

Assessment of Records Management in High Court of Justice, Adamawa State

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ABSTRACT: *The paper is an assessment of records management in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State. A Survey research method was used for the study. The population comprises 168 record managers in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State. The data was analyzed using frequency, count, and percentages. The study reveals, among others, that the sources of records available are police reports and case files. The method used for preserving these records is by filing them in cabinets and on shelves, and the origins of records are police stations and case files. Based on the findings, it is recommended that there is a need for the High Court to digitize their records, that is, to convert the records to electronic form for easy processing and preservation of virtual access, among others.*

KEYWORDS: records, records management (RM), high court records, documents, digitization

INTRODUCTION

Records are documented information, regardless of format, produced or accumulated in the normal course of affairs by an individual or an organization and are retained and maintained to provide evidence of specific transactions. They are information or documents created, received and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person in pursuance of legal obligations or the transaction of business (Encyclopedia.com, 2019). Judicial records are records generated or received by courts about court adjudications or litigations (Ladan, 2014). Judicial records include case files, registers record books and case books (Omehia & Pokubo, 2020)

The proliferation of records created or generated by organizations, including judiciaries, in performing their duties can create enormous problems that, if not properly managed, the records cannot be easily accessed. Records management is the process of planning, organizing, staffing,

directing, and controlling all the steps involved in the life of a record, from creation to disposition. Records management incorporates the policies, systems and professional management techniques systematically applied to control recorded information to enhance an organization's efficiency and effectiveness. Records management is “responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records”(United Nations, 2021).

The objectives in managing judicial records are to make the records serve the purpose for which they were created as cheaply and effectively as possible and to dispose of them after they served those purposes properly. To guarantee efficiency and effectiveness, records must be actively managed throughout their life (Omehia & Pokubo, 2020). The benefits of managing records are for organizations and society to protect and preserve records as evidence of actions (Immaculate, 2018). He further stated that records are the only reliable and legally verifiable source to prove any organization's decisions, actions and transactions.

Records are precious materials. They need to be protected and preserved for posterity. They need to be protected from insects, rodents, natural disasters such as fire outbreaks, floods, rain (when the roof leaks), and users- through theft and mutilation. Activities that prolong the life of records are storing the records in a conducive atmosphere and in facilities such as acid-free boxes, fumigation, and digitization- to convert the information from paper to digital/electronic form.

Records are preserved or appropriated for preservation by the institution or its legitimate successor as evidence of its function, policies, procedures, decisions, operations or other activities or because there is value in the information that contains numeric, graphic or other information that is created or received by an organization (Omehia & Pokubo, 2020).

Study Objectives

The following objectives guide the study:

1. To Determine the Types of Records Generated in the High Court Of Justice, Adamawa State
2. To Identify the Records Sources in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State.
3. To find out how Records are organized in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State.
4. To establish how Records are Preserved and Stored in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State.
5. To Discover the Type Of Records Used in the High Court Of Justice, Adamawa State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ISO (2016) described records management as a field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records,

including processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records. There are different types of records created or generated by organizations. Ladan (2014) in his study discovered that the types of judicial records created and received by Federal High Courts are proceedings orders, released orders, judgments, adjournments for hearing and minutes. Similarly, the study's findings by Immaculate (2018) revealed that the types of records used in the courts studied are adoption, divorce, probate, case files, dockets, minutes, and orders. The result of the study by Njeru(2018) indicated that the types of records available at the Parliamentary Service Commission are administrative records, legal records such as litigation and compliance and records associated with enquiry and complaint handling, service records, management records, project files, records of parliamentary house and business records.

Records of various forms and types are very important sources of information and are used by individuals for various purposes. The study by Immaculate (2018) revealed that the users of the records of Milimani Commercial Courts are Advocates, litigants, researchers, judges, magistrates and registry staff.

Records of all types need to be preserved for posterity. Based on that, Oyeleye (2011) reiterate that the major security and preservation threats to information sources include poor handling of library materials by people, adverse environmental factors, such as temperature, humidity, biological, atmospheric pollution and disaster (fire, flood etc.) to libraries and information centres buildings and materials. Based on that, Immaculate (2018) suggested that records must be stored in a secure environment to protect them from unauthorized access. Furthermore, Penn et al. (1994), cited by Immaculate (2018), stressed that protecting information materials encompasses the caring of records to guard them against fire, water, pests and vandals to ensure that proper environmental controls are in place and functioning.

Digitization is one of the best ways of preserving documents. With the advance of Technology, Organizations and Information Centres are transforming their collections by converting analogue materials to digital format (LIS Education Network (2013).

Digitization is converting hard-copy (paper) or non-digital records into digital format. This can be done by scanning or taking pictures of the physical documents and saving them as digital files or using a document Management system. (Malak, 2023}According to Dhule (2018), one of the benefits of digitizing documents is improving the preservation of the documents. Dhule (2018) further stated that electronic documents are not prone to physical wear and tear. Similarly (LIS stated that digitization protects documents from degradation, loss, obsolescence, and data loss in case of calamities, natural disasters or catastrophes. Digitized documents are also easy to process, retrieve, access virtually, etc.

High Court, Adamawa

There are different departments in the High Court of Adamawa State. Each department has its records. Litigation and Court Administration, Personnel, Finance/Audit, Legal Records (Library), Probate, Maintenance, and Electrical work are the departments.

METHODOLOGY

A survey research method was used for the study. The population of the survey consists of record managers in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State, which consist of 168 record managers 38 library staff and 46 record managers were selected. The study's data collection instruments were questionnaires, interviews and observations. Questions related to the objectives were asked. The data was analyzed using frequency, count, and percentages.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Out of the total 84 copies of a questionnaire distributed, 79 (94.1%) were duly returned, completed and found usable for the analysis. This indicates a high response rate because the researcher used qualified, trained research assistants to help administer and collect the questionnaire.

Table 1: Types of Records Generated in High Court of Justice, Adamawa State

| S/N | Types of Data | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|--------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1 | Crime Reports | 19 | 24% |
| 2 | Litigation Reports | 8 | 10% |
| 3 | Financial Reports | 7 | 9% |
| 4 | Staff Data | 4 | 5% |
| 5 | Probate Data | 14 | 18% |
| 6 | Statistical Data | 8 | 10% |
| 7 | Conviction Data | 13 | 16% |
| 8 | Correspondences | 6 | 8% |
| | Total | 79 | 100% |

The results of the table 1 indicated that crime reports 19 (24%), probate records 14 (18%), conviction records 13 (16%), and litigation records 8 (10%). Financial records 7 (9%), staff data 4(5%), and statistical records 8 (10%) were the highest type of records that were generated in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State. This aligns with Ladan's (2014) result that found that the

types of records created or received by the court studied are proceeding orders, released orders, judgments, and adjournments for hearings and minutes.

Personal observation shows other records, such as appeals from lower courts, writs of summons, motions on notice, motion esparto, petitions, and register judgments.

Table 2: Sources of Records Available To the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State.

| S/No | Sources of Records | Frequency | Percentage |
|------|------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1 | Police | 17 | 22% |
| 2 | Case File | 9 | 11% |
| 3 | Library | 8 | 10% |
| 4 | Individual | 3 | 4% |
| 5 | State Security Service (SSS) | 10 | 13% |
| 6 | CID | 9 | 11% |
| 7 | Internet | 7 | 9% |
| 8 | Community Leader | 4 | 5% |
| 9 | Others | 12 | 15% |
| | Total | 79 | 100% |

From Table 2, it is clear that all the sources outlined, which include police stations, case files, libraries, individuals, SSS, CID, internet, and community leaders, were the sources of data consulted in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State. By implication, this finding connotes those information resources like the printed and non-printed that are found in the library are equally consulted in the High Court of Justice. Similarly, online databases and e-journals were among the data sources of the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State.

An attempt was made to identify the methods or styles used in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State, to organize records. To achieve this, lists of methods/styles were outlined for the respondents to tick as many as relevant in the High Court of Justice. Table 3 shows the methods used in organizing records in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State.

Table 3: Methods of Organizing Records in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State.

| S/N | Methods of Organizing Data | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Alphabetical order | 25 | 32% |
| 2 | Subject Index | 12 | 15% |
| 3 | Title arrangement | 18 | 23% |
| 4 | Numerical order | 20 | 25% |
| 5 | Others | 4 | 5% |
| | Total | 79 | 100 |

Table 3 shows the different methods of arranging records in any organization. An observation of the table revealed that alphabetical order, subject arrangement, title arrangement and alphanumeric style of arrangements were the methods/styles of records organization used in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State. This finding was because most records in the High Court were organized according to their subjects of treatment in alphabetical order, with some numbers attached to each record. This finding implies that records are systematically arranged so that access and use of records in the High Court is efficient and effective.

On the other hand, it was revealed that numerical arrangement systems were not adopted to organize records in the High Court of Justice. This is so because the Subject and alphabetical method of records organization was acceptable in the organization.

A follow-up question was also raised to determine the effectiveness of the method for records organization used in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State. To achieve this, the Likert scale was used to determine the effectiveness of the methods in this order: Table 4 shows the method's effectiveness.

Table 4: Effectiveness of the Method of Organizing Records in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State

| S/N | Method/ Level of Data Organizing | Very effective | Fairly effective | Effective | Not effective | undecided |
|-----|----------------------------------|----------------|------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1 | Alphabetical order | 53 (68.4%) | 20 (25.3%) | - | - | 5 (6.3%) |
| 2 | Subject arrangement | 65 (82.3%) | 10 (12.7%) | 4 (5%) | - | - |
| 3 | Title arrangement | - | - | 1 (1.2%) | 54 (68.4%) | 24 (30.4%) |
| 4 | Alphanumeric | 36 (45.6%) | 40 (50.6%) | - | - | 3 (3.8%) |

Table 4 shows that 53 (68.4) indicated that their level of organizing records is in alphabetical order of arrangement, subject arrangement 65 (82.3%) and alphanumeric arrangement 76 (96.2%) were very effective methods of organizing records in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State, while on the other hand, title arrangement 54(68.4%) was found to not be effective in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State.

However, it is surprising to discover that some fraction of the respondents, were undecided in their responses, considering that they are library staff and record managers trained in record organization. It is concluded that alphabetical order of arrangement, subject arrangement, and alphanumeric arrangements were very effective methods of organizing record in the High Court

of Justice, Adamawa State. In order to identify the methods used for record preservation in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State, a list of options was provided for the respondents to tick as many as possible. The responses are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Records Preservation and Storage in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State.

| S/N | Methods of Preserving Records | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|--------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1 | Using a filing cabinet | 35 | 44% |
| 2 | Computers | 10 | 13% |
| 3 | Shelving | 15 | 19% |
| 4 | Microfilming | - | - |
| 5 | Digitization | - | - |
| 6 | Photocopying | 8 | 10% |
| 7 | Lamination | - | - |
| 8 | Use of Polyester | - | - |
| 9 | Cleanliness of the environment | 7 | 9% |
| 10 | Fumigation | 4 | 5% |
| | Total | 79 | 100% |

From Table 5, it was discovered that the use of filing cabinets, computers, shelving, and photocopying, fumigation and regular cleanliness of the environment was used to preserve record in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State. This finding is not surprising because these methods are the usual practice in any organization to preserve the record generated.

On the other hand, microfilming, digitization, lamination and use of polyester were not used to preserve the integrity of record generated in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State. This situation could be better for record security as printed documents must be digitized, microfilmed, or laminated to elongate their utility value. This finding implies that the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State, may likely record a high record loss due to daily use and possibly virus attack.

A follow-up question was raised to determine the formats through which record is stored in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State. A list of formats was provided for the respondents to tick as many as possible to achieve this. Records in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State, were discovered to be stored in both hard copy (printed documents) and electronic formats. Printed record means that paper was used as a storage medium. In addition, electronic format includes CD-ROMS, tapes, video cassettes, flash drives, etc., to store record for future use.

Table 6: Type of Records Used in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State.

| S/N | Types of Data | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|---------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1 | Crime Reports | 19 | 24% |
| 2 | Litigation Reports | 8 | 10% |
| 3 | Financial Reports | 7 | 9% |
| 4 | Staff records | 4 | 5% |
| 5 | Probate records | 14 | 18% |
| 6 | Statistical records | 8 | 10% |
| 7 | Conviction records | 13 | 16% |
| 8 | Correspondences | 6 | 8% |
| | Total | 79 | 100% |

The table 6 shows that all record generated were used in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State. Crime reports, litigation reports, financial data, staff data, conviction data and correspondences were the record types used in the High Court of Justice. This is because they enable the court Stakeholders to make speedy rational decisions.

A follow-up question was raised to determine the extent of use of these record types in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State. To do this, the Likert scale was used to determine the extent of using the type of record in the following order: Daily, Weekly, Monthly, and fortnightly, when the need arises.

Table 7: Extent of Records Use in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State.

| Types of records | Daily | Weekly | Monthly | Fortnightly | When the need arises |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|----------------------|
| Crime Reports | 15(19%) | 4(5.1%) | - | - | 60(75.9%) |
| Litigation Reports | 70(88.6%) | - | - | - | 9(11.4%) |
| Financial records | 5(6.3%) | - | 20(25.3%) | - | 54(68.4%) |
| Staff records | 20(25.3%) | 10(12.7%) | 4(5.1%) | - | 45(57%) |
| Conviction records | - | 3(3.8%) | 10(12.7%) | 20(25.3%) | 46(56.2%) |
| Correspondence | 65(82.3%) | - | - | - | 14(17.7%) |

From Table 7, it can be seen that crime reports 60 (75.9%), financial record 55 (68.4%), staff record 48 (57%), and conviction record 46 (58.2%) were the type of record used in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State when the need arises. This means that these records were used only when the need to use them arose. Their use is purely based on the task and responsibility at hand. On the other hand, litigation reports, 70 (88.6%) and correspondences, 65(82.3%), were the types of records used in the High Court of Justice daily. This might be connected with the fact that the court may require to use those reports daily to enable the court to decide on the matter. Crime records, financial records, staff records and conviction records were used when the need to use them arose. In contrast, only litigation reports and correspondences were used daily in the High Court of Justice, Adamawa State.

Interview

An interview with the Chief Registrar of the High Court revealed that the challenges encountered with their records are rain, records get lost, files need to be properly filed, and there needs to be proper documentation. Interviews with the staff managing the records also revealed that they are not professional record keepers and they do not attend training in record keeping.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above findings, it is concluded that the major types of records are probate and convictions; the majority of those responsible for generating these records are police, registrars and court clerks; the sources of records available are police stations and case files. Even though the adoption of Information and Communication Technology presents numerous opportunities for effective and efficient record management, the method used for preserving records in Adamawa State High Court is filing them in cabinets and on shelves. The staff handling the records could be more professional.

Recommendations

Given the above challenges encountered by the Adamawa State High Court in managing its records, it is recommended that:

1. The staff handling the records should be subjected to periodical trainings, workshops or courses aimed at improving their skills on records management. This would also enable them to organize the High Court's records professionally.
2. There is a need for the High Court to digitize its records, that is, to convert the records to electronic form. This can be done through electronic and digital storage devices, such as the use of digitization software to enjoy the benefits derived from it, such as facilitating easy storage, processing of records, easy retrieval and virtual access to records stored, as well as protection from natural disasters such as rain, among others.

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