

# Preserving evidence integrity: the key to efficient anti-corruption investigations

Preserving  
evidence  
integrity

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aims to examine the connection between the integrity of records and the effectiveness of anti-corruption investigations. The objective is to determine how the quality of records affects the efficiency of anti-corruption investigations.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study uses a qualitative, exploratory case study approach, with data collected through interviews with 15 anti-corruption investigators in 2020 in Nigeria. The data were analysed using thematic analysis.

**Findings** – The results indicate that the efficiency of anti-corruption investigations depends on the quality of the evidence. Proper recordkeeping, which maintains the integrity of records, is crucial for efficient anti-corruption investigations. Inadequate recordkeeping practices that do not adhere to the lifecycle concept are often driven by corruption and can significantly hinder the efficiency of anti-corruption investigations by causing delays in obtaining crucial evidence.

**Originality/value** – From a records management perspective, this study highlights the impact of unreliable evidence on every corruption investigation effort and the motives behind rendering the process unproductive. Accountability forums must enforce adherence to proper recordkeeping procedures to ensure the desired investigative outcomes with minimal resources, time and effort to combat corruption.

**Keywords** Accountability forums, Anti-corruption investigations, Corruption, Efficient investigation, Record integrity

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Regardless of their format, records ought to be trustworthy (Duranti and Rogers, 2011; Ketelaar, 1997; Lemieux, 2016; MacNeil, 2000). Records earn trust by maintaining

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completeness and authenticity throughout their lifecycle for reliability. The authenticity and reliability of records offer them the value of evidence (Duranti, 1995). For records to be trustworthy, they must contain a genuine manifestation of accurate facts that qualify them to represent the facts it attest to and mean what it claim to be. Only then can it be said to have fulfilled two critical dimensions of trustworthiness: reliability and authenticity (MacNeil, 2000). The trustworthiness of a record is the most sought-out component of interest that qualifies it as evidence backing a claim. Confidence in reliable records can reveal the truth of a situation and warrant trust during investigation. Reliable records are the most widely accepted tools in accountability forums.

Records, irrespective of physical form, age or the information they contain, are recorded evidence of an action undertaken by an individual or a workgroup in their business, resulting in a definable outcome (Shepherd, 2006). Generally, records must be accurate, complete and trustworthy to serve their purpose (Al-Sharieh and Bonnici, 2019; Gilliland *et al.*, 2016; Reed, 1990; Lemieux, 2016). Accountability forums rely heavily on recorded evidence to effectively function in the private and public sectors. Records management provides a platform for planning, creating, distributing, maintaining, using and evaluating records for appropriate engagement (Penn and Pennix, 2017). It refers to systematically controlling an organisation's records throughout its lifecycle to meet operational business needs, statutory requirements, fiscal requirements and community expectations (Harries, 2009). Availability and prompt access to complete and accurate records provide an accountability tool necessary for efficient anti-corruption investigations. The global fight against corruption is critical, as it threatens joint resolutions to protect human rights (Hough, 2013; Peters, 2018; Rose-Ackerman, 2004; World Bank Group, 2000). Irrespective of its varying nature, corruption is often perpetrated by falsifying accurate records (Okello-Obura, 2013). Whenever one uses the power of public office for personal gain in a manner that contravenes the rules of the game, it is said to be a corrupt practice that directly affects the pace of global development (Gray and Kaufmann, 1998). Corruption also inhibits the achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (France and Duri, 2020; Mugellini and Villeneuve, 2019). Thus, the need for watchdogs asserts the mandate of preventing corruption or unveiling hidden practices, thereby bringing culprits to book. The job of this unique accountability forum is impossible without using valid evidence from records management throughout its entire lifecycle (Hoke, 2011).

The main objective of this study is to increase the understanding of the impact of the integrity of records on the efficiency of anti-corruption investigations. The research question explores how the integrity of records influences the efficacy of anti-corruption investigations. Because the amount involved and the quality of evidence used are two critical factors that determine the feasibility of a successful prosecution, only prompt access to authentic, reliable evidence allows maximum efficiency in investigation processes.

Probing corruption-related crimes is a meticulous undertaking that requires rigorous and comprehensive methods and protocols. The effectiveness and eventual success of the investigation depend heavily on quick, unimpeded access to relevant and reliable information. One crucial aspect of the investigation is reconstructing previous transactions, necessitating the use of the most widely recognised accountability mechanism as a vital evidence source. This underscores the significance of proper recordkeeping for successful investigation (Meijer, 2000). Despite the link between adequate records management and the fight against corruption (Adu, 2020), only trustworthy records can sufficiently justify the need for record creation (Duranti, 1995; MacNeil, 2000). However, adequate and reliable records alone cannot prevent corruption or its related practices without the use of anti-corruption watchdogs (Lawan and Henttonen, 2023).

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No prior study has empirically examined the impact of record integrity on the efficiency of investigations from the perspective of those who fight corruption. Understanding the implications of the integrity of valid evidence on the efficiency of anti-corruption investigations will strengthen the global fight against corruption.

## Background

According to [Penn et al. \(2017\)](#), records management is a logical and practical approach to create, maintain, use and dispose of records, including the information contained therein. Records management ensures that the correct record is adequately produced, organised, used and managed. A records management program should exist because it guarantees access and determines the lifespan of records for their eventual destruction. Cost savings that ensue are mere bonuses; whether savings accrue due to records management is not the rationale or justification for the program and should never be considered ([Penn and Pennix, 2017](#)).

The record life cycle framework is a conceptualisation of professional responsibilities and user groups at different stages of the record life span, from creation to their ultimate disposition. It consists of several key stages.

- creation stage: records are generated and their metadata is collected;
- use stage: accessing, updating and sharing records as needed;
- maintenance stage: encompasses tasks like organisation, indexing and proper storage to ensure accuracy, completeness and accessibility;
- disposition stage: making final decisions to either destroy or preserve records;
- preservation stage: focuses on long-term retention which may involve digitisation, conservation and fixity/storage in archival repositories; and
- access stage: ensures authorised users can access records after their initial use is over while maintaining security and privacy measures ([Penn, 1983](#); [Matlala and Maphoto, 2020](#)).

The three concepts used to define authenticity are source authority, accuracy assurance and originality/genuineness. Authentication symbols and source authority are significant indicators of record authenticity. While the signature is of higher value when working with manual records, electronic records require comparison with other sources for authentication ([Park, 2001](#), pp. 271 – 280). But regardless of format, the need for records to be trustworthy, retain their evidential value and function effectively is a constant.

Recordkeeping systems should incorporate technological, corporate and institutional safeguards to produce authentic records ([Meijer, 2003](#)). A robust institutional safeguard will support and aid the building of a good reputation, performance, competence and confidence of record custodians, which is the requisite knowledge upon which trust rests ([Duranti, 2012](#); [Duranti and Rogers, 2012](#); [Duranti and Rogers, 2019](#)). Technological and organisational safeguards help preserve authentic digital records. To support effectiveness, accountability forums need authentic records to reconstruct government organisations' and officials' actions and decisions.

The authenticity of records does not depend solely on technological and organisational safeguards but also on norms, values and cognitive scripts. Administrative safeguards for authenticity serve as general mechanisms; however, if they fail, public-sector accountability forums expect civil servants to follow the law and prevent government records from being altered.

Poor record management reduces confidence in records, undermining their evidential value. The authority and trustworthiness of records as evidence determine their reliability when it is the document it claims to be (Duranti, 1995). The value and importance of these records are enormous. Records help demonstrate the fair, equal and consistent treatment of citizens and play the most sensitive role in and are a critical component of virtually every aspect of governance. Records are desirable to provide a reliable, legally verifiable source of evidence of decisions and actions to attain the essential objective of supporting the rule of law, accountability, management of state resources, protection of entitlements, services for citizens, foreign relations and international obligations. Public servants need reliable information to carry out their given tasks, and records represent a crucial source of that information (World Bank Group, 2000). They also empower public servants to formulate, implement, monitor policies and manage key personnel and financial resources. Records are essential for government accountability in maintaining transparent democracies and providing access to information by citizens (Shepherd, 2006). Without records, it is impossible to have the reliable evidence needed to hold officials accountable (Okello-Obura, 2013).

Records are considered essential elements that ensure accountability, the maintenance of transparent democracies, the provision of citizens' access to information and the formulation and execution of policies. However, records can only achieve these goals if they are adequately managed. Records management enables records to attain full potential. Thus, poor management makes records inadequate to meet their informational needs, difficult to access, often lost, premature or unnecessarily retained (Shepherd, 2006).

### Previous research

Effective records management is crucial for Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts. However, there is limited research on the perspective of those fighting corruption in Nigeria regarding records management (Lawan and Henttonen, 2023). While the importance of records in anti-corruption is generally recognised, there is a lack of scholarly exploration of the practical challenges and best practices faced by those leading this fight. Further investigation can provide valuable insights to strengthen records management in the fight against corruption, benefiting not only Nigeria but also global accountability efforts.

Records serve as the nerve centre for sustaining accountability forums such as anti-corruption agencies. Without accountability, they will not be able to perform tasks. This study provides a firsthand empirical perspective on the impact of the integrity of records on the efficiency of anti-corruption investigation work.

Corruption is a significant problem that affects societies globally, and efficient anti-corruption investigations are necessary to combat it (Dávid-Barrett and Fazekas, 2020; Prabowo, 2020; Kobets *et al.*, 2021). Scholars have studied the efficiency of anti-corruption investigations and have identified challenges, including the complexity of corruption schemes, lack of program resources and capacity, presence of political interference, lack of transparency and accountability, weak legal frameworks and parallel corruption in the judiciary. However, studies have suggested that technology and data analytics, international cooperation and capacity-building and training programs can enhance the effectiveness of anti-corruption investigations (Mniwasa, 2019; Mungiu-Pippidi *et al.*, 2017).

Furthermore, scholars have argued that anti-corruption agencies must be shielded from political interference to be effective (Becker, 2008). Open-data policies and transparency can improve accountability and effectiveness in the fight against corruption. Strong legal frameworks and independent judiciaries are crucial for successful prosecution. International cooperation can provide access to resources and information and facilitate asset recovery. Capacity building and training programs can improve the skills, knowledge and resources

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necessary to conduct effective investigations (Brody *et al.*, 2020; Prabowo, 2020; Walton and Hushang, 2022).

In Africa, records are neglected information resources (Murunga, 1995). Corruption is a prominent obstacle (Gillies, 2020). The prevailing strategy used to address this challenge closely mirrors the global trend of establishing specialised anti-corruption agencies whose effectiveness hinges entirely on the availability of dependable evidence (Abdulrauf, 2020; Lawan and Henttonen, 2023). It is worth noting that adopting a viewpoint that places significant emphasis on proficient records management will offer a more promising solution for numerous African nations struggling with this pervasive threat.

Despite the immense potential of Nigeria, the largest economy and most populous country in Africa, it continues to be plagued by corruption, a pervasive threat that undermines its progress and development (Osoba, 1996; Page, 2018).

### Methodology

A well-defined research problem must be established and geared towards a specific feature to achieve focus (Silverman, 2010). This research project examines how the accuracy of records affects the effectiveness of anti-corruption investigations. The in-depth exploratory investigation uses qualitative methods to explore social phenomena through a case study. Studying the impact of the integrity of records within a unique accountability forum that relies heavily on them as a primary source of information makes the record lifecycle concept with its segmented phases best suited for system vulnerability. The four stages of the record lifecycle concept (creation, distribution, maintenance and use and appraisal and disposition) bring critical constructs in alignment with the variables of this research field (Shepherd and Yeo, 2003). The concepts can help to simplify diagnosis/troubleshooting, understand process-related leakages and point to the exact trail that requires urgent attention for prompt guided treatment. The record lifecycle remains a practical and helpful concept for examining and interpreting records management for professionals in other disciplines (Hoke, 2011). This model forms the basis for formulating the study's research questions and interview templates.

The case study approach is most suitable for investigating cases because it enables researchers to describe the elements and impacts of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2018; Taylor *et al.*, 2015; Yin, 2009). This study concentrates on records management in the context of anti-corruption investigations, considering the numerous corruption cases and substantial national and international interest that the country has received (Olujobi, 2021). The case study subject organisation is Nigeria's Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), its first central anti-corruption agency, although it has extensive experience fighting corruption at the local level (Abdulrauf, 2020).

The ICPC was selected because its operations department relies heavily on recorded evidence for investigation. In addition to its primary mission of combating financial crimes and corrupt practices in government ministries, departments and agencies, the commission also examines public bodies' practices, systems and procedures to identify areas vulnerable to corruption and oversees their review. The ICPC is committed to promoting transparency and accountability for effective governance (ICPC, 2024).

The research data were collected in 2020 using a semi-structured interview guide through recorded interviews with 15 ICPC staff from six units of operation (Computer Security, Financial Investigations, General Investigations, Petition Registry, Special Duties and Special Investigations).

Investigation-related units were informed about research data collection by the Director of Operations (DG OPS). Snowball sampling was used to choose the 15 research participants from the six units of the Operations Department of the ICPC. Snowballing was kick-started, with the first principal investigator introduced by the DG OPS as a possible interviewee. Saturation (Baker *et al.*, 2012) was observed during the 15<sup>th</sup> interview. The research participants comprised senior, mid-level and junior officers. Two to three staff members from each investigation unit participated in this study. Although the staff perform different tasks in their respective teams, they all use records to discharge their assigned duties. The sole responsibility of each participant lies in investigating corruption cases using recorded evidence. Their reliance on records as an exclusive accountability tool during the investigation and prosecution processes made this group the best source of information for this research.

Owing to the subject's sensitive nature and related privacy concerns that ensure best practice, the researcher provided a series of detailed explanations of the aims and objectives of the study to secure permission for data collection, as centralised investigations warranted interviews at the commission headquarters in individual participants' offices. Each interview lasted 30 min to an hour, depending on the varying length of individual responses to the questions. No interviewees were reluctant to answer questions, and only minor interruptions by visitors and colleagues occurred during the active interview sessions.

Out of the 28 open-ended interview questions (see *Appendix*), five (**bolded**) were designed to elicit responses that unveil records integrity as it impacts the effectiveness of anti-corruption investigations. Questions such as "What was it like to interface with a poorly managed record system if experienced?" further probed how this affected their work, informed them and supported other general questions. The themes of this study analysis were derived from the records lifecycle model that foregrounds the purposeful creation and maintenance of records for appropriate use; the main research questions were:

- RQ1.* What is the perception of Nigeria's anti-corruption professionals on the role of records in investigations?
- RQ2.* How does the integrity of records influence the efficacy of anti-corruption investigations?
- RQ3.* How do activities in the stages of the record life cycle impact the practice of anti-corruption investigations?
- RQ4.* How do anti-corruption practitioners perceive the significance of maintaining proper records to promote good governance?

The interview data were transcribed and theme-coded, and a thematic analysis was then conducted (see [Table 1](#)). The interview guide results for the research questions were determined from the identified research gap. It points to the question being categorically meant to elicit responses corresponding to the importance, value, advantages and status of records and records management. Initial codes for the study data emerged from the patterns and meanings derived from interviews. The analysis was performed by comparing similarities and differences in the interviewees' responses. Other emerging themes include the role of investigators, prospects of records management and transparency in recordkeeping practices.

The scope of this research was restricted to the analysis of anti-corruption investigators. Individuals in the study were selected from a department that exclusively dealt with enquiries and evidence related to investigations.



## Findings

The findings of this study explore record integrity and its impact on the effectiveness of anti-corruption investigations. An efficient investigation can achieve the desired outcomes with minimal resources, time and effort. Attaining efficiency in anti-corruption investigations is essential because it allows investigators to achieve their objectives effectively and practically. This means that investigators should prioritise their efforts and allocate resources wisely to identify relevant evidence, evaluate it thoroughly and draw valid conclusions. Additionally, an efficient investigation can help reduce the impact on any individual involved, whether victims or subjects, by minimising unnecessary disruption to their lives.

Table 1 summarises the response areas and emergent themes from the interviews. The response areas encompassed activities such as building case files, event reconstruction, productivity/efficiency and exploring emotions towards those job activities (both positive and negative). The identified themes included record access, conflicts and quality. The table also provides a quantification of how frequently each theme was mentioned in the responses, allowing for multiple mentions per response. The table offers a concise yet comprehensive overview of the study's primary focus areas and key interview-derived themes, emphasising the crucial role of meticulous recordkeeping in anti-corruption investigations.

Sample quotes in the following sections illustrate the themes and mentions tabulated in the table.

### *Challenges in accessing records*

Anti-corruption investigations are time-sensitive and evidence-based and require prompt access to relevant and valid evidence. Therefore, it is essential to have authentic evidence to support these claims. One respondent shared their experience when making record requests during an investigation:

The Majority of the cases [...] suffered a lot of delays as a result of the inability to get the record on time. Recordkeeping in government offices, for instance, is very, very poor. You want some records, and it takes [...] a week, two weeks or even more [...] to get the record.. So, recordkeeping is really very slow, very poor, and that's why many times cases are delayed. (Interviewee I):

When access to vital information is frequently denied because of unwarranted delays, it hampers the ability to carry out investigative responsibilities efficiently. This issue is directly related to the importance and appropriate handling of the records. Unfortunately, this is a widespread problem that benefits corrupt individuals and exacerbates misconduct, which appears to be a deliberate effort to undermine the fight against corruption.

Areas	Themes	No. of times mentioned responses
Building case file	Record access	23
Event reconstruction	Record conflicts	7
Productivity/efficiency	Record quality	46
Emotional response	Positive	21
	Negative	26

**Table 1.**  
Response areas and  
themes

**Source:** Table courtesy to Soyka (2022)

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Delays in acquiring records not only lead to operational inefficiencies but also potentially impede decision-making processes. This situation also indicates possible problems with the organisation, storage and retrieval systems of records as well as insufficient training of staff in proper records management practices. The inadequate maintenance and utilisation of records throughout their lifecycle can result in delays, communication breakdowns and decreased productivity.

#### *Inadequately maintained records*

Effective time management during investigation is crucial for enhancing productivity. Investigators rely on different records management systems to extract pertinent evidence, and their first-hand experience with these systems sheds light on the difficulties encountered when dealing with poorly maintained records throughout the investigation process:

Oh, God! It's terrible. It's terrible. It really [...] is time-consuming. It will consume more of your time. (Interviewee II)

The above response shows the extent of frustration that anti-corruption investigators feel when seeking reliable evidence in a poorly managed records management system. Moreover, the amount of time that discovery takes is elongated, which calls into question the judicious use of available resources that define efficiency criteria.

It is highly unsatisfactory to deal with poorly maintained records in investigations of its impact on efficiency, productivity and the overall outcome of the exercise:

It's frustrating. It's very frustrating. That's the only thing I can say because if you are waiting for information to do something until you have it, you cannot move on. (Interviewee IV)

This emphasises the emotional toll on investigators dealing with disorganised records, highlighting their frustration and the critical importance of timely record access. Delays in obtaining essential information can significantly hinder investigation, leading to stagnation and reduced productivity. This insight aligns with the broader theme of efficient resource utilisation and the impact of time-consuming tasks on investigative efficiency. This underscores the practical challenges faced by anti-corruption investigators and the urgent need for better records management systems to overcome these obstacles.

#### *Irregular/unreliable records*

Anti-corruption investigators have made specific requests for records to be provided by the individuals responsible for their maintenance. These requests were meticulously detailed to ensure accuracy and prevent errors that could undermine the investigation. Therefore, it is expected that correct records containing the necessary information will be shared promptly. In contrast, one interviewee expressed a different viewpoint regarding the consistency of the information requested for the investigation:

You may see them [MDAs] giving you conflicting or ambiguous information that you can't use in court, especially on land matters. We had a re-claiming that a plot belonged to this person. It was equally allocated to, say, another person. But this was equally allocated to another person, like 3,4,5 people on the same plot. So, I do not want to use that [Information]. (Interviewee III)

Such inconsistencies in the records provided during the investigation indicated inauthentic content. For instance, when the responsible authority presents conflicting or vague information about a transaction, it unnecessarily prolongs investigations. These deliberate actions obstruct the investigation process and undermine its purpose, resulting in an



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ineffective investigation that fails to produce satisfactory outcomes for prosecution. Consequently, unreliable evidence hampers the efficiency of the investigation because its effectiveness relies on the quality of the evidence.

To ensure accurate and reliable information, organisations and individuals should uphold the integrity of records throughout their entire life cycle. Falsification can occur when records are accessed for use or review. This can involve altering or manipulating records to present a different story or to conceal information. Records can be falsified when stored in physical or electronic systems. Unauthorised access or tampering with stored records can lead to falsification due to a lack of controls limiting access to records only to authorised personnel. Establishing clear policies and procedures for recordkeeping, conducting regular audits, implementing physical security measures and documenting all changes made to records can help prevent falsification and ensure reliability.

### *Falsified records*

Records can only serve their purpose if they remain authentic. They must stand for what they have purported. As presented by this principal investigator, even timely access to unreliable evidence wastes time and resources:

I will say to a reasonable extent, we keep records, but because there is no record that we have requested that we didn't get, that is not where the problem lies. Some of these records are manipulated. So, the records are there, but they are manipulated. (Interviewee V)

Therefore, neither the availability nor speed of access and presentation can guarantee the integrity of records. The only desirable records were those that eventually proved their value by strengthening the investigation and improving the efficiency of the process. Unfortunately, the possibility of attaining anti-corruption investigation efficiency is limited by the rampant manipulation of the recorded evidence in the system.

The integrity of records is greatly prioritised in the realm of anti-corruption enquiries. Using a methodical record-keeping approach is advantageous in investigative procedures. Nonetheless, even if these records are meticulously structured and effectively overseen, their worth diminishes when artificially generated or tampered with:

Records management could be very beautiful and well managed but if those records that are well managed are created artificially or fictitiously will it aid in fighting corruption? The answer is no. You can see a well-arranged and well-managed record system, but the documents there are cooked. We used to hear about the cooked financial statement that impacted negatively on the investing public during the period of the share awarded and they roll out financial payment that is fictitious and cooked and people are buying in because that's what they saw. (Interviewee VI)

Record authenticity is crucial in preventing corruption. Forged or altered records undermine credibility and enable corrupt activities. The link between record authenticity and corruption emphasises how fake records, such as misleading financial statements, can harm stakeholders. The importance of transparency and trustworthiness in recordkeeping is highlighted, as manipulated records erode trust. Reliable records are essential for trust, accountability and efficiency across sectors, emphasising the need to protect records from manipulation and falsification. Implementing proper controls is crucial to prevent unauthorised access and tampering with records. Establishing clear policies and conducting regular audits must support detection of any discrepancies. Physical security measures such as locks, alarms and surveillance cameras should also be implemented. It is important to document any changes made to records to ensure they are authorised and traceable.

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*The importance of effective records management*

Professionally maintaining records is crucial for producing trustworthy evidence that fulfils accountability standards. Therefore, the respondents confirmed the significance of proper recordkeeping:

There is no denying the fact that proper recordkeeping and again I think the underlying word there is proper, proper recordkeeping can be a panacea to some kind of corruption cases we have seen in Nigeria. (Interviewee VII)

In the absence of professional controls, records are susceptible to various risks, including manipulation, falsification, misplacement, unauthorised access and destruction. This vulnerability can have detrimental effects on investigations aimed at safeguarding the interests of individuals impacted by corruption, resulting in inefficient and ultimately fruitless outcomes.

Conversely, the following interviewee shared a positive experience where evidence was handled professionally, highlighting the importance of adhering to the record life cycle stages. Without professional controls, records face significant risks that can compromise investigations. Proper record creation, use, maintenance and disposition are crucial for preserving integrity and supporting effective investigations. The record life cycle concept plays a vital role in ensuring the protection of interests and successful corruption-related investigations:

During the investigation, the well-managed documents assist because it makes your work easy, work that is supposed to have taken you maybe one month, three months, if you have the document at your disposal, you'll just finish in a matter of weeks, maybe in a week, you'll finish. (Interviewee VIII)

Having access to a well-designed record system during an investigation can significantly benefit investigators by saving valuable time, energy and limited resources. Moreover, high-quality records can enhance the likelihood of a successful investigation, making it feasible to combat corruption within a designated timeframe. This emphasises the importance of an efficient investigation process in the context of anti-corruption efforts.

## **Discussion**

### *The significance of high-quality records in thorough investigations*

Failing to keep proper and trustworthy records has consequences, and costs can vary among establishments depending on the significance of records in their line of work. Nonetheless, records are crucial tools in anti-corruption investigations because they provide concrete evidence throughout the process. While certain expenses, such as wasted time, may be typical for all organisations, governmental or private, other costs may be more severe, such as losing a critical piece of strategic information or an irreplaceable part of their history (World Bank Group, 2000). According to this study, the effectiveness of anti-corruption investigations depends on the quality of the evidence. Because investigations must be completed quickly, readily available, reliable evidence is crucial for a smooth and efficient process. This boosts the investigator's self-assurance and helps confirm the investigation results. However, if the evidence is unreliable, it can slow down the progress of the investigation, which can impact the quality of service. However, even if the evidence is not of the highest quality, it is still often used as a starting point for investigation as evidence of wrongdoing.

### *Professional management and care of records*

Records must receive professional controls to maintain optimal conditions over time. According to this study, this type of care ensures that records retain their integrity and can

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be effectively used in anti-corruption investigations. To prevent unauthorised access and tampering, access to records should be restricted to authorised personnel using passwords, biometric authentication and other access-control mechanisms during record creation. Audit trails should be maintained during usage to track access and changes. Physical security measures such as locks, alarms and surveillance cameras can be used during storage and preservation to protect records from theft, damage or destruction. Personnel should be trained on the importance of accurate and complete records and the risks associated with corruption. Record retention policies should be established to ensure records are retained for the appropriate period during the disposition and destruction stages.

Records that do not meet management standards or lack proper protection are more vulnerable to corruption and may be less reliable. As a result, it is crucial to handle records with utmost care to maintain their authenticity and prevent corruption. (Casadesús de Mingo and Cerrillo-i-Martínez, 2018; Adu, 2020; Okello-Obura, 2013; Shepherd, 2006). Our data indicate that unauthorised manipulation, falsification or destruction of records impede anti-corruption investigations and reduce their effectiveness. This exacerbates the negative impact of unprofessionalism on the efficiency of anti-corruption efforts, which directly affects the quality of investigations and may lead to inaccurate conclusions.

The quality of evidence presented before a judge is crucial for obtaining a conviction. It helps reconstruct events for better analysis, decision-making and logical conclusions. Conversely, a lack of reliable evidence fosters corruption by failing to prove cases, thereby emboldening those who engage in corrupt practices and attracting like-minded individuals. This may reinforce the belief that it is beneficial to continue such behaviour.

#### *The implications of inefficient recordkeeping*

Efficient recordkeeping requires eliminating barriers such as cost, resistance to change and lack of knowledge. Implementing records management controls, including access control, policies, audits, security measures and documentation, can counter inefficient recordkeeping.

Inefficient recordkeeping, which can be a deliberate ploy serving the interests of corrupt individuals, causes undue delays in obtaining recorded evidence for anti-corruption investigations. This obstruction prevents the investigation process from operating efficiently and impedes timely administration of justice. Over time, this situation may cause corrupt individuals to continue engaging in illicit activities with severe implications for human rights. (Hough, 2013; Peters, 2018; Rose-Ackerman, 2004; World Bank Group, 2000).

#### *Ensuring trustworthy records for legal proceedings*

Records ought to be trustworthy (Duranti and Rogers, 2011; Ketelaar, 1997; Lemieux, 2016; MacNeil, 2000). If there is no valid and accurate evidence to support a case, it is considered null and void by a judge, which could delay the administration of justice. Therefore, it is essential to have strong institutional safeguards such as access controls, audit trails and record retention policies to ensure that records can be trusted and used effectively in the fight against corruption. Any loopholes that allow for manipulation, falsification or unauthorised access must be eliminated by following standard procedures, principles and practices for records management. Records must be reliable, complete, authentic and trustworthy, regardless of their electronic or manual format. While the criteria for attaining these attributes remain consistent, dissimilarities in necessary skills, infrastructure and accessibility might arise, depending on the format of the records within one's possession.

## Conclusion

Several factors influence the effectiveness of anti-corruption investigations linked to challenges and opportunities for improvement: the need for robust legal frameworks and independent judiciaries; and the importance of technology, international cooperation and capacity-building and training programs to combat corruption. Proper recordkeeping ensures protection of the truthfulness of records to provide reliable evidence to support these factors.

With strengthened institutional safeguards, availability and easy access to organised records can enhance authenticity and reliability. Since corruption usually involves abuse of credible evidence, is it reasonable to believe that proper recordkeeping can guarantee the process of producing organised, reliable and valuable evidence? Understanding the value of the integrity of records on the efficiency of anti-corruption investigations will redirect policymakers' priorities towards a more productive exercise.

Creating trustworthy records is essential for accountability forums, a viewpoint that is widely shared among records management experts (Palmer, 2000; Casadesús de Mingo and Cerrillo-i-Martínez, 2018; Adu, 2020). Access to reliable evidence remains essential to effective anti-corruption efforts.

However, this concept may not be universal in all scenarios that involve records. In the intriguing world of anti-corruption investigations, alterations to or manipulations of records can actually serve as triggers for enquiries, offering fresh perspectives and insights into the investigation. Regardless of the condition of the records, they can serve as valuable starting points for inquiries, given the time-sensitive nature of investigations. While records management experts emphasise trustworthiness, the dynamic nature of anti-corruption investigations necessitates a different perspective that values timely access to evidence, regardless of their authenticity.

But overall, poor recordkeeping undermines the integrity of the evidence and can lead to manipulation, falsification, misplacement, unauthorised access and destruction. This hinders prompt access and constitutes deliberate sabotage against accountability forums, obstructing efficient anti-corruption investigations and serving the interests of corrupt beneficiaries. In addition, inefficiencies, such as delays and lack of reliable evidence, threaten the success of investigations, impeding good governance and human rights. Therefore, further studies should explore enhancing strategies within the record lifecycle for more effective accountability forums.

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### Further reading

- Trust and conflicting rights in the digital environment (2012), "Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada (an international conference on permanent access to digital documentary heritage", [www.unesco.org/archives/multimedia/document-2775](http://www.unesco.org/archives/multimedia/document-2775) (accessed 6 August 2022).

- (1) To start with, could you please tell me your position and a little bit of background on your work?
- (2) How do records feature in your work?
- (3) What types of records do you work with?
- (4) How do you source the records with which you work?
- (5) What role(s) do the records play in your work?
- (6) How do you manage records at your disposal?
- (7) What specific role(s) do you play in records management?
- (8) How do you access the records you need to work within the ICPC?
- (9) How do you access the records that you need for your work outside your organisation?
- (10) Tell me about your experiences of interfacing with a well-managed record system during the investigation.
  - How does this facilitate your work?
- (11) What was it like to interface with a poorly managed record system if you had experienced one?
  - How does this affect your work?
- (12) Are there situations in which the records you were looking for happen not to be created in the first place?
  - If yes, tell me that, please.
  - What did you do, or how did you take care of it?
- (13) Were you ever presented with a record in a state so bad that it could not be tendered as valid evidence?
  - If yes, what happened? What did you do?
- (14) Have you ever found yourself in a situation where the record in question had already been destroyed?
  - If yes, what was your next line of action in this situation?
  - What alternative options do you have?
- (15) Records management professionals generally believe that if records management systems are in place, it will be very difficult for corruption to thrive. What is your opinion on this?
- (16) What is your understanding of the link between proper recordkeeping and the fight against corruption in Nigeria?
- (17) What is your idea of transparency in recordkeeping practice?
- (18) Can you describe the level of transparency in recordkeeping practices in Nigeria?
- (19) What are the major challenges of recordkeeping practices in Nigeria?
- (20) How can record-keeping practices in Nigeria be enhanced?
- (21) What do you think are the functions of records in enhancing good governance in Nigeria?
- (22) What are the bottlenecks in achieving proper recordkeeping practices in Nigeria?
- (23) What role do records play in enhancing accountability for good governance in Nigeria?

- (24) What are the significant challenges to proper recordkeeping practices in Nigeria?
- (25) How can these challenges be addressed by examining the value of the records in your work?
- (26) What, in your opinion, should be the consequence of poor recordkeeping in your work?
- (27) What can you say are the prospects of records management practices in Nigeria?
- (28) Do you have anything else to say, or is there a need to make corrections or clarify something?

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