

# The challenges of records management and the way forward for the administrative effectiveness of the Assemblies of God Church

**Chukwudebelu Izuchukwu Vincent**

**Corresponding author: Chukwudebelu I. V.**

**E-mail: [izuchukwudebelu@yahoo.com](mailto:izuchukwudebelu@yahoo.com)**

Department of Mass Communication, Action Word Educational Services, Lagos

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**Abstract:** The paper focuses on the challenges facing records management and how to improve the administrative effectiveness of the Assemblies of God church. Records management involves the systematic control of an organisation's records throughout their life cycle in order to meet operational business needs. However, records management encounters numerous challenges that could potentially impact administrative effectiveness. Based on this, the paper presents the meaning of records management and its implications for church organizations. The paper highlights some of the challenges of records management in church organisations. Some of these challenges are: unavailable, inaccurate, incomplete, and dishonest records; difficulty in record retrieval; and a lack of appreciation by management and staff of the need for well-controlled records, among others. The paper also discusses the importance of maintaining proper records for administrative effectiveness and suggests potential solutions. Based on these recommendations, the paper suggests that administrators should promote the use of electronic records management systems among records managers to avoid premature and untimely record destruction. Additionally, church administrators should establish records management structures and ensure that both the church and individuals with sufficient knowledge of records management are actively involved in managing the organization's records.

**Keywords:** records management, administrative effectiveness, record-keeping practice, record disposition

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## INTRODUCTION

Records keeping plays an important role in the church's efficient and effective management. In fact, it is central to the administration of religious organisations because it documents the planning and implementation of appropriate courses of action, allowing proper monitoring of work. Conventional paper-based organizations continue to view paper as the primary record material for administrative documentation (Igwoku, 2008). For example, the American Psychological Association (APA, 2007) contains the 'Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct' that are generally required for the maintenance of appropriate psychological services records.

In Nigeria, just as in America, the nature and extent of the records will vary depending upon the purpose, setting, and context of the services. However, whatever the records may be, it is important that the staff become familiar with the legal and ethical requirements for keeping records in their specific professional contexts and

jurisdictions. Generally, a certain level of confidentiality, proper maintenance, security, content preservation, and context, among others, must guide record-keeping (Akpohonor & Iwhiwhu, 2007).

Unfortunately, the business of records keeping and management in Nigeria, particularly in the church setting, has not been particularly successful due to a lack of management components (Omeyi, 1997). Writing in support of the above finding, Ibiam (2004) noted that many years of neglect had done great damage to management, and records keeping is not an exemption. According to Iguodala (1998), personnel (secretaries and filling clerks) who maintain the registry systems with filing cabinets containing business paper evidence are inadequate and, in fact, ignorant of their responsibilities. This calls into question the reliability and authenticity of records kept in such a system. Giving credence to this, Afolabi (1999) asserted that records management practice in Nigeria has a number of problems, which may

include insufficient skilled and experienced records management personnel and possibly a low priority for records management in the scheme of things. This paper therefore discusses record management, the history of record management, the challenges of records management, proper records keeping for administrative effectiveness, and the way forward.

## Record Management

Records management is the systematic administration of records and documented information throughout their entire life cycle, from creation, classification, use, filing, retention, storage, and final disposition (Chukwudebelu, 2024). According to the author, records management involves managing an organization's records from their creation to their eventual disposal. This may include classifying, storing, securing, and destruction (or, in some cases, archival preservation) of records. Similarly, it is the systematic control of an organisation's records throughout their life cycle in order to meet operational business needs, statutory and fiscal requirements, and community expectations.

## History of Records Management

Oral transmission was the most ancient form of this practice, where people relied more on memory to manage history and human activities. Duranti (1993) suggests that certain individuals may have taken on the responsibility of memorising rules, contracts, and sentences, then reciting them to their juniors. Though this could not continue for long because of human memory lapses, This led to the invention of pictorial depictions of events to aid in the management of human activities (Maedke, Robek, & Brown, 1974).

Ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Babylon, and the Roman Empires recorded and kept track of business and legal activities (Ngoepe, 2008). Hieroglyphics on rock walls and caves, artefacts, and relics were the major forms of storing and transmitting information (Read & Ginn, 2011). Writing, paper, typewriters, microfilming, and computers appear to have revolutionized the act of keeping records. Records management originated in the United States of America in 1948, when the Hoover Commission set up a task force headed by Emmett Leahy in response to the problem of managing the ever-increasing volume of records in the world and the USA in particular. The commission received the task force's report on October 14, 1948, and Congress received it in 1949. Similarly, the right honourable Sir James Grigg led a committee in the United Kingdom, which presented a report to parliament in 1952, significantly contributing to the establishment of the concept of records management (Abioye, 2007).

The colonial administration in Britain began managing records in Nigeria in 1914 by issuing circulars to its

officials in Nigeria. The colonial office in London sent five dispatches between 1914 and 1948, demonstrating its concern for the perilous state of Nigeria's records (Alegbeleye, 1998). However, records management did not find its feet until 1954, when the Nigerian records office was formally established in Ibadan. This was due to the mandate given to Kenneth Dike, who conducted a study on the country's historical and cultural records, which were rapidly deteriorating at the time. In 1957, they changed the name from the Public Records Office to the National Archives. According to Iwhiwhu (2009), between 1954 and July 1955, Derek Charman, an English county archivist, provided 'bibliographic instruments' in the form of inventories, hand lists, and so on, and was concerned about the elimination of pests and cellolytic organisms found in record storage areas (Alegbeleye, 1998). The National Archives established a records management division in the early 1970s, and it currently holds the responsibility of coordinating the records management program in Nigeria (Abioye, 2007).

Records management practices in Nigeria have a number of problems. They include insufficient skilled and experienced records management personnel, low priority for records management in the scheme of things, and insufficient funds (Afolabi, 1991). Baje (1998) and Enwere (1992) argue that the unintegrated records management program in the Nigerian public service has led to inefficiency in administration and the loss or unavailability of vital information needed for decision-making. As records management developed, it also incorporated principles integral to information science as 'the means of processing information for optimum accessibility and usability, concerned with the origination, collection, organisation, storage, retrieval, interpretation, transmissions, transformation, and use of information' (Vakkari & Cronin, 1992). Records managers adopt these principles to improve the accessibility and utilization of records.

Stressing the use of technology in records management, McDonald (1995) opines that in developing record-keeping solutions, it is necessary to understand the evolution that is taking place in the use of technology. Therefore, the application of information and communication technology (ICT) to record management will go a long way in making such records accessible and usable.

The National Archives, a federal department under the Ministry of Information and National Orientation, with its main regional centres at Ibadan, Enugu, and Kaduna, carries out supervisory duties as a regulatory body for all records in Nigeria. The director is required to prepare an annual report on the activities of the public offices in the field of records management. The National Archives Decree places responsibility for records management within public offices on the heads of the offices concerned. The National Archives Decree possesses extensive investigative, corrective, and advisory powers for public records, ensuring effective management of records. The National Archives Act (1992) Part II,

Preservation and Management of Public Records, Sub-sections 3(1) and (2) outlines the responsibilities for records management. These include the head of a public office's obligation to create or ensure the creation of essential records for the office's continuity, to fully document its organization, functions, policies, procedures, and transactions, and to ensure the efficient, economical, and orderly execution of its duties.

Nigeria places significant emphasis on computerizing key functions, and it is crucial to ensure adequate capacity for managing the records generated by these new systems as evidence for accountability. The primary reason for creating archives is that they serve as memories. Just as individuals cannot function without a memory, so too do organizations, the nation, and the church, among others. Without archival recall, they would have no perspective on which to base planning, nothing to prevent them from repeating mistakes, and no expertise or knowledge except what people remembered, perhaps inaccurately. By implementing archives and records management principles, we can enhance the poor recovery and haphazard arrangement of records in the offices, thereby creating better records for the 21st century generation (Iwhiwhu, 2005).

In the Nigerian public sector, records are fundamental to the concept of democracy. The protection of human rights, the rule of law, and the fair and equal treatment of citizens are all underpinned by recorded information. For example, records are the basis for determining whether revenue collected on behalf of citizens is spent in a way that benefits them: on health, education, and other services. Records also protect citizens' rights, such as their rights to ownership of land, documented through land registration records, or their rights to pensions, documented through employee or personnel records. Records also enable citizens to obtain legal redress in cases where their rights are not upheld. According to Roper (1999), without records to provide documentary evidence of its activities, no government or organisation can be held accountable (Nigerian church administrators included). Evidence establishes accountability by revealing what public servants knew, when they should have known it, the actions they took, and the results of their activities.

Records document compliance with laws, rules, and procedures. Reliable records can serve as evidence to identify abuses of position, misuse of resources, and non-compliance with financial regulations (International Records Management Trust, 1999). Records are verifiable evidence of fraud and can lead investigators to the root of corruption. Well-managed records can act as a cost-effective restraint. Though the National Archives Policy is in place, the managing director is occupying his office and carrying out his required functions; the ministries of information and orientation are making noticeable efforts towards e-records management as part of the government's ICT strategy; however, little impact is being felt in Nigerian churches in comparison with other

developing nations such as South Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, and the like.

### Challenges of Records Management

It is not an overstatement to say that record-keeping challenges are common to the different levels of the religious sector. According to observation and related literature, however, it is becoming clearer that it is more pronounced in the church setting because accurate, reliable, and trustworthy records that fulfill evidential requirements are being created but not properly managed. This therefore becomes an issue of great concern to administrators, pastors, staff, and members.

Awe (2000) viewed the problems in record-keeping from the perspective of these bodies: governments, management, and staff. He accused these bodies of being responsible for unavailable, inaccurate, incomplete, and dishonest records. These records adversely affect the planning and provision of structures and facilities, adequate funding, and the proper formulation and review of policies. Other associated challenges of record-keeping identified generally in Nigeria include a lack of records manuals and filing guidelines, which lead to the loss of vital information (Egwunyenga, 2005) and inadequate computer terminals (Oketunji, 2002). Other challenges include difficulties in retrieving records and a lack of appreciation by management and staff for the importance of well-controlled records (Egunleti, 2000). Researchers believe that the aforementioned factors lead to high-profile failures in accountability. The management of these challenges would mean the development of efficient and effective options within and between organisations; this indeed requires urgent attention.

Bolu, citing Ihejirika (2010), asserts that despite frantic efforts to improve the situation in many churches through the introduction of computers and internet services, as well as the development of database management systems, the records management system remains conventionally paper-based and manual in operation. Many members of the management staff express frustration regarding the lack of funds and material resources available. The reality reveals the gross inadequacy of qualified personnel, facilities, membership explosions, and space problems.

### Problems with Electronic Records

According to Iwhiwhu (2010), many governments around the world have embraced the enormous potential of ICTs. Nonetheless, it appears that governments have not given adequate attention to the vital need to manage electronic records so that they meet evidentiary requirements, promote accountability, protect citizens' rights, and support the rule of law. Moreover, poor ICT infrastructure will make it difficult for a complete transition

to the electronic environment in developing countries. We have not adequately developed the necessary infrastructure and capacity to manage electronically generated records in a constantly changing software and hardware environment.

### Poor records management

Poor records management has caused serious impediments in several aspects of the public sector. This has had a negative impact on prompt payments and employment practices, the revamping of government functions and organizational structures, the strengthening of financial management, and the national legal and regulatory framework (Kove, 2013). In the absence of a culture of records management, monitoring, and evaluation, quality control and verification cannot proceed, as well-kept records provide the basis for all these, which also engender the rule of law and accountability. They are the foundation upon which a nation can build programs for good governance, poverty reduction, equitable justice, financial accountability, and enforceable civil rights, among other things.

It is imperative, therefore, for government officials to adopt good record-keeping practices, since this will support an effective, transparent, and accountable government. Accessible and reliable records will demonstrate the decisions made, actions taken, individuals involved, and the existing rights and responsibilities (The International Records Management Trust, 2002). Many countries encounter numerous challenges when it comes to managing records, especially electronic records. These border on technology obsolescence, inadequately trained personnel, policy formulation, and implementation, among other things. These factors have led to indiscriminate changes in the structure, content, and context of records. The adoption of integrated electronic information systems in government and organization transactions, the formulation and implementation of electronic records management policies, the establishment of more training outlets for records managers and archivists, the development of metadata for record locating, and other measures will significantly contribute to the adequate management of electronic records in Nigerian churches.

Citizens expect that their rights are as well protected and documented in an electronic environment as in a paper-based one. Until there is a well-developed capacity to manage electronic records as legally verifiable evidence of entitlements, contractual obligations, policies, or transactions, mixed media (paper and electronic systems) will be essential (Thurston, 2000). The new technologies offer a vastly enhanced means of collecting records for and about citizens, communicating within government and agencies, parastatals, and the public, and documenting the business of government and organizations. Before the advent of ICT (for creating and managing e-records), there was a high transaction cost

(in terms of time, effort, and opportunities lost) to access timely and relevant information, which governments turning online can 'potentially' reduce.

Information and communication technology (ICT) applications, according to Thurston (2000), have transformed the creation, use, maintenance, storage, and dissemination of information, enabling governments worldwide to improve the delivery of information and services to citizens. ICTs have revolutionised records-keeping practices in public and private organisations worldwide. However, there is a fundamental tension in information technology, which makes it possible to process, manipulate, reformat, and change information easily. Due to their reliance on evolving technologies, their storage on fragile media, and their reliance on potentially inadequate or missing documentation, electronic records are susceptible to loss. Therefore, it is crucial to properly manage them early in their life cycle, which presents significant challenges for accountability, the rule of law, and the preservation of organizational memory.

This has resulted in a lack of confidence in e-records. Accordingly, the US government's document on the Implementation of Government Paperwork Elimination Act (1998), cited by Iwhiwhu (2009), noted that public confidence in the security of the government's electronic information processes is essential as agencies make the transition from paper records to electronic records. Against this backdrop, the Australian Government, through the National Archives, established a standard (AS ISO 15489-2002) for a best practice approach to record-keeping within Commonwealth nations.

### Proper record-keeping for Administrative Effectiveness.

The concept of proper record-keeping practices encompasses the process of creating and capturing records, as well as their eventual use and disposal. It requires the consideration and maintenance of certain elements. Various scholars and researchers, including Upward (2000), Iwhiwhu (2009), Cumming (2010), and Flynn (2010), have utilized the RCM. The literature understands that effective record management and administrative effectiveness can shape congregational perspectives by exposing them to relevant information. It is crucial to acknowledge that the Assemblies of God church manages its records in both paper and electronic formats. In light of this, these models—the 'life cycle and the continuum'—will aid in forming key constructs that measure the Assemblies of God Church, Nigeria's perception of records management, and the effectiveness of administrative processes. According to Upward (2000), these elements are as follows:

1. **Records Creation/Capture:** This refers to the initial stage of a record, also known as a proto-record, and serves as the pre-communication system for document



creation. It follows a record from creation to description, to organization, and finally to incorporation in a general body of information. However, a record maintains its original quality as it progresses through each stage; an individual record within the cultural memory remains a created document.

2. **Records Management:** The functions of records maintenance encompass the following essential components: The process involves the organization and filing of records, determining which ones to keep and for what duration. Arrange and file current records **for efficient retrieval and handling**. Deciding how to file records need not be complicated; it begins with a careful look at the records currently in use. Are they already filed in a way that allows for quick access? Is the current system logical, consistent, and reasonably convenient? Could a newcomer interpret and understand it? If so, there is probably no need to change the system. We should leave an existing system that functions well for the organization in place. On the other hand, if the existing system is cumbersome, idiosyncratic, or even nonexistent, then the records require some type of orderly filing system. The first step in setting up a new arrangement for current office records is to focus on the daily operational needs of the organization. There are three primary methods of filing organisational records: department or function, subject or topic, and chronology. An organization may choose one of these methods of arrangement or, more likely, combine two or all three.

3. **Records Disposition:** Records disposition is a critical element of records management. Records disposition enables programmes and offices to dispose of records that are no longer needed in the office for current agency business. Offices should maintain only those active records necessary for current business. Offices should use records schedules to determine when to destroy records or transfer them to more cost-effective storage. The records disposition program contributes to efficient and economical agency operations. Clearly written, up-to-date, and properly implemented comprehensive records schedules form the basis for a sound records disposition programme.

4. **Records Preservation:** Preservation safeguards archives for the benefit of both current and future generations. Records offices, libraries, and museums commonly use this word to describe the methods they employ to safeguard and maintain the physical condition of their collections. A variety of measures aim to minimise the risk of record loss and slow down the physical deterioration processes that affect most archive materials. Preservation is a core function of any records office. It is central to a records office's role as guardians of archival heritage. Preservation helps to ensure that all of us have an equal opportunity to see and enjoy unique and important records.

5. **Records Evaluation:** is necessary and important in both the selection of new records and the use of existing ones. This guarantees the inclusion of the best, most complete, and most accurate information in our records and for our users. The tension between record evaluation and acceptability is always between the practical, usable, acceptable, and perfect. We should review the **entire record before selecting it**. Before deeming a record acceptable, disposing of it, or eventually archiving it, carefully evaluate and research any questions or inconsistencies.

Summarily, for administrative practices to improve administrative effectiveness, Grace International Communication (2013) listed the administrative practices in church organisation as follows: conform to the scriptural examples and principles relevant to structuring the church under the new covenant of grace; model and teach an ethos of openness, humility, service, and accountability at all levels of leadership; protect the denomination, its congregations, and its members from spiritual harm; maintain appropriate unity of doctrine and practice in congregations dispersed throughout many different geographic and ethnic cultures; and lots more.

### Way Forward

Church organisations lack a records management structure; hence, the challenges of conducting a needs analysis, designing the framework, marketing records management, establishing service targets, and performance measurement are very glaring in most Nigerian Christian denominations (Ikoni, 2000). Roper (1999) asserts that organizations need to devise strategies to guarantee the full and accurate recording, capture, and maintenance of their decisions, actions, and transactions through records-keeping systems. We need strategies to establish the methods, timing, locations, and formats for capturing information in records as 'evidence', and to retain it for the necessary duration. Once their business value has ended, we also need strategies to dispose of records promptly and appropriately, either by destruction or transfer to an archival institution.

Ogundede (2001) believes there is a serious training need for staff. Full introduction and sustenance of computer and internet services as well as records management integration are necessary (Baje 1998; Fadokun 2004). Experts generally recommend adequate manual classification, security, storage facilities, and funds for good record-keeping (Tower, 2004). Therefore, experts agree and hope that adopting these options, as stated and discovered by Ogundede, Baje, and Fadokun, to address records management issues in an administrative setting could potentially address most, if not all, of the challenges associated with records keeping. Furthermore, a record may be involved in any or at least most of the categories, depending on when it is considered or, more importantly, these includes:

1. **Creation and/or Receipt:** This is the first phase of a record's life. Records may be created within an organisation in many different ways, including but not limited to: the typing or word processing of a document; the typing and sending of an email; the construction of a spread sheet; the recording of a meeting; the entering of a transaction within an enterprise system; the receipt of documents; the receipt of spread sheets; and the receipt of an email.

2. **Maintenance and Use:** Once a record has been created or received, it goes through a phase of distribution and use. During this phase, the record is frequently in use. This phase may last only a few hours in the case of a transient record or may last a few years in the case of short- to long-term records. **Storage and Retrieval:** While many records may be disposed of after their initial use, others are required to be kept for a longer period of time for legal, fiscal, or other administrative reasons. During this phase, the operating office typically stores these records offsite or offline to avoid overloading its storage capacity and compromising the efficiency of the operating system.

1. Disposition is the final phase for the majority of an organization's records. Records dispositions should be documented appropriately. Disposition can be achieved through various methods, including but not limited to:

2. Disposal in the trash or recycling bin
3. Incineration
4. Deleting an electronic file
5. Shredding an optical disc

1. **Archives:** Archives will house records with enduring historical value, preserving them for future research and use.

First, it was actually Ian Maclean, Chief Archivist with the Commonwealth Archives Office of Australia, who pioneered the principle in the 1950s. She said records managers were true archivists, and that archival science should be directed towards studying recorded information characteristics, record-keeping systems, and classification purposes. The ongoing cooperative interaction between the records manager and the archivist is necessary to:

1. Ensure the creation of the right records, containing the right information, in the right format;
2. To facilitate their availability, organize the records and analyze their content and significance.
3. Make them available promptly to those (administrators and researchers alike) who have a right and a requirement to see them;
4. Systematically dispose of records that are no longer required, and
5. Keep the information safe for as long as it might be required (if necessary, indefinitely).

## CONCLUSION

The church organization has certain issues that make its administration complex. Church administrators are

expected to utilize their administrative skills to address these issues and guarantee the attainment of denominational objectives, as outlined in the administrative practices component of the conceptual model. Therefore, through church records, management functions such as planning human and material resources and directing church programmes could be enhanced. Church records can also assist church administrators in supplying information to and soliciting assistance from adherents' communities, government agencies, and international organisations (Grace International Communication, 2013). Ensuring the safety and confidentiality of church records, a positive attitude towards record-keeping, adequate knowledge of record-keeping, and the availability of record materials could serve as a veritable means of making church records an administrative tool.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The church organization has certain issues that make its administration complex. Church administrators are expected to use their administrative skills to solve such problems and ensure the achievement of denominational objectives (as captured in the administrative practices components of the conceptual model). Therefore, this paper recommends that:

1. Proper recording could enhance management functions such as planning human and material resources and directing church programs.
2. Ensuring the safety and confidentiality of church records, a positive attitude towards record-keeping, adequate knowledge of record-keeping, and the availability of record materials could serve as a veritable means of making church records an administrative tool.
3. The church records managers or archivists should be trained in records appraisal so that they know which records are of enduring value.
4. Administrators should encourage records managers to use electronic records management systems to avoid premature and untimely destruction of records.
5. The church administrators should create records management structures and make sure that the church and people with adequate knowledge of records management are involved in handling the records of the organisation.

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