

**CIVIL SERVICE INNOVATION AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

The civil service is the engine room that implements government policies and programmes. The strategic position of this sector in socio-economic development and good governance of a nation can never be overemphasized, the re-invigoration of the civil service has become inevitable and pertinent as Nigeria is at crossroads of economic crisis bogged down by decline in oil prices in the international market, with its attendant threats to national security and deplorable living conditions of the citizenry. The service delivery of the Nigerian civil service exhibits significant potential for enhancement. Nevertheless, the realisation of this potential necessitates civil servants to recognise the pivotal role that innovation assumes as a catalyst for constructive transformation and advancement within any given economy. The study adopted the technological theory of social change by William Ogburn(1947) and being a qualitative study, data was generated through secondary sources i.e. texts, journals, newspapers and online sources. The study examined the Nigerian civil service and how it has fared as regards innovation in efficient and effective service delivery to its citizens. The study recommends there is a crucial need for government to build a civil service that is innovative, futuristic and technological driven, devoid of red-tapism and bureaucracy by institutionalising the culture of innovation in the public sector. The study further suggests that a well-motivated and trained civil service would be an asset rather than liability.

**Keywords:** Innovation, Service delivery, Civil service, Nigeria

**Introduction**

The civil service is the engine room that drives and implements government policies, programmes and projects. In view of the strategic position of this sector in the socio-economic development and good governance of a country, the Nigerian civil service needs to be re-invigorated and repositioned for efficient service delivery. The importance of embracing innovation in the public sector becomes even more apparent when considering the rapid adoption of innovative technologies in private sector administration. Many organisations have successfully utilised these technologies to improve their efficiency, transparency, performance, and overall success.

As a result, it is critical that the public sector, which is expected to be the driving force behind the country's socioeconomic development, falls behind in this critical area. While innovation in the private sector is viewed as one of the five key drivers of productivity, alongside investment, skills, enterprise, and competition, in the public sector, innovation is concerned with efficiency and strongly aligns with service delivery. The drivers for innovation in the public sector in the 21st century consist of different domestic as well as global forces. These include, but are not limited to globalisation, rising new technologies, changing expectations of citizens, and increasingly complex problems facing governments, particularly against the backdrop of the recent COVID-19 pandemic and resultant economic crisis and constricted budgets. Against this backdrop and despite the divergences of approaches to innovation, the consensus seems clear, that the civil service needs to find new ways of working and doing things to be effective in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Innovation is generally defined as something new that can be implemented and has a positive impact on specific sectors of society. It is a concept, process, practice, and capability that defines successful organisation (Serrat, 2017). The public sector is a major agent of national growth and development. The transformation of any society or system depends on the effectiveness and efficiency of its public service, especially in developing countries (Lawal & Oluwatoyin, 2014). The challenges and opportunities in recent times requires the civil service to embark on open and collaborative innovation for transformation and improvement of the systems and processes for sustainable service delivery. This study examined the Nigerian civil service and how it has fared as regards innovation in delivering efficient and effective service to its citizens and in meeting up with the global practices and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Conceptual and Theoretical Discourse**

### **Innovation**

Innovation entails responding to change in a creative manner. It entails and the development of, and the practical implementation of ideas that result in the introduction of new goods or services, or the improvement of goods or services offered. The concept of innovation simply put, entails new things, new ideas of an individual, organization and even government that improves its services in a changing world. Man is dynamic in nature and adjustments to meet the changing ideas and situations are often said to be innovation. Innovation is what we cannot do without because no one or government is static. Innovation has been a constant force in human history, driving progress and improving the quality of life (Afegbua, 2015). It is the catalyst for introducing new ideas that propel organisations forward and foster growth (Maduabum, 2014). Awosika (2014) defines innovation as the process of researching, acquiring, and implementing new ideas, technologies, processes, and products. Its purpose goes beyond problem-solving, aiming to enhance efficiency, effectiveness, and ultimately, the standard of living. According to Osborne and Brown (2005) cited in Afegbua (2015), innovation involves the introduction and adoption of new ideas that bring about a shift in the relationship between an organisation and its internal and external environments. Innovation often involves putting an invention into action to create a significant impact in a market or society. It's important to note that not all innovations necessarily involve a completely new invention. For this paper, I will be discussing two processes of change in an organisation or society that are distinct and noteworthy. Firstly, it involves implementing fresh concepts in a practical manner (UNDESA 2007). According to Aldair (2007), innovation involves the combination of two interconnected processes: generating new ideas and putting them into action. Additionally, innovation involves finding fresh and improved approaches for an organisation or society to overcome its challenges (Aldair, 2007).

### **Reasons for Innovation**

According to Weihrich et al. (2008), they clearly identified the following as the reasons for innovation in an organization be it public or private:

1. An unexpected event, failure, or success
2. An incongruity between what is assumed and what is really is.
3. A process or task that needs improvement
4. Changes in the market or industry structure
5. Changes in demographics
6. Change in meaning or in the way things are perceived
7. Newly acquired knowledge

Innovation plays a crucial role in various aspects, including:

- Cost reduction, productivity improvement, profit enhancement, and organisational strengthening. Maintaining competitiveness in a globalised economy is crucial for organisations.
- They must be able to adapt to changing environments, whether it's due to legislation, technology, society, economy, or physical factors. This adaptability can breathe new life into slowing or stagnant markets and operational areas, or help facilitate entry into new markets.
- Inculcating a culture of creativity is essential for organisations, especially those in research-oriented fields or dynamic markets like ICT. However, it is also relevant for any organisation that wants to attract high-quality creative staff and managers at any level (Damanpour & Gopalakrishnan, 1998; Hargadon & Sutton, 2000; d'Aveni, 1994)

When it comes to successfully managing public services in a society that is constantly evolving, creativity is absolutely necessary. The characteristics of public services, on the other hand, have a significant impact on the degree of innovation that occurs within the public sector. There are significant differences between the various public units in terms of size, focus, objectives, and outputs. Public services exhibit a remarkable level of diversity, with significant variations among both. It's possible that these differences are even more significant than those found in the workplace. As an illustration, there are institutions that provide services to individual users, institutions that provide collective services to all citizens, and administrative institutions that cater to other governmental organisations (Bloch, 2012:7). Other examples include institutions that provide services to all citizens. This highlights the significance of innovation within the Nigerian public service in order to provide customers with services that are both efficient and effective.

### **Service delivery**

Service delivery is the primary concern of any organization that deals with one or more persons. The concern here is not limited to only those in the public sector; it is also of great importance to the private organization. The growth of any organization directly depends on the quality of service such organization delivers. Effective service delivery relies on the mode and manner members of staff handles the constitutionally assigned functions and responsibilities given to them. It involves all aspects that have to do with when, how and where a service is delivered to a customer, and whether it is fair and in line with the laid down procedures. Service components are usually not always physical products, but instead are a combination of resources (skills and material) that must be appropriately planned and designed (Martins and Ledimo, 2015). According to Ikeanyibe and Imhanlahimi, (2006), effective service delivery connotes the formulation, design and implementation of governmental policies, programmes or service to the satisfaction of the clientele. It involves implementation of assigned duties and responsibilities as outlined in the constitution/rules of the organization which one pledged to carryout in other to meet the organizational objectives. As a result, the level of performance that an organisation or its employees demonstrate in terms of carrying out their responsibilities and working towards goals has a direct influence on the quality of the services that are provided. According to Ezekwesili (2010), it is able to determine whether the service is efficient or inefficient, effective or ineffective, economical or not. It can also determine whether the service is productive or not productive. The public must have some sense of satisfaction in the services so rendered. For the people to be satisfied, the service must reflect courtesy, fairness, timely, equity, relevance, accountability, effective and efficient. It underscores the fact that the services so provided actually reach the target groups and they are satisfied in its mode of operations/implementations. Service delivery is successful implementation of assigned task to the satisfaction of the public/clientele.

### **The Nigerian Civil service**

The civil service is the engine room of government. It comprises all government departments except the navy, army and Air force whose salaries and allowances are paid from the funds voted by the legislature. There is a definition of the civil service that can be found in the constitution from 1999, specifically in section 318 sub-section 1. It is a term that describes the service that is provided in a civil capacity to the federation, state, or local level respectively. This includes employees who work for the offices of the president, vice president, governor, and deputy governor, as well as those who work for ministries, departments, or agencies operated by the state and the federation. Their responsibility is to provide assistance to the operations of the government at the various levels. According to Ipinlaiye (2001), the civil service is comprised of individuals who are employed by the federal and state governments to make and carry out decisions regarding the implementation of government policies in a capacity that is not related to politics. The government depends on the civil service for implementation of its policies and programmes because they are experienced and have the know-how. They are a well-organised body of permanent paid officials of government ministries that are solely responsible for implementation of government policies/programmes as prescribed by the constitution. When it comes to law enforcement, political office holders or elected representatives of the people do not exert their power directly. They utilise the civil service as a means to exercise it.

The fundamental responsibilities of the civil service include:

- a. To support the government in shaping policies by supplying the required data.
- b. To implement the approved policies without any bias or favouritism.
- c. In order to prevent the potential regret of future consequences, it is important to prioritise long-term considerations over short-term conveniences (Al-Gazali, 2007).

The study utilised the technological theory of social change proposed by William Ogburn(1947). In his work "How technology shapes society," the author suggests that technology has the power to transform our environment, leading us to adjust accordingly. This alteration typically occurs within the material environment, and the adjustments we make to the changes often result in modifications to customs and social institutions. This theory, when applied to this study, explains the changes in social institutions that can occur when emerging technology is implemented in public institutions. These changes can lead to more efficient service delivery. Through this approach, the government discovers a more streamlined and productive way to provide public services. This leads to smoother operations within the political system, as the public receives higher levels of satisfaction from the services provided by the civil service. This study being a qualitative study, utilized data from secondary sources i.e. texts, journals, newspapers and online sources.

### **Innovations in the Public Sector: Nigerian Experience**

The public sector in Nigeria, like many African countries, was shaped by colonialism, hence, many reforms before and after colonialism was aimed at addressing diverse problems in the civil service ranging from dependency syndrome to corruption. We can summarise and categorise the civil/ public service reforms undertaken in Nigeria in three phases: Reforms undertaken during the colonial period from 1934 - 1959; Post-Independence Reforms from 1963 – 1998; Reforms under Democratic Governance 1999 – date. Given the specific focus of this study, it has been argued that several innovations accompanied the third phase of the public sector reforms that were undertaken during the Democratic era -1999 – 2019. Upon return to democratic governance in May 1999, the civilian government met a civil service that

was weak, inefficient, and characterized by poor service delivery, hence unresponsiveness towards public demands (Oyo-Ita, 2018). In 1999, President Obasanjo stated that there had been a decrease in productivity and service delivery among the general public. Notable advancements and changes include the implementation of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) in 2007, Pension Reforms in 2004, Public Procurement Reforms from 1999, Monetisation Policy in 2003, SERVICOM Reforms in 2004, Steve Oronsaye Panel (Presidential Committee on Restructuring and Rationalisation of Federal Government Parastatals, Commissions and Agencies), and the Federal Civil Service Strategy and Implementation Plan 2017 – 2020 in July 2018 (National Salaries, Incomes & Wages Commission, Oyo-Ita, 2018; Oyo-Ita, 2019; Olaopa, 2008; Okorie and Onwe, 2016).

The study examined some innovations in the civil service as regards efficient service delivery i.e. the SERVICOM Initiative, IPPIS Initiative, Performance Contract, E-Governance Initiative and establishment of Efficiency Unit.

### **Service Compact with all Nigerians (SERVICOM)**

SERVICOM, also known as Service Compact, is a forward-thinking policy programme. That was introduced by the Federal Government in 2004 to address the challenges that often arise from service delivery and to enhance effectiveness and efficiency in providing services in the ministries, departments, and agencies of government (MDAs). The policy programme introduced by the Obasanjo civilian administration in 2004 aimed to enhance customer satisfaction, optimise resource utilisation, achieve cost effectiveness, improve risk management, and fosters a secure and stable service environment. It also aimed to support change and flexibility. SERVICOM is responsible for monitoring the performance of MDAs in the country, regular evaluation and ratings of service delivery to measure excellence, to report and recommend sanctions and penalties for MDAs found wanting. Every MDA has a SERVICOM unit headed by a Nodal officer (usually a director) and supported by 3 staff (a charter Desk officer, a Customer Relations/Complaints Officer and a Service Improvement Desk Officer) - all appointed from regular staff of the MDA. The MDAs SERVICOM – vetted service charter is to be displayed at conspicuous places where the customers could easily read and know their rights to good service. They measure timeliness, professionalism, information and staff attitude. Interestingly, they also take note of the physical (non-verbal) communication that indicates that the staff is happy to give service and the MDAs compliance is ranked on the SERVICOM index. Even though successive administrations after Obasanjo have retained the SERVICOM, and despite the modest achievements of the initiative, poor service delivery has remained endemic in several public sectors (The Cable, March 27, 2017). More so, SERVICOM is also confronted with many challenges which includes inadequate funding and this affects the training of members of SERVICOM units in MDAs.

### **Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS)**

The year 2007 marked the beginning of the implementation of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS). According to Olumbide (2015), the primary objective was to reduce the cost of governance by avoiding any expenses that were not necessary and by enhancing the effectiveness of the administration of government payroll functions. IPPIS is a computerised and efficient human resource management information system that has been deployed by Ministries, Departments, and Agencies to carry out human resource activities ranging from recruitment to separation, including payroll and pension processing. These activities encompass recruitment, separation, and processing of pensions. IPPIS has documented some notable achievements. Mr. Jonah Otunla, the former Accountant-General of the Federation, stated that the implementation of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel

Information System resulted in significant savings of N120 billion on personnel cost from 2007 to 2013 (The Punch, 2013, page 18). Not all institutions have embraced the federal government's efforts to expand the coverage of the IPPIS to include the Armed Forces, Federal Universities, and other academic institutions across the country. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has raised strong objections to the introduction of IPPIS and opted for University Transparency and Accountability Solution (UTAS).

### **Performance Contract**

The Nigerian government introduced a performance contract system in its drive to improve service delivery in the public service in 2012. The performance contract is an accord linking the government and MDAs, which set up broad goals for the MDAs, put a target for evaluating performance, and provide rewards for meeting these targets (Eneanya 2013). The purpose is to advance contract services to the populace by enhancing output, responsibility, and efficient service delivery (Eneanya 2013). As a sign of commitment to the policy, Ministers were mandated to draw mission statements, requested to set agreed goals for top priorities, and make clear their appropriations to definite services and the part to be given to each frontline component. They were to review their managerial systems in tune with the SERVICOM charter and ensure proper public service delivery, planning, and resource distribution; performance inspection and analysis; responsibility for utilisation of funds and delivery of outcomes and instituting a more valuable balance between capital and non-staffing revenue spending. To boost the scheme, Ministers were requested to go into similar contracts with Permanent Secretaries. In the same vein, Permanent Secretaries would go into contract with their directors, to cascade down to the rank-and-file involving all staff. The FGN anticipated that this initiative would be extended to States and Local Governments. Thus, the commencement of the performance contract approach to governance has made a modest contribution to service delivery in the federal civil service.

### **E-Government Initiative**

The Nigerian government also carried out a comprehensive reform in the ICT sector. This was to further improve service delivery and improve performance management. In 2011, a new Ministry of Communication Technology (ICT) was created and in 2012 there was a review of the ICT Policy and the development of the E-Government Master Plan, followed by the launch of the Nigerian ICT roadmap 2017- 2020 (BPSR, 2018). This led to the setting up of e-services portal, to have a single point of access to governmental information and services in practically every public sector in Nigeria (Eneanya, 2016). These initiatives gave birth to the establishment of ICT-enabled government services, like IPPIS, GIFMIS, Bank Verification Numbers (BVN), e-passports, e-drivers licenses, Treasury Single Account (TSA), electronic card readers, e- tax management, e-NYSC registration, e- land management, Geographic Information System (GIS), and so on. E-government, which aligns with the technological social change theory adopted for this study and has been a tool that stimulated the expansion of the private sector in Nigeria (Ashike, 2015). Thus, its application has succeeded in curbing wastage and improving efficiency in public financial management.

### **Establishment of an Efficiency Unit**

In 2015, the federal government set up a 'Efficiency Unit' within the Federal Ministry of Finance. The Unit regulates public procurement procedures, and checks the internal apparatus of recurrent spending, including government activities that promote wastage and ineptitude in MDAs. Its overarching goal is to establish a fresh custom of service delivery that encourages good organization, competence, prudence, and value for money in government services

(Ashike, 2015). It presents a mutual stage for MDAs to acknowledge and establish a system of good organization as part of the general cultural transformation necessary to drive the nation towards progress, especially now that the government's revenue is dwindling amongst competing demands (Ashike, 2015).

### **Factors Militating against Innovation in the Civil Service**

- **Bureaucratic bottleneck**

Some bureaucratic principles hinder innovation in the Nigerian civil service. The inclination of senior staff to exploit the drawbacks of bureaucracy in order to hinder the execution of creative concepts, especially when these ideas come from lower-ranking civil servants (Maduabum, 2014). Some senior officers may resist directly/indirectly innovative ideas that tend to bring commendation to subordinate staff because every effort made by the subordinate must be reported accordingly through the senior staff. This type of behaviour can be compared to what Peter (1997) cited in Awosika (2014) describes as "Bureaupathology." It represents the negative administrative behaviours exhibited by professionals and experts in organisations, which hinder the accomplishment of public goals and the provision of high-quality public service to consumers.

- **Politicization and Lack of Sustainable Innovations in Public Sectors**

Public sectors that have become politicised often struggle to embrace innovation and operate as efficient organisations. Public sector organisations led by political appointees often prioritise maintaining their power rather than promoting collaboration and sharing. Political appointees often prioritise immediate media attention over long-term innovative solutions. There is a lack of strong incentives for sharing tasks and knowledge among public sector organisations, and unfortunately, internal political competition often takes precedence over sensible collaboration. Sustaining innovations possess a wide range of strengths, often resulting in enhanced quality and performance. They play a vital role in almost every organization's innovation strategy, and effective leadership is crucial in achieving this.

- **Corruption**

Corruption has crippled innovative idea introduced to ensure effective service delivery in the Nigerian civil service. Though, several measures has been put in place to curb corruption in Nigeria which the civil service is part of, this efforts seemed to have proved abortive amongst civil servants in Nigeria. Corruption comes in various forms during recruitment, posting to preferred places, kickbacks, over pricing, contract inflation etc. Innovation will not be encouraged if the right thing is not done. Kickbacks undermine innovation and the intending innovators may not be encouraged since the funds may not be used for what it is meant for.

- **Resistance to change**

This is another factor inhibiting innovation in the Nigerian civil service. Most civil servants are not willing to adapt to the current trends, they believe in the traditional method of service delivery. Sometimes bureaucrats resist innovation especially when such innovative idea tends to expose their ineffectiveness in line with global trend, coupled with the fear that automation and technology will erode their usefulness.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Innovation in the civil service is imperative for effective service delivery. More so, for the Nigerian civil service to meet up with the current global trend it has to be innovative. The Nigerian experience highlights how innovation efforts were revitalised alongside public sector reforms after Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999. However, despite the noble intentions behind the innovations and reforms in the public sector to address issues such as leakages in government resources, service delivery, and inefficiency, several challenges still

hinder efforts at innovation. The Nigerian civil service is burdened by excessive bureaucracy, red tape, corruption, favouritism, and inefficiency caused by subpar working conditions and low pay. The study argues that without navigating the innovation barriers, service delivery would remain difficult for the public sector in the 21st century. It is against this backdrop that the study made a strong case for radical public sector innovation measures to be put in place by the public sector. This has become imperative because gradualism does not seem to be yielding the expected results for public sector innovation in Nigeria. Even though the study suggested the adoption of a public sector innovation framework, it is evident that innovation capability and activity do not automatically impact performance, the wider sector conditions for innovation, plays an instrumental role. Training civil servants on the new tools and techniques involved in these innovations is key as well as having strong ethical principles for responsible innovation. This pertains to the impact of the operating environment on the innovation potential of a public sector organisation.

The study recommends the following:

- i. The government of Nigeria should implement the institutionalisation of the culture of innovation in the public sector.
- ii. It is crucial to provide comprehensive re-orientation for civil servants at all levels. It is important for workers to understand the significant impact that innovation has on driving positive change and development in the economy. Currently, there are workers in the civil service who are resistant to change and unwilling to adapt to new ways of doing things. This crop of civil servants will no doubt be a clog in the wheel of progress, without proper and consistent re-orientation.
- iii. It is important for the government to create a supportive work environment that prioritises the well-being and safety of workers. This can be achieved through the implementation of appropriate legislation and policies, as well as initiatives that promote new values, education, and innovation.
- iv. The civil service rules should be reviewed as it stifles creativity, ingenuity and innovation.
- v. The government should take proactive steps to implement structures and mechanisms for digitising administrative processes, in order to enhance and streamline government operations.

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