Civic Engagement and Governance in Nigeria's Public Service Sector

Shalom Ufuoma ERUDE
Department of Public Administration,
Faculty of Management Science,
Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.
Email: shallomerude26@gmail.com

Akpomuvire MUKORO, PhD
Department of Public Administration,
Faculty of Management Science,
Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.
Email: akpomuviremukoro@delsu.edu.ng

Ifeoluwa TAIWO
School of Politics, Policy and Governance
SPPG
Email: ifeoluwapotaiwo@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper seeks to underscore the important role of civic engagement in governance in the public sector. What happens when citizens decide to get involved in the policy making of their community, society and/or country? The social capital theory was used to explain the relevance of organizing and actively participating in public matters. This paper is based on qualitative analysis using historical design that engaged journals, articles, publications, and the internet sources. From the findings, it is established that, the public service is the driver of the sociopolitical and economic growth of any society, that for governance to bring about affordable public goods and services it must be people centric. Also, for there to be good governance, the citizens must be actively involved in policy making. We went to highlight the importance of civic engagement which includes solving problems of homelessness, pollution, climate change, race and gender inclusiveness and food insecurity. The various interventions cum forms of citizens engagement were explained to include; activism/advocacy, civic learning, philanthropy/fundraising, community service volunteering, etcetera. In conclusion, the following recommendations were suggested: a deliberate effort to engaging and developing the next breed of leaders, accepting medium term strategies to building an inclusive government whilst working on the big picture of a society void of segregation, supporting persons lacking the financial muscles to compete with the political mafias cum machiavellians in the political space and etcetera.

Keywords: Civic Engagement: Governance: Public Service: Social Capital: Nigeria.

1.0 Introduction of the Study

In virtually all nations of the world, a larger chunk of their citizens and residents (billions of persons) are denied the privilege of actively participating in the polity be it politics, economics and sociocultural systems, that determines their existence (Erude et al., 2023; Salami & Eze, 2024). Whilst these deprived population are denied access to relate their political leaders and state actors, thereby having a stake in formulation cum implementation of policies that have a bearing on them, the government has often failed in service delivery, working for some selected insignificant few having both political and economic power, with the attendant of widening the inequality gap (Ford Foundation, 2024). The power to either change this narrative or maintain status quo reside in the government. From antecedents, it is obvious that when the population of a society come together to organize, voice out, as well as engage the government, there is the possibility that the government cum state actors, as well as institutions would be accountable and propelled to be responsible leaders, who fulfill promises, with the attendant of good governance for the common good (Oyedele, 2015; Paschalis, 2017). It is on this premise, this paper is written, supporting the assertion that, sensible civic engagement serves as a panacea to societal inequalities in many regards, as well as the ability to cater for the fears, worries and deprivation of the vulnerable groups in the society, that overtime have been in such conditions.

Civic engagement as a term has plethora meaning and is associated to the social cum management science discipline like political science and public administration. However, the definition that seems holistic, sees it as the engagement of enlightened citizens with their government, society and/or community (Vaghefi & Krcatorich, 2023). Narrow down, civic engagement refers to consistent participation of citizens' in societal matter to make life better for the common good. Most times, we see civic engagement as peculiar to the activities cum actions orchestrated by young people in the community, older members of the community can still be involved in the process. Safe to say, there may be differences in terms of context, purpose as well as scope of the forms of civic engagement, the ultimate objective is to add up, positively to the community, politically, socially and/or culturally, for the benefit of the people (Hilger, 2006; Odionye & Odionye, 2024). The various interventions could be either a voluntary service in terms of education, by activities geared to protect the environment, actively participating during elections, or an advocacy project work as well as events organized for charity.

The concept of civic engagement is premised on social capital, which common sensically refers to the combination of assets gained by a person or body, based on their connections, relationships, and social networks (study.com, 2024). The value of connection (socially) of a group and/or person is ascertained vis-a-vis social capital, and it forms a major determinant in their success stories vis-a-vis education and economics. A major form of social capital is bonding, and it has to do with the engagement and interactions with others-individuals and groups, having similar or distinct experience (Verba et al., 1995; Warren et al., 2014). Moreso, it cut across social capital bridging, involving the relationships shared amongst groups and persons from different works of life in the society.

The Nigerian state is in a democratic quagmire, coupled with an unprecedented crisis amongst the aristocrats, a situation that determines who gets what, who decides on important matters, as well as the ethical standards that is to guide the future of the nation (Erude et al., 2023; Salami & Eze, 2024). The Nigeria democracy is an oligarchic democracy. We operate a gerontocratic, kleptocratic as well as kakistocratic democracy. The duo of religion and ethnicity in the country have further deepened the inequality gap, social injustice as well as political exclusion, that has lingered, ab initio. As identified earlier, our democratic system is faced with three compounding challenges: an oligarchy dominated government of plutocrats, aristocrats and kakistocrats; increasing societal cleavages rooted in religion, ethnicity, sentiments, as well as an increasing dictatorial
tendency; and gender exclusion. These inequalities inherited from colonialism are further exploited to the point of weakening civic engagement cum participation in the country (Berger, 2009; Eze et al., 2024).

Making matters worse, is the electoral umpire, The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which has not conducted an election that is void of malpractices viz rigging, killings, monetization, murder, voter intimidation, coercion and threat, since the start of the fourth Republic. The last presidential, as well as state election, further attested to this point. We witnessed a high level of manipulation of election results, aided by the officials of INEC. Most of the results coming from states like Rivers, Lagos, etc., did not show the wishes of the electorate (Hilger, 2006; Odionye & Odionye, 2024). This recent development in the country, has increased the level of trust in the government, especially amongst the younger generation, as a lot where betrayed seeing the outcome of the election, and have concluded that the government lacks the moral justification to deliver on its promises, with the attendant of lethargic disposition to political engagement. For we to change these narratives, those who bear the brunt or at the receiving end of these inequalities have a stake and must brace up act and get involved.

Fig 1: a cross section of citizens engaging one another in the United States of America (Source: Ford Foundation, 2024).
2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Public Service
The body responsible for policy formulation, implementation and service delivery is the public service of a country. It turns government's plans to tangible outcomes that benefits the public (Oyedele, 2015). Irrespective of style cum system at play in a polity, it is the public service that drives the economic and sociopolitical sector. A major challenge facing developing nations, Nigeria not exempted, is the nature of the public service vis-a-vis service delivery. The Public service does not work for the common good of the people. It is the duty of every responsible government to provide public goods and services, at a very considerable rate through the public service (Verba et al., 1995; Warren et al., 2014). Public service has to do with that which the government does for public utilities. Like public schools, health care center, hospitals, fire units, etc. (Vocabulary.com, 2024).

Ogbonnaya puts it this way, 'the activities of public officials and the parastatals that seek to formulate and implement government's programs for all and sundry to benefit (Agba et al, 2013 in Ogbonnaya, 2024). The public service as an agency is responsible for managing cum implementing government decisions. The civil service is under the public service. In fact, all civil servants are public servants but not all public servants are civil servants. Omojimite & Ben (2014) examined the relationship between education and economic growth in Nigeria for the periods of 1980 to 2005. The study employed Granger Causality test and co-integration. The result, contrary to the finding of Okere et al. (2019), showed a one way direction of causality from expenditure on education to economic growth in Nigeria. Almost all the studies carried out in Nigeria on the effects of government spending in education on economic growth, none consider productivity as a moderating variable. This study differs from the previous studies in Nigeria by examining how spending in education affect economic growth through improvement in productivity as well as using expenditure on health as a control variable for the study.

2.2 Governance
The definition of governance is relative and not absolute. Governance Institute, defines it thus: Governance cut across the system of control and operation of an organization, as well as the structure through which the government, its citizens and dwellers, are to be accountable (Youniss et al., 2002; Mukoro, 2021). The
following are governance elements; ethics, management, risk, compliance, as well as administration. Corporate governance on the other hand, refers to set of relationships between the management of a company, board members, holders of shares as well as stakes. Corporate governance gives the template that sets the objectives of the company, as well as the means needed to fulfilling it, and to monitor performance level (Governance Institute, 2023). Erude et al. (2023), views the public service as highly bureaucratized. Over fifty percent of world population have apathy for their government and its institutions, as a result of distrust. According to World Bank, the challenge of getting it right with leadership from top, forms the major puzzle of governance. Governance as well as its agencies are pivotal to poverty reduction and to get back from whatever crises. The post COVID-19 period in various governments of the world, is testament to the relevance of strong institutions and governance in nation building.

2.3 Citizens Engagement

Civic engagement as a concept has been viewed from different perspectives vis-a-vis citizenship, such as participating in election, being involved in activities within an organization, volunteering as a person, as well as actions that are collectively taken (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Warren, Sulaiman & Jaafar, 2014 in Paschalis, 2017). Whilst some scholars like Verba et al. (1995) views citizens engagement as a combination of both political and social activities, Berger (2009 in Paschalis, 2017), is of the opinion that the two terms - 'political and social' are somewhat distinct, and mutually exclusive. Others find a common ground between the two terms, seeing them as mutually inclusive (Ekman & Amna, 2012; Jugert, Eckstein, Noack, Kuhn, & Benbow, 2013; Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002; Youniss et al., 2002, in Paschalis, 2017). Hence, the concept of civic engagement is said to be deliberate steps cum actions for the purpose of addressing concerns of the public, via personal effort, action collectively taken, or engaging democratic institutions (Paschalis, 2017).

Adler & Goggin (2005 in Paschalis, 2017) views it as a situation where citizens of a community actively participate in the things that affects them for the purpose of improved living conditions for all. This can be activities by an individual or partnership, as long as it is to attend to public challenges. There are certain characteristic features associated with civic engagement. It is a voluntary service, void of salary and/or wages, altruistic in nature, and speaks to character cum actions, and it is public oriented (Gil de Zuniga & Valenzuela, 2011; Hilger, 2006; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995 in Paschalis, 2017). Basically, civic engagement has to do with coming together of persons in order to help ameliorate the living standard of settlers and workers in a community (CCPS, 2023). It is done either through a political process, social process, or both. Citizen’s engagement can take the following manifestations; actively involvement in politics, rendering services to the community, and environmentalism, etcetera.

2.4 What then are the importance of citizens engagement in the public service?

Coming from a broad perspective, the role of citizens engagement cannot be overemphasized, as it enables the society stand on the principles of equity cum fairness, as well as allowing persons to have a say in the governance of their societies and states. It upholds the tenets of communism cum spirit of ubuntu - I live because you live or live and let others live (Erude et al., 2023; Ameh et al., 2024). Civic engagement supports democratic ethos as well as uphold social justice. This is so, because democracy thrives on citizens involvement in governance. When the public are actively involved in politics, public officials cum servants are accountable, and they determine policies options in the country. In the words of John Lewis, when citizens are engaged, it can lead to "good trouble", opposing segregation whilst upholding equity in every regard.

Irrespective of the forms, nature or interventions, civic engagement in every regard is pivotal to maintain a productive societal set-up. By relying on social capital as well as individual and group trust, civic engagement is playing an important role in harmonizing the different interests and societal strata (study.com, 2024). Moreso, it creates a culture that is transparent as well as responsible, by supporting efficiency in all sectors viz political and social. By and large, when citizens cum residents actively participate in the society, they found
themselves by involving in policy making, it brings about development in many regards, both locally, state wise and nationally, and it makes them more socially conscious. The Theory of Social Capital was used in the study. It was developed by Bourdieu and Coleman, as they were the foremost scholars who used the term capital, concurrently (Erude et al., 2023; Ameh et al., 2024). Social Capital refers to human relationships, its importance and roles in societal development. Relationship is a currency, far more valued than money, in many regards. The right relationship comes with security, status and reputation.

2.4.1 Five Societal Challenges That Civic Engagement Tend To Solve

Quite a lot of problems cum issues that plague human existence can be corrected by civic engagement, this is in addition to the numerous opportunities that abounds, career wise, for those with the passion to make humanity. Below are some of these societal anomalies that civic engagement can address:

**Homelessness:** Homelessness, is a major problem in the society that civic engagement can directly impact and address. A recent study carried out in the United States of America in 2020, revealed that, over 580,000 persons are homeless (CCPS, 2023). We are talking before the presence of the COVID-19 and the economic anxiety that beclouded it, creating more problems for the world, both of which have undoubtedly made things worse. In Nigeria, the right figure may not be ascertained but over 5 million persons do not have a roof over their head. There are quite a lot of paths to follow for persons who wishes to make positive impact career wise, as soon as they graduate from school. They could be persons who help those having mental challenges as well as the homeless experts through outdoor programs that seek to solve issues.

**Pollution:** Pollution is another social challenge that can be corrected through civic engagement. In 2022, the estimate plastic waste in the present in the ocean is 75 to 199 million tons. A lot of persons still find it difficult to accept that pollution in every regard is a major challenge, having dire consequences vis-a-vis aesthetics. It pollutes the supply of our water, heighten sickness level, incapacitates us during food production on a global scale. The role of environmental scientists is enormous here, they are responsible for finding answers to issues that has to do with pollution and avoiding future occurrence.

**Climate Change:** In same vein, change in climate is a general concern that affects everyone nation, tribe and tongue. As time passes by and by, virtually every country would experience climate change practically, with its negative impacts. Recent studies have shown that, climate change effects transcend expectations, even the Secretary General of the United Nations sees it as "an atlas of human suffering and a damning indictment of failed climate leadership. The impact of climate change will be felt on nations that are developing, especially those already impoverished. With recent breakthroughs cum interventions of scientists as well as those professionals, a lot of remedial steps are being taken, before things get out of control (Gil de Zuniga & Valenzuela, 2011).

**Food Insecurity:** Insecurity in food happens in a situation when the right kinds of food are not easily accessible by the persons living in a country. This is owing to certain factors viz lack of employment, poverty, when there is no access to the sources of food like markets for farmers as well as supermarkets. There are grave consequences for food insecurity vis-a-vis our health which includes lack of proper nutrition, stunted growth cum high rate of diseases that are deadly. Some social consequences can emanate viz production reduction and cost of taking care of one's health would increase. Through civic engagement, scientist who are professionals in Food can put in their expertise knowledge in managing the challenge of unavailability of food, through innovative technology cum procedures to increase the availability of food, limit the rate of wastage, as well as improving the food nutrients. Food would be more accessible, cheap, production becomes easy and food would be less hazardous for consumption. These scientists come to up with sustainable methods for producing food, like farming in a vertical way cum hydroponics, which enables these farmers produce more with less impact of the environment in agriculture (CCPS, 2023).

**Race & Gender Inclusiveness:** According to CCPS (2023), white race earns far more than Africans, black as well as Hispanic population, and women of same level with men earn lesser. Citizen’s engagement, is one way
these societal anomalies can be tackled. The role of urban cum regional planners are very significant, here. Through the development of plans for land as well as other policies aiming to instill community resilience in every regard are developed by these professionals. It can be for growth of the population, economic rejuvenation, as well as creating equal opportunities for all and sundry, regardless without gender bias or racial discrimination.

2.4.2 Possible ways to increase Civic engagement in governance
There are plethora ways in which civic engagement can be increased, as such creating awareness, sensitization, educating and training, CSR, and pragmatic actions. It is a common thing for people to get involved in a profitable and/or productive venture (Gil de Zuniga & Valenzuela, 2011). As soon as people starts seeing the importance of civic engagement cum interventions, they will get involved. When community social responsibility is carried out, the persons involved must go far as projecting their work, experience, innovations, expertise, so that all and sundry would believe that indeed such things pays. Donors and good citizens would get encouraged. Again, education and training in very crucial. Our campuses, institutions, schools and universities should add it to their curriculum, so that the young people (most importantly), would see the need for it. Civic engagement can be promoted both physically and virtually, in person and on social media. There is no age limit in participating in public matters.

3.0 Empirical Analysis
According to research conducted by Center for Civic Engagement (2024) at Illinois University, civic engagement has to do with the combining of human resources like intelligence, craft, expertise, values and the motivation that should follow, in making positive changes in our society as well as increasing the standard of living through state and non-state actors (Erude et al., 2023; Ameh et al., 2024). There are plethora interventions one can embark on vis-a-vis civic engagement. However, nine peculiar forms of civic engagement will be highlighted here, as observed by Illinois University.

Fig 3: a spherical symbol showing the various forms of civic engagement (source: Illinois University 2024).
They are been explained below:

3.1: Activism/Advocacy: This intervention has to do with organizing to cause a change politically and/or socially, support, create consciousness, or supporting a particular policy of the government. An ideal example of this intervention was the EndSars nonviolent civil disobedience in Nigeria that took place between October 8 and 20, 2020. It was a protest against the brutality of the now dysfunctional special anti-robbery squad (SARS) a unit in the Nigeria Police (The Guardian, 2021).

![Fig 4: a symbol of activism/advocacy form of civic engagement (source: Illinois University 2024).](image)

3.2: Civic Learning: This involves the acquisition of knowledge about community, government, social and political problems knowledge of community, government, social issues, or political issues just to be conscious and aware. In Nigeria, several advocacy group and the likes have emerged, chief amongst them is the School of Politics, Policy and Governance (SPPG), founded in March 2021 by Dr. Oby Ezekwesili. It is a movement geared towards breeding new sets of leaders who would be dogged, resilient and understand that concept of leadership. The basic assumptions guiding the school is the three C's, Character, Competence and Capacity. These leaders are trained unconventional to be disruptive (positively) in thought and action.
3.3: Community Service Volunteering: Participating in activities for the benefit of humanity may not necessarily require a formal cum organized training, etc. The Capstone Project initiated by Oby Ezekwesili’s SPPG, is a good example here (Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012; Eze & Fadiyimu, 2024). Here, leaders are grouped into different thematic areas, to carry out a voluntary project to correcting a societal error.
3.4: **Service Learning**: This has to do with the deliberate aligning of activities together with student aim for learning to benefit both the community (recipient) and the provider (students) by solving a particular problem based on what they have learned and taking it upward by actively participating in community service, etcetera. The Capstone Project of SPPG still falls under this intervention.
3.5: **Community Engaged Internship:** This intervention program enables students to have a direct experience that would make their learning process effective, as well as equip them with the right knowledge about politics, policies and governance (Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012). The SPPG program that requires students to be trained for 10 months is a good example here. They have different professionals, University dons, captain of industries, etc. speak to different topics that enables students to be adequately equip for governance.
3.6: Philanthropy/Fundraising: This has to do with collecting of resources like money, clothes, food items, etcetera, for the benefit of the community. One of the thematic areas of the SPPG is targeted at food and welfare of the community (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Nweke & Eze, 2024). Here students are to organize, engage the public and private sector, raise funds, partner with NGOs, to ensure that certain problem of the community is resolved. According to Abraham Maslow, the basic need of a man are; food, clothes, shelter and sex. If citizens get involved, this challenge would reduce.
3.7: Political Engagement: This is the deliberate development of one's political understanding, consciousness and awareness, which is manifest in the challenge of a political philosophy cum ideology of society, influencing political decision/policy options, as well as changing the narrative of a system. An excellent example to the above, is the School of Politics, Policy and Governance (SPPG). It is an unconventional school that enriches students, from all disciplines, as to the fundamentals of politics and governance (Vaghefi & Krcatorich, 2023; Jugert et al., 2013). Its curriculum is built to help everyone who wishes to have a stake in the society vis-a-vis politics. In fact, every right-thinking citizen must be interested in what happens in government circles, as that is what determines every other form of human engagement.
3.8: **Community Engaged Research:** This particular intervention involves the creation of new solutions or building on hitherto studies with a partner from a community for the purpose of contributing to the learning of students in the academic field as well as, empowering citizens welfare, through realistic solutions Creation of to public concerns (Erude et al., 2023; Ogechi et al., 2024).
Fig 11: a symbol of community engagement research as a form of civic engagement (source: Illinois University 2024).
3.9: Social Entrepreneurship/Social Innovation: This is the combination of creativity, resourcefulness, innovations and opportunity to addressing critical societal as well as environmental issues by developing models, products and services for businesses and government. Programmes of such nature are included in schools in the country. There are courses on entrepreneurship, artificial intelligence, web designs and developing, etcetera.

![Fig 12: a symbol of social entrepreneurship/social innovation as a form of civic engagement (source: Illinois University 2024).](image)

4.0 Methodology of the Study
This study is purely qualitative, as such the secondary method of data collection like journals, publications, books, etcetera was used in this paper (Vaghefi & Kcatorich, 2023; Jugert et al., 2013). We made ample use of both the historical and content analysis in analyzing the concepts.

5.0 Conclusion/Recommendations
Conclusively, civic engagement refers to a situation when citizens actively get involved in community cum societal development by taking certain actions and actively participating in policies that would bring about human capital development and general in improvement on the condition of living. As highlighted these interventions are in different manifestations viz volunteerism, activism on a communal/organizational level, or directly participating in politics. Moreso, at the crux of citizens engagement is social capital. In this regard the following recommendations are pivotal: A deliberate effort to engaging and developing the next generation of leaders, thereby changing the trajectory of kakistocracy, and setting a new order of technocracy for Nigeria democracy. Accept medium term strategies for building an inclusive government, whilst looking towards the big picture of a gender inclusive and class embracing democracy. Promote community-based leadership, a bottom-top approach should be encouraged, where leaders must have garnered experience from their base
before coming to mainstream politics. Empowering CSO and NGO, whose visions are in tandem to the UNO sustainable development goals. Empowering and encouraging citizens to get involved in the political, economic and social affairs of the government. Those who do not have the necessary well-withal to compete with the political mafias cum machiavellians in the system, should be supported and encouraged, by donations, gifts, and technical assistance, and etcetera.

6.0 References


