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IMPACT OF HISTORICAL REVIEW AND ARCHIVAL ACCESSIBILITY IN COMBATING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NIGERIA

Abstract

Archives and records management play a central role in understanding the past and aid effective decision-making on current situations. The main objective of this study was to assess the impact of historical review and archival accessibility in combating COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The study was based on a systematic review of existing literature on overview of pandemics in human history, history of pandemic in Nigeria, 1918-1919 influenza in Nigeria, COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, and archival accessibility and pandemics. The study was able to identify some major challenges of archival accessibility in Nigeria, which made it difficult to access documents of historical values for decision-making for combatting the COVID-19 pandemic. It was discovered that the failure of past governments in Nigeria to document and archive past occurrences of pandemic in the country prevented access to relevant archival materials for decision making to combat the coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, the study recommended that issues of national importance should be well documented by the government at various levels and made available to the national archives as well as the national library for future reference. If this had been done by previous governments, it would have been very easy to access such in the time of COVID-19 pandemic for quick decision-making in curtailing the spread of the virus

Keywords: Historical review, Archives, COVID-19, Pandemic, Nigeria

Introduction

Over the years, human history has witnessed and experienced different kinds of plague or pandemic which claimed millions in different parts of the world. A portion of these notable pandemic were the extraordinary flu pandemic of 1918; the new and tolerantly brief flare-up of extreme intense respiratory disorder (SARS); the progressing significant scourges, for example, HIV/AIDS and endemic illnesses, for example, jungle fever; the endeavors to control and wipe

out poliovirus; the solitary victory over smallpox; and the compromised 1976 "pig influenza" pandemic.

Historically, the coronavirus pandemic also known as COVID-19 started spreading in December 2019 in the City of Wuhan in China and became noticeable in early January 2020. It has since been recognised as a humanitarian challenge affecting about 184 out of 195 countries of the world representing 94.4 percent. Since the outbreak of the virus and its consequential spread, no fewer than 18.6 million confirmed cases worldwide with 11.2 million recovered and 704 thousand deaths as at August 5, 2020 have been reported (New York Times, 2020). The impact of this pandemic has affected countries and communities in terms of economic, socio-psychological issues, as well as international relations (Hua and Shaw, 2020) of which Nigeria is not an exception (Ajibo, 2020). In reality, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on the socio-economic well-being of Nigerians.

Moreso, since the discovery of the first case in the country in February 2020, the number of people confirmed with the virus has been increasing exponentially on a daily basis, therefore creating serious panic among the people. Available data from the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) on the spread of the virus shows that there is no single state of the nation that is free of this viral infection. Since the outbreak of the virus and its discovery in Nigeria on February 27, 2020, a total number of 344,397 samples have been tested. Out of this figure, 48,116 cases were confirmed, 34,309 cases were discharged, 966 deaths recorded while 12,841 cases were still active (as at August, 2020). Interestingly, of all the confirmed cases, 30,863 (64%) were male while only 17,253 (36%) were female, indicating that more males than females have been affected so far. Globally, the total number of confirmed cases of the virus stands at 20,439,814 million with 744,385 deaths worldwide spanning through 216 countries and territories (NCDC, August, 2020). All these data will be made accessible if they are properly archived as this will afford posterity a peep into the discourse of COVID-19 pandemic within the Nigerian space. This is a bane the Nigerian government is battling with as they seem not to understand the pivotal role of the archive in combating this pandemic as previous government have lost every sense of history which has left the present administration at a precarious situation. This assertion was buttressed by Abioye (2007) who lamented the decadence of Nigerian archives and highlighted the problems that bedeviled the institutions of archives and records management in the country among which are

poor funding, lack of appreciation of the importance of archives, obsolete equipment and high staff turn over

Archives usually contains both published and unpublished materials in any format. Typical examples are manuscripts, letters, photographs, moving image and sound materials, artwork, books, diaries, artifacts, and the digital equivalents of all of these things. Materials in an archive are regularly exceptional, particular, or uncommon items, which means not many of them exist on the planet, or they are the solitary ones of their sort. Archives exist both to protect memorable materials and to make them accessible for use. Archives records serve to reinforce aggregate memory and ensure individuals' privileges, property, and character. For example, governments and medical researchers may utilize records to study patterns of diseases which goes a long way in curtailing the spread of another. In short, archives benefit nearly everyone, even those who have not used them directly. As the Universal Declaration of Archives (UNESCO, 2011) pointed out, "archives keep decisions, actions and memory" and "they are reliable sources of information that guarantee the security and transparency of administrative actions."

Quintana (2020) points out that archives are responsible for the preservation and maintenance of large historical records, which are very essential for decision making during the COVID 19 pandemic. Also, access to quality information and archival evidential materials is key to combat fake news in times of such uncertainty as COVID-19. The author submitted that archival information should be properly managed and solid electronic administration infrastructures must be built to guarantee good management and the rights of citizens.

Archives as a documentary heritage is regarded as an important resource to offer a historical perspective on how health organisations, governments, their citizens and the international communities have faced global health emergencies like pandemics in the past and, therefore, the importance of preserving records regarding this pandemic for future research is pertinent. In times past, archives have proven to be a reliable resource for managing global healthcare challenges. For instance, the World Health Organisation (WHO) was able to create an archive of the smallpox eradication programme in 1986. This archive provided a guide and inventory of the pandemic and the various actions that were taken to curtail this epidemic.

Globalisation and advancement in digital technologies have greatly affected the way in which certain new initiatives are undertaken compared to earlier days. However, a knowledge and

understanding of previous efforts is likely to have considerable value. To this end, Rhoads (1983) suggested that:

It is thus important to have ready access to a full account of the programmes, measures and procedures that have been proposed, attempted or implemented in the past, as well as data to support the reasons why they may have failed, been abandoned, or succeeded. If this information is available in the national archives and used in current decision-making, governmental actions will be more likely to be soundly based and successfully implemented. There is less likelihood of unnecessary risk or failure and the resulting waste of scarce resources.

Throughout the pandemic, UNESCO, through the Memory of the World (MoW) Programme (archives), was able to support all Member States and memory institutions in their efforts to preserve and ensure public access to official records related to COVID-19. In this process, UNESCO features initiatives that harness the scientific, educational and artistic potential of archives to address the pandemic (UNESCO, 2020). This affords countries and governments the opportunity to make effective decisions to combat the pandemic drawing from previous occurrences. Therefore, there is a need for the government to critically review archival documents of historical value in order to gain perfect understanding of the past for future decisions. It is observed that the Nigerian government has been paying lip service to the development of archival institutions in the country. The archival institution across the country has been neglected for long and thus, many of them are in deplorable states. It is on this basis that this research article seeks to systematically examine the impact of historical review and archival accessibility in combating COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

Literature review

The essence of this literature review is to place the study within the context of previous research. Related and relevant literature were systematically reviewed under the following sub-headings:

- Overview of Pandemics in Human History
- History of Pandemic in Nigeria
 - 1918-1919 Influenza in Nigeria
 - COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria
- Archival Accessibility and Pandemics

- Challenges of Archival Accessibility in Combating COVID 19

Overview of Pandemics in Human History

The World Health Organisation (2010) described a pandemic as the worldwide spread of a new disease. It is a sickness episode that spreads across nations or mainland's which influences a greater number of individuals and takes a bigger number of lives. The World Health Organization (WHO) announced COVID-19 to be a pandemic when it turned out to be certain that the sickness was serious and that it was spreading rapidly over a wide territory. The number of lives lost in a pandemic depends on: total number of people infected, the severity of an illness the virus causes (its virulence), the vulnerability of certain groups of people, and the effectiveness of prevention efforts. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2018:58) described a pandemic as

“.....an epidemic of infectious disease that spreads through human populations across a large region, multiple continents or globally. These are diseases that infect humans and can spread easily. Pandemics become disasters when they cause large numbers of deaths, as well as illness, and/or have severe social and economic impacts. Concerns exist about potential pandemic diseases including new strains of influenza, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) to which humans may not have immunity. In the past, pandemics have included cholera, smallpox, leprosy, measles, polio and yellow fever”.

There was the 1817 Cholera outbreak in India which later became global pandemic as it spread across many countries of the world along trade routes reflecting the expanding reach of the global transport system and increased movement of people (Rogers, 1919). The flu pandemic of 1918-19 introduced one of the world's most decimating transient segment calamities, killing an unexpected 40 million individuals in around a year internationally (Oxford, 2004; Johnson & Mueller, 2002). Solitary and Ahmad (2020) investigated COVID-19 pandemic from the African viewpoint. The specialists gathered and summed up the acts of now accessible writing on the study of disease transmission, etiology, weakness, readiness and financial effect of COVID-19 in Africa, which could be helpful and give essential data on progressing COVID-19 pandemics in the landmass. The concomitance of the COVID-19 pandemic and global warming was also summarized by the researchers. According to Lone and Ahmad (2020), the recently emerged novel coronavirus,

“severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2)”, caused a highly contagious disease called coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Coronavirus was first discovered and reported from Wuhan city in China in December, 2019, and in less than three months, it spread throughout the continents of the world. The rapid and sporadic spread of the virus made the World Health Organization (WHO) declare it as a global health crisis and a pandemic on 11th March, 2020. Besides, since it began, the dreaded pandemic has seriously damaged the world's most developed countries and is becoming a major threat for low- and middle-income countries like Nigeria.

There are hundreds of viruses that belong to the coronavirus family. However, only six (229E, NL63, OC43, HKU1, SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV) have been reported to cause mild to severe respiratory tract infections in humans (Su, Wong, Shi, et al., 2016). Among them are serious intense respiratory condition Covid (SARS-CoV) detailed in November 2002 and center east respiratory disorder Covid (MERS-CoV) revealed in September 2012, which arose in human populace from creature supplies and caused extreme respiratory disease with high death rates (Wang, Shi, Jiang, 2013).

A novel severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) emerged in 2019, and caused an infectious disease called coronavirus disease also known as (COVID-19) (Lai, Shih, Ko, 2020). The virus was first identified and reported from Wuhan city of China in December, 2019 (Du, 2020). The SARS-CoV-2 is highly contagious, spread globally in a short period of time, and was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020 (World Health Organisation, 2020).

History of Pandemic in Nigeria

Although COVID-19 is majorly affecting many countries all over the world, Africa is the last continent to be hit by the pandemic. However, Africa is expected to be the most vulnerable continent where COVID-19 spreading will have a major impact (Moore, Gelfeld & Okunogbe, 2020). The landmass affirmed its first instance of COVID-19 in Egypt on fourteenth of February, 2020, and from sub-Saharan Africa, the main case was accounted for in Nigeria on 27th of February, from an Italian patient who traveled to Nigeria from Italy on 25th of February, 2020 (WHO, 2020; NCDC, 2020).

(a) 1918-1919 Influenza in Nigeria

The flu pandemic of 1918-19 was perhaps the most inescapable and crushing organic calamity ever recorded on the planet. In spite of the fact that there were disputes on the causes of the 1918-19 flu pandemic, its spread notwithstanding, was ordinary of that of human travel, as it headed out all around. Significant dissemination started in Europe to the remainder of the world. Africa recorded its previous hit from a boat that had moored in a British port from where it conveyed people contaminated by flu to Freetown, Sierra Leone in August 1918 (Crospy, 1976). In a comparative vein, an American vessel S.S. Shonga, which made a short stop in Freetown, conveyed flu casualties in Freetown to Cape Coast. The boat which secured for a couple of days in Cape Coast proceeded with its excursion to Accra with essentially the entirety of its group down with flu. Nonetheless, by September 14, 1918, the flu hit Lagos through Lagos seaports by a sea liner, S.S. Bida which conveyed effectively tainted travelers from Accra, Gold Coast, who, on appearance in Lagos passed the infection to Lagos occupants. Occupants around the seaports of Marina and Apapa, particularly sailors working on boats moored on harbor ports, were one of the primary set of individuals to be tainted with this infection.

The pandemic spread rapidly into the hinterland, particularly through Lagos terrain and afterward followed shipping lanes, for example, railroad lines, engine streets, streams and convoy courses. The progress of the spread of the epidemic was based on the speed of normal transport prevailing on each highway (Public Record Office, 1919). But since the train was the major means of local transportation back then, locations such as Abeokuta, Ibadan, Ilorin, Bida, Jebba, Zaria, Kano, and Bauchi which were linked to the existing rail lines were quickly affected by the epidemic (Beringer, n.d). While populaces along the Western railroad kept on being blasted by this illness, traveler vessels kept on bringing contaminated individuals into other seaside towns of Nigeria. For example, by 28 September, another vessel called S.S. Batanga had shown up at Calabar port with a man associated to be a casualty with flu. Likewise, Forcados was not saved as sea liner S.S. Ravenston brought a group and travelers previously contaminated by the sickness to Forcados on 27th September. Different ports influenced, including Burutu, Warri, Port-Harcourt and Bonny with this pandemic infiltrating different private regions and neighboring towns by streets. By December 1918, it had spread everywhere in the nation directly from the main episode in Lagos (Olapoju, 2020).

(b) COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

Olapoju (2020) gave a brief but comprehensive overview of coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria. By February 27, 2020, Nigeria's first case was recorded when a 44-year Italian resident was analyzed of COVID-19 in Lagos State. The contaminated man showed up at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos at 10pm on 24th February 2020 on board Turkish carrier from Milan, Italy. He went on to his organization site in Ogun state on 25th February. On eighth March 2020, one of the asymptomatic contacts to the record case in Ogun was affirmed to have tested positive to the virus.

On seventeenth March 2020, a 30-year-old Nigerian female was diagnosed of COVID-19 in Lagos. She got back from the United Kingdom on the thirteenth of March. On the eighteenth of March 2020, five new affirmed instances of COVID-19 was recorded in Nigeria, carrying the record to 8 cases. All the new five cases had a movement history to the UK or USA; four were recognized in Lagos while one distinguished in Ekiti had contact with an explorer from the USA. On the nineteenth of March 2020, four new affirmed instances of COVID-19 were recorded in Nigeria carrying the recorded cases to twelve affirmed cases. All the four new cases were from Lagos. One had a travel history to the UK; one to France, 3rd case was a contact to one of the previously confirmed cases; 4th case had no history of travel but lived with foreigners/expatriates.

On the 21st of March 2020, three new confirmed cases of COVID-19 were recorded in Nigeria. Two of the three new cases had travel history to the United Kingdom and United States of America. One case had contact with recent travelers. On the 22nd of March 2020, five new confirmed cases of COVID-19 were recorded in Nigeria. Four of the five new cases had travel history to high risk countries. The fifth case was a contact of a confirmed case. On the 23rd of March 2020, ten new confirmed cases of COVID-19 were recorded in Nigeria with the first death.

However, typical symptoms of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) are fever, dry cough and fatigue and in severer cases dyspnea. Many infections, in particular in children and young adults, are asymptomatic, whereas older people and/or people with co-morbidities are at higher risk of severe disease, respiratory failure and death. The incubation period is ~5 days, severe disease usually develops ~8 days after symptom onset and critical disease and death occur at ~16 days. ARDS, acute respiratory distress syndrome; ICU, intensive care unit (Hu, Guo & Shi, 2021). The prevalence of coronavirus has caused people to reconsider many aspects of life, such that the way

human move and sell will change greatly in the future, and special measures in the field of transportation and shopping and livestock sales will be applied to prevent the spread of virus and other infectious diseases (Mirian, Danjuma & Amaonyeze, 2021).

Conversely, in efforts to investigate the nature of the coronavirus pathogen in Nigeria, (Ubi, Ekpo, Eyopor, Ebigwai, Ofem, Essien & Ettah, 2020) retrieved the RdRp region gene sequences of COVID 19 coronaviruses sequenced from the first confirmed index case in Nigeria by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and deposited in the database/gene bank for human genome hoisted by the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) with Accession number MT159778.1 in March, 2020. The researchers also retrieved the RdRp region gene sequences of COVID 19 from the epicenter of the COVID-19 coronaviruses from Wuhan China, with Accession number MT042777.1. This was to enable them compare the protein structure, phylogeny, mutation rate, bad angles, bad bonds, C- Beta deviations, Ramachandran outliers, clash score, residue quality, physical, chemical and biological nature of the virus pathogen called COVID-19 to be able to scientifically reveal the nature and attributes of the coronavirus in Nigeria. This has become necessary because a good background knowledge and understanding of the complete nature and attributes of the coronaviruses will help the scientific community in Nigeria and elsewhere to develop and design appropriate and relevant potential prophylactic and therapeutic measures towards finding a lasting solution to the global pandemic.

Archival Accessibility and Pandemics

Archives can be depicted as forever important records, for example, letters, reports, accounts, minute books, draft and last original copies, and photos. These records are kept on the grounds that they have proceedings with an incentive to the making organization and to other possible clients. They are the narrative proof of past occasions. They are the facts used by people to interpret and understand history (Society of American Archivists, 2016). Rhoads (1983:1) perceived archives as:

“Non-current records that have been formally appraised, and found to have continuing or permanent values as evidence or for research purposes. They normally amount to only a small percentage of the great mass of records from which they are selected, but they are useful and valuable in an almost infinite variety of ways. They serve first of all as the nation's memory, and enable a society to plan intelligently

for the future based on an awareness of past experience. Archives preserve a record of the obligations and commitments of the government and evidence of the rights and entitlements of the citizens. Collectively, the archives contain a vast amount of information about people, organizations, social and economic development, natural phenomena, and events invaluable primary source material for writing about all facets of the nation's history”

Pandemics have been identified as a global health challenge. Archives play a significant role in combating pandemics in many ways which include: prevention of corrupt tendencies, facilitating smooth investigations by researchers and medical scientists; and providing evidence of transactions (Kanzi, 2010). Okello-Obura (2012) examined the need for effective records and information management as a cornerstone ingredient in fighting corruption. This can also be extended to public health including epidemics, plagues and pandemic if well harnessed and not seen as collections of old relics.

The continuing significance of archival collections in the digital age cannot be underestimated. They serve as sources of trustworthy evidence of the impact that decisions of government have and continue to have on people, families and communities. By consolidating documented records with local area and individual encounters and individual records, the task conveys advanced long lasting learning encounters, and a more profound enthusiasm for a country's living social history – one that is presently shared by the local area with Archives (Rohrlach, 2016).

According to Pradhananga (2016), the collection of archives comprises some of the oldest and most unique national records dating back to 3rd. Century B.C. The original copies are as legends, moral stories and dramatizations, crystal gazing, medication, theory, religion alongside different kinds of verifiable archives, for example, Royal declaration, orders given by the public authority and approved authorities, arrangements, authentic letters and enormous measure of records aggregated by government, government workers and public papers. These archival documents are playing a vital role in different cases as they are the link between the past and the present in fighting the menace of the present pandemic facing the human race. They are also indispensable in enhancing decision-making during crises and pandemic such as COVID-19.

Challenges of Archival Accessibility in Combating Covid-19

Any serious government, or agency will have a frequent need to refer to records it has created in the past to verify past decisions and continuing obligations, to determine precedents, to conduct ongoing research operations, and for a host of other legal, administrative, political and diplomatic reasons. If these records are disorganized, difficult to access, lost or capriciously destroyed, it is obvious that a wide range of decisions and actions will be faulty, ill-conceived and erratic (Rhoads, 1983).

Lack of access to archives is due to lack of awareness, inadequate training, as well as inadequate records management in governmental bodies, have been identified as major challenges to accessing archives for quality decision making in difficult times as we are currently experiencing. The inaccessibility or lack of documentary evidence results in increased tendencies for recurrence of pandemics, as well as poor management of such pandemics in case of any occurrence (Palmer 2010). Inconsistency and instability in government made these problems more pronounced in Nigeria.

Another challenge in the accessibility of archives for fighting pandemics can be attributed to lack of standards and requirements for electronic records management. The potential for Electronic records can be handily lost, overwritten, deleted or delivered difficult to reach, are media free, equipment and programming subordinate, arbitrarily found, effortlessly copied and put away on conceivably temperamental media, and so forth (Palmer, 2010). Thus, there is a need for standards for electronic records management especially in this information age.

With time, the role of the archives as the government's institutional memory becomes ever more important. With the turnover of officials and employees the government is forced increasingly to rely less on the personal memories of individuals and more on the institutional memory embodied in the archives. Thus the lack of a professionally designed and managed archival institution is certain to cause increasing confusion, inefficiency, mismanagement and expense throughout the governmental structure (Rhoads, 1983).

The attitude of Nigerian government to archives and records management over time has not been very encouraging. Archives as an institution in Nigeria has been neglected by past governments, and has not been receiving the necessary attention it deserves as the memory of the nation. As a matter of fact, the negligence of Nigerian government has caused serious damages to this great

institution; and that is why it was difficult to harness the wealth of historical and archival resources to combat the menace of COVID-19 as was done in other developed nations.

Summary

This study was carried out to assess the impact of historical review and archival accessibility in combating COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The study was based on a systematic review of existing literature. The introduction gave a synopsis of coronavirus pandemic otherwise known as COVID-19 and the possible role of records management in combating such pandemic. The other section focused on systematic review of related literature with emphasis on overview of pandemics in human history, history of pandemic in Nigeria, 1918-1919 influenza in Nigeria, COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, and archival accessibility and pandemics. Lastly, some challenges of archival accessibility in combating COVID 19 in Nigeria were identified. Recommendations were also made for future improvements.

Conclusion

Archives and records management play a central role in understanding the past and aid effective decision-making on the current phenomenon. Successful archives are those that can be relevant to those who need, value and use them, and continuously reach out to new audiences. This study was able to identify the value of archival accessibility in combating COVID-19 pandemic through a systematic literature review. It was discovered that the failure of past governments in Nigeria to document and archive past occurrences of pandemic in the country prevented access to relevant archival materials for decision making to combat the coronavirus pandemic. In an effort to reach out to a new and wider spectrum of audiences in the new millennium age, National Archives in Nigeria should begin to explore new approaches in making archival materials accessible for effective decision-making and adequate preparedness.

Recommendations

Having identified the various challenges confronting archival accessibility in combating COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, it is necessary to make some recommendations for future improvements. It is therefore recommended that:

1. Nigeria is big and old enough to have a fully functional national archive. Therefore, there is a need for total overhauling of the archival institution in Nigeria so that it can assume the real status of “memory of the nation” which it is.
2. Adequate funding is required for the archives to really function effectively and be alive to its responsibility as it is in other developed nations of the world.
3. The National archives should create a functional digital repository that can easily be accessed for quick decision-making on any matters of national value.
4. Professional archivists should be employed to manage the archival institution, while the available staff should be trained and retrained in current world best practices in archives and records management.
5. There is a need for archivist within the Library and Information Science profession to build up their technological ante in entrenching the significance of the profession within the Nigerian space and accept this as their personal responsibility because if the government does nothing, the profession is doomed
6. Issues of national importance should be well documented by the government at various levels and made available to the national archives as well as national library for future reference. If this had been done by previous governments, it would be very easy to access such in the time of COVID-19 pandemic for quick decision-making.

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