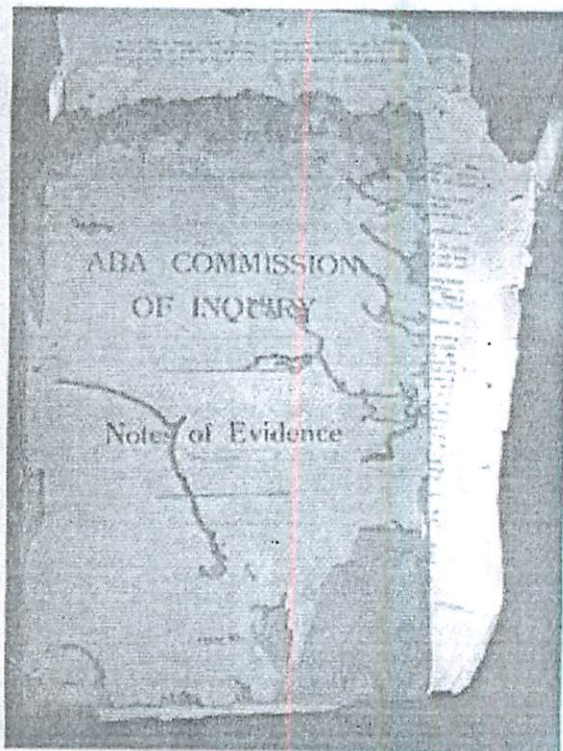
Regrettably, however, the acquisitions from Abeokuta South were inconclusive. Apart from the records from Abeokuta South Local Government area in Ogun State, which were acquired in 1993, I believe that there are still endangered 'Grassroots' records in nineteen (19) local government areas within the state waiting to be properly surveyed, rescued and rehabilitated. In other words, the twenty (20) local government areas in Ogun State may still have in their care records that are still waiting to be investigated and salvaged. I am talking about records that might be lost permanently to posterity if nothing is urgently done to rescue them. But in the National Archives of Nigeria, survey and acquisition tours now belong to the past. None that I know of has been undertaken in the last 20 years.²⁹

But the question may still be asked: why do we need to salvage these

endangered archives in the remaining 19 or 20 local government areas in Ogun State or even other places in Nigeria when they remain endangered even within an archival institution? How well have we taken care of those acquired in 1993 that are currently being consulted at the Abeokuta Branch Office? The point we are making is that Archives are endangered both by the actions or inaction of mankind and the forces of nature. It is an unfortunate retrogression that archives kept within the federal government establishment in Nigeria today are still susceptible to neglect or destruction. Vital records, which are fundamental to ensuring the survival of "truth, memory and justice", are gradually, but steadily being lost through the nonchalance of those who should know better.³⁰ It is imperative that survey and acquisition tours be urgently embarked upon by archivists so as to rescue whatever is left of the heritage of our nation. The records so acquired should be well processed and preserved. Archival documents should not remain under threat once they are able to get into the premises of an archival institution. But sadly, we still have endangered records within the National Archives of Nigeria across the country! This situation calls for serious concern.

The dearth of professional training programmes, coupled with the lack of resources continues to pose a threat in the National Archives of Nigeria. It is often the unintentional which is most damaging – the sheer neglect of documentary heritage for want of awareness of its significance. Today, as I speak to you, there are still many endangered archival documents in absolute state of disrepair and neglect within the Abeokuta branch and other branch/zonal offices of the National Archives of Nigeria. These are records of significant historical value and some of them were discovered dumped in the attic of the Archive premises. Even as I speak to you now, there are still some unprocessed records in the Abeokuta branch office that were acquired from Abeokuta South in 1993. These records have remained unprocessed because funds needed to purchase items required for processing have remained unavailable. This unwholesome and un-archival situation is unfortunately not peculiar to the Abeokuta Branch office

of the National Archives of Nigeria. The problem pervades the entire length and breadth of the National Archives of Nigeria.



Above are 2 images of vital archival documents that have been badly damaged as a result of poor maintenance culture within the Abeokuta branch office repository. (Aba Commission Report and Egba Council Record)

Source: National Archives Branch Office, Abeokuta.

The above images are just two of the many 'endangered' archival records that the Abeokuta Branch has in its holding. The first indigenous Archival Institution in Nigerian cannot afford this type of back-sliding at a time when other archival institutions are developing in leaps and bounds. The point we are making is (that) if heritage collections are frequently at risk even when housed in recognized archives, how much more endangered are private collections and even those that are yet to be acquired? Helping to bring unknown and unexploited private collections into the international research domain is one of the aims of the Endangered Archives Programmes.

But the question is: what guarantee do we have those new acquisitions would also not be more 'endangered' once they are brought within the Archives premises?

Unfortunately, the National Archives of Nigeria can best be described as a neglected heritage as it continues to slide and sink into a wretched state. The staff productively has become very low as some branch offices do not even have a reprographic/preservation section attached to them as they are either located in rented apartment or within the federal secretariat complex. With the increasing lack of funds and the rising cost of newspaper and magazine which are published in Nigeria, it is becoming steadily difficult for the archives to even secure all complimentary copies of all news papers for safe keeping. New acquisitions are not coming in as funds are not even available to undertake acquisition tours. The development that should follow the decentralization of the archives has failed to take place as the branch and zonal office have been thoroughly neglected over the years.

Among the many challenges that have bedeviled the Nigerian National Archives is the deliberate non-training for the staff of archives. While we find time to organize training and workshops for non staff, workers from other ministries and students from institutions, many staff members have not undergone any form of training in the last 20 years. There is no gain-say in the fact that it is important to organize training programmes for staff members too. Historians in Nigerian universities have taken the initiative in the use of archival records in the country and are given more attention and hearing in public institutions than the archival agencies of government. In essence, unless the capacity of the archival personnel is built to standard, the current pedestrian efforts at acquiring, preserving and disseminating information concerning the documentation at our disposal will be hardly noticed in the changing society of our time. The archive personnel cannot just afford not to be properly trained if he is to continue to play pivotal roles in the archival environment³¹

and the larger society.

It is also important to bring again to the foreground this unholy arrangement of retaining the National Archives of Nigeria under the civil service arrangement. It is necessary to reiterate that the Archive is a research institute by every standard. Unfortunately, it has been kept under the civil service arrangement for 57 years! This is the anomaly that has remained unchallenged and unchanged for too long. We need to urgently address this issue so that the National Archives of Nigeria can begin to function as Archives all over the world.

Not only that, the process of getting the National Archives of Nigeria commissioned is an area where the National Archives has been facing very serious challenges. It is important to note that the commissioning process was at its conclusive stage before it went awry after the exit of former Director, late Mr. Doyin Lafimihan. The Commission issue, which would lead to autonomy and better funding, is also related to the digitization of the records that are housed by the National Archives of Nigeria. There is an urgent need to recommence the digitization process, which got stalled because of the lack of sincerity or inadequate commitment of the main stakeholder and funding not sustained.

Funding remains the main issue that has continued to hamper the development of the National Archives of Nigeria. Grossly inadequate or total lack of resources continues to pose a threat in the Archives. It has not only prevented archivists from embarking on survey and acquisition tours for over two decades, but has also put on hold the erection of purpose built archival structures across the country. The purchase of shelving materials, reprographic, binding, restoration and conservation needs now belong to the past while the purchase of fumigation needs as well as the emolument of the personnel who embark on survey or acquisition tours is now impossible.

Apparently, the challenges of growth and development have turned

out to be a hill too steep to climb for the National Archives to the extent that it is currently in a comatose and one wonder if it would ever rise again. In the last 57 years of its existence, issues of inadequate infrastructural base and funding, either unavailable or mismanaged, have indeed contributed to archival deceleration. The decisive factor in archival management and development is, no doubt, funds, which would spur archival consolidation and expansion. The National Archives cannot develop where cheap long term funds are rare or inaccessible as is currently the case with us. It is necessary for all stakeholders to come together in order to tackle all the issues related to funding.

Housing (purpose built archival building) has also remained a major issue for the National Archives of Nigeria. Till date, out of three zonal and 12 branch offices in all the 6 geo-political zones, only the three zonal offices are in permanent archive buildings. The rest are in rented houses and federal secretariat complexes. The department, no doubt, needs to put up more purposely built archival structures. In addition, we do not have enough preservation and conservative techniques and tools. The ones presently in use are hopelessly archaic. There is an urgent need to acquire modern working tools. Apart from the above problems, the National Archives does not enjoy the benefit of adequate information technology; inadequate computer facilities, inadequate and sometimes, dysfunctional scanning machines continue to characterize the entire length and breadth of the National Archives of Nigeria. Funds to run the generators whenever there is power failure are almost impossible. In addition, operational vehicles are not available for survey and acquisition of records. In fact, the list is endless.

The National Archives has gone a long way but much still needs to be done by way of research and training to equip ourselves to deal adequately with new challenges. One major constraint before now was the dearth of local training centers where formal training in archival studies can be undertaken. On-the-job training was found

to be inadequate. Happily, however, arrangements were concretized with the University of Ibadan for the establishment of a programme of Archives Study in the Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies, (LARIS). It is important to note that many Archives institutions of other African countries already have their own training facilities. This is a best practice that Nigeria must emulate. Efforts must, therefore, be stepped up in this and other respects in order to bring archives administration in Nigeria to such pedestal that we can all be proud of.

Conclusion

The main question that arises from the preceding submission is this: is it right for the National Archives of Nigeria, a research institution by all standards, to remain perpetually subsumed and tossed from one Ministry to the other since inception 57 years ago? Placing the National Archives under the Federal Ministry of Information has led to unmitigated funding difficulties, which consequently has resulted in the unremitting decline and degeneration of many archival records. Therefore, keeping the National Archives under the Federal Ministry of Information or any Ministry at all should be jettisoned without further delay.

Indeed, implementing an effective archives and records management practices in any country requires funding, which is needed for acquisition, conservation and dissemination of information. As already noted, it was the recognition of this need some 57 years ago which motivated government's approval of the establishment of the Public Records Office, a fore runner to the present National Archives of Nigeria. Since we need to effectively safeguard our nation's heritage, which we have entrusted in the hands of the National Archives, it is imperative that the National Archives commissioning process is fast tracked. When this is achieved, it automatically translates into autonomy for the Archives, which would, in turn, lead to better funding. The National Archives of Nigeria must not remain subsumed under the Federal Ministry of Information if this

downward slide in its fortune is to be permanently controlled.

The future of the Nigerian archival records *can only be guaranteed* if successive administrations are sincerely burdened and committed to records keeping culture for the verification of rights, claims and education of the citizens of this country. The National Archives would need to be helped by the Federal Government in the execution of their policies, expanding their facilities and modernizing their processes to cope with the growth and development in the industry. The future of the archives in Nigeria lies in the ability of individuals and the government to faithfully acquire, preserve and facilitate accessibility to the accumulated experiences for the sake of posterity. It is important to make the Archives attractive to all the stakeholders.

We urge the federal government that the National Archives should be properly funded so as to provide sound basis for the development of the discourse of history and nation building. There is no doubt that the development of history has been greatly aided since its establishment of a link with the Archival sources. This is because documentary source materials constitute a veritable tool for the historians and other scholars as these records are frequently consulted by all. Preserving this source material is vital to the preservation of the social memory of any nation. This position cannot be compromised as it is not negotiable.

Finally, if the National Archives of Nigeria is to continue to enjoy the patronage of its documents by scholars/researchers, which includes among others, lawyers, chiefs and others anxious to get information for their own purposes, then, it is important to bring the cost of using the archives within the reach of the historians and other scholars so as to stem the ebb and flow in the fortune of the National Archives of Nigeria. It is important that we make the National Archive of Nigeria accessible to both local and international scholars. This can only be achieved when irregularities in the cost of registration and photocopying are stabilized and placed within affordable range. If

this serious issue is not addressed, scholars may begin to look for *alternative* sources of writing. It is imperative that we ensure that our *National Archives* function like archives anywhere *in the world*. It is important for the National Archives of Nigeria to rise up and tackle the challenges associated with ensuring the safety and security of the archives as it did in the past. It is important that we replicate LASRAB's success story and the dynamism of its leadership in other places in Nigeria. Historians and other researchers should endeavour to pay a visit to LASRAB in Lagos and see how the place is fast beginning to constitute a veritable source of archival documentation.

Notes and References

- 1 The Nigerian Archives, *Journal of the Society of the Nigerian Archivists*, (Nov. 1995). Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 3.
- 2 Guide to the Sources of Nigerian History, (1995) the National Archives of Nigeria, Lagos, p. 3.
- 3 Prof Bolanle Awe, extract from a paper presented at the Pan-African Conference on Archival Policies and Programmes in Africa, Nigeria. 30th October - 5th November, 1994, Abuja. P. 7.
- 4 Guide to the Sources of Nigerian History, (1995) the National Archives of Nigeria, Lagos, p. 3. Since 1954, the office has come under ten Ministries, and is currently a Department in the Federal Ministry of Information.
- 5 The National Archives of Nigeria: its Purpose, Development and Functions, p. 1. This is an apt definition of the purpose of an archival institution as given in the introduction to the first volume of the *Archaeologia Cantiana*, a 19th Century Publication. P. 1.
- 6 Nigeria: Good People Great Nation. National Archives of Nigeria, "Preserving the Nation Heritage", Federal Ministry of Information & Communication. 10th floor, Radio House, Garki, Abuja, Nigeria.

- 7 The National Archives of Nigeria: its Purpose, Development and Functions, p. 7.
- 8 Prof Bolanle Awe, extract from a paper delivered at the Pan-African Conference on Archival Policies and Programmes in Africa. 30th October - 5th November, 1994, Abuja: Nigeria. P. 7.
- 9 The Nigerian Archives, Journal of the Society of the Nigerian Archivists, (January & July 1990). Vol. 1, Nos. 2 & 3, p. 19.
- 10 Nigeria: Good People Great Nation. National Archives of Nigeria, "Preserving the Nation Heritage", Federal Ministry of Information & Communication. 10th floor, Radio House, Garki, Abuja, Nigeria. P. 8.
- 11 Guide to the Sources of Nigerian History, (1995) the National Archives of Nigeria, Lagos, p. 10.
- 12 Mrs. C. A. Ukwu, The Archives in Nigeria: its Mission and Vision, in The Nigerian Archives, Journal of the Society of the Nigerian Archivists, Vol. 2, No. 1, November, 1995. Mrs. Ukwu was a former Director of the National Archives of Nigeria, 1992-1999.
- 13 Guide to the Sources of Nigerian History, (1995) the National Archives of Nigeria, Lagos, p. 3.
- 14 Nigeria: Good People Great Nation. National Archives of Nigeria, "Preserving the Nation Heritage", Federal Ministry of Information & Communication. 10th floor, Radio House, Garki, Abuja, Nigeria.
- 15 Nigeria: Good People Great Nation. National Archives of Nigeria, "Preserving the Nation Heritage", Federal Ministry of Information & Communication. 10th floor, Radio House, Garki, Abuja, Nigeria.
- 16 Nigeria: Good People Great Nation. National Archives of Nigeria, "Preserving the Nation Heritage", Federal Ministry of Information & Communication. 10th floor, Radio House, Garki,

- 17 (http://archiveswiki.historian.org/index.php/National_Archives_of_Nigeria). "Wiki leak? National Archives, Ibadan Censorship!" What Simon Heap has on the web site in bracket is food for thought, which also calls for prompt attention and response.
- 18 The Nigerian Archives, Journal of the Society of the Nigerian Archivists, E. E, Ezomo, (January & July 1990) The Future of Archives in Nigeria: A Presidential Address. Vol. 1 Nos. 2 & 3. P. 7.
- 19 LASRAB was officially commissioned on the 28th of February, 2012 by the current Governor of Lagos State, Raji Fashola, who apparently recognizes the importance of the archives and has thus continued to accord the Lagos archives all the support it needs in order to remain functional and vibrant.
- 20 LASRAB was established in May, 2007 in pursuant of law No. 22 of same year, which took off in August 2008 on the executive order of the Lagos State Governor, H.E. Babatunde Raji Fashola (SAN), vide Public Service Circular. (Ref. No. CIR/HOS/o8/Vol. 1/43) of 31st March, 2008 with the assumption of duty of the premier Director General, Mr. Bolaji Uthman, consequent upon his appointment on the 25th November, 2008.
- 21 Pastor J. B. Daramola, Director, National Archives of Nigeria, 1999- 2007.
- 22 The Nigerian Archives, Journal of the Society of the Nigerian Archivists, E. E, Ezomo, (January & July 1990) The Future of Archives in Nigeria: A Presidential Address. Vol. 1 Nos. 2 & 3. P. 7. The 1957 act was repealed with the promulgation of the National Archives Decree No. 30 of July 8th 1992, which rectified some of the observed inadequacies of the earlier act.
- 23 Does any money come to the National Archives through the

Federal Ministry of Information, the supervising ministry? Does the National Archives of Nigeria even have a budget attached to it? If it has, then, it means the zonal and branch offices of the National Archives of Nigeria are probably being denied of proper funding by the Federal Ministry of Information, which is the supervising ministry. In fact, no funding has reached the Abeokuta branch office since 2008. It is therefore not to be wondered at that there is unmitigated threat to the safety and security of the archival records in our branch and zonal offices across the nation as no comprehensive fumigation exercise has taken place in the last two decades.

- 24 See Petition by Mr. Momodu Umoru titled: Request for an audience with the Hon. Minister and a call for visitation panel: Appalling situation in the National Archives of Nigeria with particular reference to Microphotography. Mr. Momodu Umoru, who was always at loggerhead with the top management of the department for not providing the tools he needed to function, worked in the Reprographic section of the National Archives, Enugu and Ibadan until he retired in the late 1990s.
- 25 See Petition by Mr. Momodu Umoru titled: Request for an audience with the Hon. Minister and a call for visitation panel: Appalling situation in the National Archives of Nigeria with particular reference to Microphotography.
- 26 Simon Heap frowned at the non-uniformity in the cost of registration between Ibadan and Kaduna Archives. See http://archiveswiki.historian.org/index.php/National_Archives_of_Nigeria Dr. Larry Denzer too lent her voice, though not too strongly, to these issues relating to the high cost of registration and photocopying in the Ibadan Archives. It is my candid opinion that some of the search-room officials in Ibadan need to have a reorientation so that we can begin to have some attitudinal reform in our interactions with the searchers.

UNESCO Memory of the World Programme. At the 2004 Congress of the International Council on Archives (ICA), some 2,000 delegates from 116 countries came together to discuss how better to preserve the world's documentary heritage. UNESCO has recognized the scale and urgency of the danger by establishing 'The Memory of the World' Programme to stimulate action to safeguard our documentary heritage.

- 28 UNESCO has recognized the scale and urgency of the danger by establishing 'The Memory of the World' Programme to stimulate action to safeguard our documentary heritage. The ICA Congress also noted that the Archives are fundamental to ensuring the survival of truth, memory and justice.
- 29 Late Mrs. Osifeso, a Deputy Director in the National Archives of Nigeria, led a team of archivists as a Chief Archivist to acquire the Cocoa Board records in the early 1990.
- 30 It is expected that those who head the National Archives should be individuals who appreciate the value of the records in the custody of the Archives. I think the process of commissioning the National Archives should be fast-tracked. Moreover, only such individuals who are truly burdened with the desire to move Archives to greater height and preserve the national archival heritage for posterity deserves to occupy the position of headship in the National Archives.
- 31 The Nigerian Archives, Journal of the Society of the Nigerian Archivists, E. E. Ezomo, (January & July 1990) The Future of Archives in Nigeria: A Presidential Address. Vol. 1 Nos. 2 & 3. P.9.