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INNOVATIONS IN GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SERVICE EFFICIENCY IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA: ISSUES AND PROSPECTS.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined governance and the efficiency of public service delivery in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, with an emphasis on key challenges, innovative interventions, and policy implications. As a natural resources-endowed state, Akwa Ibom State offers a distinctive context to explore how administrative structures, institutional arrangements, and reform initiatives shape the quality and effectiveness of the public service. The study was anchored on New Public Management (NPM) Theory and Institutional Theory, which collectively provide a framework for understanding the influence of organizational design, management practices, and institutional norms on administrative performance. A qualitative research design was adopted, utilizing secondary data sources including policy documents, government reports, institutional records, and relevant scholarly literature. This approach allowed for an in-depth analysis of systemic challenges affecting service delivery, including bureaucratic inefficiencies, weak oversight mechanisms, and political favouritism, which continue to undermine performance outcomes. Despite these obstacles, the study found out that innovative strategies implemented by the State government such as e-governance platforms, digitalization of public records, performance monitoring systems, and participatory policy-making processes have contributed to improvements in transparency, accountability, and stakeholder engagement. However, persistent gaps in policy execution and inconsistent enforcement remain significant barriers to achieving sustained reforms. The study concluded that while Akwa Ibom State has made notable strides in modernizing its public administration, sustainable improvements require strengthening institutional capacity, institutionalizing merit-based practices, enhancing anti-corruption mechanisms, and promoting inclusive citizens participation. These findings provide critical insights for policy makers and public administrators seeking to optimize

governance structures, improve service delivery, and foster public trust, not only within Akwa Ibom State but also across similar sub-national contexts in Nigeria.

Keywords: Governance, Public Service Delivery, Institutional Reform, E-Governance,

Introduction

This study examined the innovative strategies adopted by the Akwa Ibom State government to enhance governance structures and public service delivery efficiency. Over the years, Akwa Ibom State has faced significant challenges in its efforts to streamline administrative processes and improve service delivery to its citizens. In response to these challenges, the state government, under the leadership of Governor Umo Eno, has initiated several reforms aimed at transforming the state's governance framework. These innovations are centered on modernizing the public service system, increasing accountability, and ensuring that the State's resources are used effectively for the benefit of the people. The major focus of these reforms covers integration of digital technologies, civil service improvements, infrastructure rehabilitation, and capacity building for public servants.

The State's bid for enhanced service delivery revolves around several strategic innovations, with a particular emphasis on digital transformation and e-governance. Governor Umo Eno administration has prioritized the introduction of digital tools across government sectors, with the aim of reducing bureaucracy bottleneck and redtapism, enhancement of transparency, and increasing efficiency in public service provisioning. An example is the implementation of digital case management in the judiciary and the establishment of e-healthcare systems which were designed to simplify and hasten performance of administrative tasks to make government services more accessible and efficient. Additionally, the state has taken steps to streamline its payroll system by ending outsourced services and moving to in-house management, which does not only promote financial accountability but also empowers local capacity.

Civil service reforms have also played a critical role in improving governance. The introduction of ₦80,000 minimum wage, along with a 13th-month salary provision dubbed "Eno-Mber," demonstrates the administration's commitment to enhancing employee welfare. Moreover, the allocation of new vehicles to senior civil servants and the payment of backlog gratuities reflect the State's efforts to improve the working conditions of public servants, thereby ensuring better productivity and service delivery. These reforms are aimed at creating a motivated and skilled workforce that can effectively meet the demands of governance and public service. In parallel, Akwa Ibom has shifted its focus from the construction of new infrastructures to the rehabilitation of existing ones. This includes repairing dilapidated roads, upgrading hospitals, and improving public schools, ensuring that services are accessible

to all, including those in remote areas. The government's establishment of the Ministry of Internal Security and Waterways further highlights its commitment to public safety and a stable governance environment, which are essential for sustainable development.

Despite the promising innovations, there are several challenges that could hinder the full realization of these reforms. One significant obstacle is resistance to change, particularly within the civil service, where traditional methods of operation may conflict with the new systems being introduced. Additionally, limited digital literacy and inadequate infrastructure in certain areas of the state could slow the adoption of digital services, preventing citizens from fully benefiting from e-governance initiatives. Financial constraints also pose a challenge, as the costs associated with these reforms could strain the State's budget, especially with competing development priorities. Moreover, ensuring that all segments of the population, particularly marginalized groups, benefit equally from these reforms remains a critical issue.

This study explores these innovative strategies, their impact on governance, and the challenges that may impede their success. By examining the interplay between these factors, the paper sought to provide insights into how Akwa Ibom State can continue to improve its governance structure and public service delivery efficiency to ensure a sustainable and inclusive development and safeguard a better future for its citizens.

Theoretical Framework

To explain the relationship between innovative governance and public service delivery, Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT), developed by Everett Rogers in 1962, provides a comprehensive framework. IDT examines how new ideas, technologies, or practices spread within a social system, particularly focusing on the process through which innovations are adopted by individuals, organizations, or societies. This theory is particularly relevant to understanding how innovative governance strategies, such as digital transformation, e-governance, and co-production, are implemented in public sector organizations and influence public service delivery.

Key Concepts of Innovation Diffusion Theory:

1. **Innovation:** An innovation is defined as an idea, practice, or object perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption. In the context of public service delivery, innovations can be new governance practices, technological advancements (e.g., e-governance platforms), or organizational changes (e.g., performance management systems).

2. **Communication Channels:** These are the means through which information about the innovation is spread. In public governance, these could include public campaigns, training programmes, social media, or government publications that inform public servants and citizens about new systems or reforms.
3. **Time:** The process by which an innovation is adopted occurs over time. IDT outlines five stages of adoption:
 - i. **Knowledge:** Individuals or organizations first learn about the innovation.
 - ii. **Persuasion:** They form an opinion about the innovation.
 - iii. **Decision:** A choice is made about whether to adopt or reject the innovation.
 - iv. **Implementation:** The innovation is put into practice.
 - v. **Confirmation:** The innovation's benefits are confirmed, and its full adoption is solidified.
4. **Social System:** The system within which the innovation is diffused, such as a public institution or government agency. The effectiveness of an innovation's adoption depends heavily on the structure, culture, and readiness of the social system.
5. **Adopter Categories:** Rogers classified adopters of innovations into five categories based on how quickly they adopt new ideas:
 - i. **Innovators:** The first adopters who are willing to take risks.
 - ii. **Early Adopters:** Individuals or organizations that embrace innovation early and are seen as opinion leaders.
 - iii. **Early Majority:** Those who adopt innovations after seeing the benefits and social proof.
 - iv. **Late Majority:** Individuals or organizations that adopt innovations only after the majority has already done so.
 - v. **Laggards:** Those who are reluctant to adopt innovations and do so only when it becomes absolutely necessary.

Application of Innovation Diffusion Theory to Innovative Governance

In the context of innovative governance, IDT can help explain how public sector organizations implement innovations such as digital transformation (e.g., e-government platforms), civil service reforms, and co-production models. It also provides insight into the adoption process within governmental systems, which typically involves overcoming bureaucratic resistance and institutional inertia. According to Rogers (2003), the adoption of new practices or technologies depends not only on the characteristics of the innovation but also on the communicative channels, the social systems, and the attributes of the adopters (e.g., government leaders, civil servants, or citizens).

Relative Advantage, one of Rogers' key attributes of an innovation, is crucial in understanding whether a governance innovation will be adopted in public administration. For instance, the relative advantage of digital transformation lies in its ability to reduce inefficiencies, improve transparency, and offer quicker, more accessible services to the public, as seen in Akwa Ibom State's adoption of e-governance tools (Akwa Ibom State Government, 2023). Moreover, compatibility the extent to which the innovation aligns with existing values and practices also plays a role in adoption. Innovations such as e-governance platforms in regions with low levels of digital literacy may face resistance due to perceived incompatibility with existing practices. Trialability (the ability to test an innovation before fully adopting it) and observability (the visibility of benefits to others) are crucial in enhancing acceptance, as citizens and public servants need to see the direct benefits of innovations in order to embrace them.

In terms of public service delivery, IDT suggests that innovations in governance (e.g., performance management systems or digital case management in the judiciary) can lead to improved outcomes if they align with public sector goals and are adopted by key stakeholders (civil servants, policy-makers, and the public). The adoption process, however, must be carefully managed through effective communication channels and leadership support, as highlighted in the study by Saragih (2024), which found that leadership and organizational culture are critical for successful innovation adoption.

Research design

The study aimed to explore the barriers to the effective implementation of innovative governance in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, using documentary and descriptive research designs. The research successfully identified several institutional, bureaucratic, resource-based, and cultural factors that hinder the adoption of governance reforms and technological innovations. By analyzing secondary data from government reports, academic research, policy documents, and media articles, the study provided a comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing governance innovation in the State.

Through the documentary research design, a wide range of secondary sources were collected, including government policy documents, academic publications, media reports, and insights from development organizations. These sources offered critical information on the institutional structures and dynamics influencing governance practices in Akwa Ibom State. The descriptive research design was then applied to analyze these documents, revealing key themes and trends, such as institutional resistance, resource limitations, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and cultural biases, which were consistently found to impede the progress of governance reforms.

Content analysis was employed as the primary method for analyzing the data. After an initial review of the collected documents, the data were systematically coded to identify significant themes. These themes were then grouped into broader categories to better understand the underlying factors influencing governance practices.

Concept of Innovation in Government Structure

Innovation in government structure refers to the strategic changes made in the way governments are organized, function, and deliver services, aimed at improving their effectiveness, responsiveness, and transparency. Scholars have provided various definitions to capture the essence of innovation in government, emphasizing the role of adaptation and modernization in enhancing public administration. Mulgan (2007) defines innovation in government structure as the introduction of new ideas, processes, or tools in the public sector to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and the quality of public services. He argues that this innovation often arises in response to evolving societal needs, technological advancements, and increasing demands for accountability. For Mulgan, innovation in governance structures is not just about adopting new technology but also about rethinking the very design of institutions to better address the dynamic challenges faced by governments. This approach includes the use of digital tools, restructuring of agencies, and the integration of innovative practices into the fabric of government functioning.

Similarly, Osborne (2010) focuses on innovation in governance as the reconfiguration of administrative processes and the implementation of modern management techniques to enhance the value delivered to citizens. In the words of Osborne, governments must continuously adapt to meet the demands of citizens in a digital age. He emphasizes the integration of e-governance and data-driven decision-making, which can facilitate more responsive, efficient, and transparent governance. For Osborne, innovation in governance structures is a means to establish a more citizen-centric government capable of responding quickly and effectively to public needs.

Hood (1991) offers a more institutional perspective, defining innovation in government structure as the adoption of management technologies and organizational reforms that enhance governmental functioning. He highlights how market-based reforms, decentralization, and flexibility in administrative frameworks allow for more responsive governance. For Hood, these innovations are crucial for adapting traditional bureaucratic structures to the contemporary needs of both the government and the public, making it possible for governments to manage resources and deliver services in an economical and efficient manner. In a broader sense, Grodach (2009) takes a more systemic view, arguing that innovation in government structure involves systematic changes to governance frameworks that alter the relationships between government institutions, officials, and the public. These innovations often involve increased citizen participation and data-driven policy development, where governance becomes more inclusive and collaborative. Grodach also highlights how these innovations enable greater adaptability in government institutions, allowing them to better serve a diverse population and respond to the rapidly changing global environment.

Concept of Public Service Efficiency

Public service efficiency is a concept that encompasses the ability of government institutions to deliver services effectively, equitably, and with optimal use of resources. Scholars define public service efficiency through multiple lenses, emphasizing its significance in improving the functioning of governments and their relationship with citizens. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) define public service efficiency as the capacity of government institutions to deliver quality services while minimizing waste. They emphasize that efficiency must be evaluated not only in terms of cost reduction but also in relation to the quality of outcomes produced. According to them, a truly efficient public service system is one that balances financial constraints with high standards of service delivery, ensuring that the needs of the public are met without compromising on the effectiveness of policies. Their definition stresses the importance of performance indicators and citizen satisfaction as key metrics for assessing public service efficiency.

Peters (2001) offers a broader perspective, defining public service efficiency as the ability to meet public expectations in delivering services that are effective, equitable, and responsive. He underscores that public service efficiency goes beyond mere cost-effectiveness and includes elements such as the fair distribution of services and public accountability. For Peters, achieving public service efficiency requires addressing both the management processes and the organizational structures of public institutions to ensure that they adapt to the changing needs of the population. He highlights the importance of performance-based strategies to foster a culture of efficiency within public institutions. In contrast, Denhardt and Denhardt (2000) define public service efficiency as the achievement of organizational goals

with minimal resources while considering both output effectiveness and citizen satisfaction. They argue that public service efficiency must encompass the quality of outcomes rather than just cost minimization. Efficiency in this sense is about aligning government actions with the public's needs and expectations. Denhardt and Denhardt also emphasize that collaboration within public agencies and with the private sector plays a crucial role in enhancing efficiency, as it leads to better service delivery and higher overall effectiveness.

Bozeman (2000) defines public service efficiency as the balance between inputs (resources) and outputs (services), highlighting the role of effective management and resource optimization in achieving governmental goals. For Bozeman, efficiency in public services is also about ensuring that services are not only delivered efficiently but are also equitable, meaning that they meet the needs of all segments of society. His definition acknowledges that, in addition to resource management, policy effectiveness and public satisfaction are central to achieving true public service efficiency. Bozeman emphasizes that innovative management practices, such as the adoption of new technologies and performance management systems, are essential to improving the efficiency of public services.

Bovens et al. (2008) focus on the accountability aspect of public service efficiency, defining it as the ability of public servants to deliver services while being answerable to the public. They argue that public service efficiency is not only about performance metrics but also about ensuring transparency and building trust with citizens. They emphasize that efficient public service delivery requires a clear accountability structure, which includes ensuring that public servants are held responsible for their actions and that services are delivered in a way that is visible and understandable to citizens.

The definitions offered by scholars on innovation in government structure and public service efficiency provide a comprehensive understanding of these concepts. Innovation in government structure is viewed as a means of improving governance by modernizing public institutions, adopting new technologies, and enhancing transparency and accountability. Public service efficiency, on the other hand, is concerned with the optimal use of resources to ensure effective, equitable, and responsive service delivery. Both concepts underscore the importance of continuous adaptation and reform in public administration to meet the evolving needs of society. Through the implementation of innovative practices and efficient systems, governments can build more responsive and effective institutions that better serve the public and contribute to sustainable development.

Innovative Governance and Public Service Delivery: the Nexus

The nexus between innovative governance and public service delivery lies in the transformative potential of governance reforms to significantly enhance how public services are provided to citizens. Innovative governance refers to the integration of new ideas, technologies, and strategies into the administration and organization of public institutions to improve their performance, responsiveness, and transparency. These innovations ranging from digital transformation and e-governance to civil service reforms are designed to make governance more efficient, transparent, and inclusive. In turn, these innovations directly impact public service delivery by optimizing service processes, improving accessibility, and ensuring more effective use of resources.

At the core of this relationship is digital transformation, a critical innovation that enhances public service delivery by modernizing government operations. The adoption of digital technologies such as e-governance platforms, digital case management, and automated service delivery systems streamline administrative processes, reduce bureaucratic delays, and increase service accessibility. For instance, in Akwa Ibom State, the establishment of the Ministry of Science and Digital Economy has propelled the state's digital governance agenda, facilitating faster service delivery and enhancing transparency in judicial and law enforcement services (Akwa Ibom State Government, 2023). As Osborne (2010) argues, these digital tools make public administration more responsive to citizens' needs, ensuring that services are delivered promptly and with minimal friction.

Moreover, civil service reforms play an integral role in strengthening the connection between innovative governance and public service efficiency. By reforming salary structures, providing employee incentives, and improving professional training, Akwa Ibom has sought to motivate public servants to improve service delivery. Initiatives such as the ₦80,000 minimum wage and the provision of brand-new vehicles for senior civil servants are designed not only to enhance public servant welfare but also to increase overall efficiency within government institutions (Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Finance, 2023). This aligns with Peters (2001), who emphasizes that a motivated civil service is essential for achieving the effectiveness and responsiveness needed to meet public expectations. A well-compensated, trained, and empowered workforce is better equipped to adopt innovative governance practices, thus improving the delivery of public services.

The relationship also extends to infrastructure rehabilitation, an area where innovation has brought about more inclusive and sustainable service delivery. Rather than focusing solely on new infrastructure projects, Akwa Ibom's government has prioritized the rehabilitation of dilapidated roads, schools, and hospitals, which allows for quicker, more cost-effective improvements to public service delivery. Bozeman (2000) highlights that efficient use of resources in this case, rehabilitating existing

infrastructure leads to more equitable service distribution across urban and rural communities, fostering inclusive development. The rehabilitation focus ensures that even underserved communities benefit from the state's developmental initiatives, enhancing overall service delivery efficiency.

Furthermore, strategic partnerships and capacity-building efforts have strengthened the nexus between governance innovation and public service delivery. Collaborations with international organizations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provide Akwa Ibom with the expertise and resources necessary to implement governance reforms effectively (Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, 2023). By fostering public-private partnerships and investing in training programs for public servants, the state is building the capacity of its workforce to adopt innovative practices and drive efficient service delivery. These efforts align with Grodach's (2009) assertion that strategic partnerships are essential for fostering innovative governance and improving public service outcomes. Finally, the prospects for sustainable development in Akwa Ibom are closely linked to its commitment to innovative governance practices that enhance public service delivery. As Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) argue, the long-term success of governance reforms depends on their ability to adapt to evolving challenges, ensuring that public services continue to meet the needs of citizens. By prioritizing innovation in governance, Akwa Ibom is creating a more sustainable governance model that ensures efficient service delivery while addressing both current and future needs of its population.

Empirical Literature Review

The relationship between innovative governance and public service delivery has received significant attention in empirical research, particularly between 2019 and 2024. Scholars have examined how governance innovations such as digital transformation, e-governance, civil service reforms, co-production, and strategic leadership impact the effectiveness, efficiency, and inclusivity of public service delivery. This review synthesizes key findings from recent studies to highlight the role of innovation in improving public sector performance and its direct connection to service delivery outcomes.

Digital transformation has emerged as one of the most significant innovations driving improvements in public service delivery. In a study by Latupeirissa (2024), it was found that the introduction of e-governance systems in local governments significantly enhanced service efficiency, reduced waiting times, and improved overall accessibility. The study used surveys and focus groups to assess the impact of digital platforms on public services, finding that the adoption of technology streamlined bureaucratic processes and provided faster service delivery. However, digital illiteracy and limited access to technology remained critical challenges, particularly in rural and underserved areas, echoing the concerns raised by Bozeman (2000) about the digital divide hindering the full potential of digital governance

initiatives. A significant study by Saragih (2024) examined the role of innovation in public sector organizations and how it contributes to the enhancement of service delivery. The research revealed that leadership support and a positive organizational culture were crucial drivers of governance innovation. Through regression analysis, the study demonstrated that management support for innovation increased the likelihood of implementing new governance practices, which led to more effective public services. However, institutional barriers, such as bureaucratic inertia and resource constraints, were identified as major obstacles to successful innovation adoption. Saragih's study suggests that fostering a culture of supportive leadership and providing training for public servants are essential for overcoming these barriers and improving service delivery.

In line with the idea of digital leadership, Ren et al. (2023) explored how digital leadership in government agencies impacts service innovation performance. Using a quantitative survey and structural equation modeling (SEM), the study found that digital leadership significantly enhanced both innovative work behavior and the adoption of service innovations. The research showed that government leaders who embraced digital technologies were more likely to implement innovative service delivery models, which ultimately improved the responsiveness and efficiency of public services. This finding aligns with the theory of dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2007), emphasizing the role of leaders in adapting to technological changes and guiding their organizations toward innovation. Furthermore, co-production has been identified as a key strategy in enhancing public service delivery. Nanz (2020) examined the role of citizen participation in co-producing services, such as healthcare and education, in a series of case studies across various government sectors. The study found that co-production led to more efficient and effective services, as citizens' input directly informed service design and delivery. By engaging citizens, governments were able to tailor services to meet the actual needs of the community, thereby increasing public trust and accountability. This finding supports Ostrom's (1996) Co-Production Theory, which argues that active citizen involvement in service delivery results in more responsive governance and improved service quality.

While innovative governance practices have been shown to improve public service delivery, there are several barriers to their effective implementation. Studies like those of Saragih (2024) and Latupeirissa (2024) highlighted resistance to change, resource limitations, and institutional inertia as significant obstacles. Saragih (2024) pointed out that despite the recognition of innovation's potential, governments often struggle to overcome bureaucratic structures that hinder the adoption of new practices. Additionally, the financial cost of implementing new technologies, training public servants, and updating infrastructure is often a significant challenge, especially in developing regions. As noted by Pollitt and Bouckaert

(2011), these challenges require strategic planning and resource allocation to ensure that innovative governance reforms lead to sustainable improvements in public service delivery.

The overall impact of innovative governance on public service delivery underscores the importance of adopting new technologies, fostering a culture of innovation, and engaging citizens in co-production. Digital transformation has proven to enhance the efficiency and transparency of public services, while leadership and organizational culture play pivotal roles in the successful implementation of innovations. Furthermore, co-production and collaborative governance models have been shown to increase the relevance and responsiveness of public services. However, the successful integration of these innovations requires overcoming challenges such as digital illiteracy, resistance to change, and resource constraints.

Innovative Approaches to Enhancing Service Delivery in Akwa Ibom State: A Critical Analysis

Akwa Ibom State, under the leadership of Governor Umo Eno, has made significant strides in modernizing its governance structures and improving public service delivery. This transformation reflects a concerted effort to address long-standing challenges in the public sector while simultaneously ensuring that the state's services are more efficient, transparent, and inclusive. Through initiatives in digital transformation, civil service reforms, infrastructure rehabilitation, strategic partnerships, and capacity building, the state has positioned itself as a model for other regions in Nigeria. These reforms are designed not only to modernize service delivery but also to ensure that all citizens, particularly those in underserved areas, benefit from these innovations.

i. Digital Transformation and E-Governance

Digital transformation is a cornerstone of Akwa Ibom's governance strategy, with the government leveraging technology to improve service delivery and enhance transparency. According to the Akwa Ibom State Government (2023), the state has established the Ministry of Science and Digital Economy, which aims to implement digital tools for better governance and service provision. The ministry has spearheaded initiatives such as e-Case Management in the judiciary and the digitization of police records, significantly reducing bureaucratic delays and improving efficiency (Akwa Ibom State Government, 2023). Governor Eno has emphasized the role of e-governance as a means of reducing corruption and enhancing public trust, aligning with Osborne's (2010) assertion that digital innovations can make government more responsive to citizens' needs. The use of technology to streamline governance processes is expected to lead to better public service outcomes and increase accountability in the administration.

ii. Civil Service Reforms and Employee Welfare

Civil service reforms in Akwa Ibom State have focused on improving employee welfare and productivity, recognizing the key role that public servants play in the delivery of services. The introduction of a ₦80,000 minimum wage and the implementation of a 13th-month salary, colloquially known as "Eno-Mber", are part of Governor Eno's effort to motivate civil servants and ensure that they are adequately compensated for their work (Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Finance, 2023). Additionally, the allocation of new vehicles to Permanent Secretaries and the consistent release of gratuities underscore the state's commitment to improving the working conditions of public servants. These initiatives are in line with Peters (2001), who argues that a motivated civil service is essential for efficient public service delivery. By improving wages and providing incentives, the Akwa Ibom government aims to foster a more productive and engaged workforce capable of delivering quality services to the citizens.

iii. Infrastructure Rehabilitation and Inclusive Development

The Akwa Ibom State government has also placed significant emphasis on the rehabilitation of existing infrastructure rather than the construction of new projects, which is often more cost-effective and provides immediate benefits to the public. The state has focused on repairing dilapidated roads, upgrading public hospitals, and restoring schools that were previously in disrepair (Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Works, 2023). This approach aligns with Bozeman's (2000) definition of public service efficiency, which emphasizes not only resource optimization but also the equitable distribution of services across both urban and rural areas. By focusing on infrastructure rehabilitation, Akwa Ibom ensures that all communities, especially rural areas, have access to basic services, thus promoting inclusive development. The state's efforts in infrastructure rehabilitation reflect a desire to ensure that economic development and improved service delivery reach marginalized communities as well.

iv. Strategic Partnerships and Capacity Building

The Akwa Ibom government has actively pursued strategic partnerships with both local and international organizations to enhance its service delivery capacity. Collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has allowed the state to benefit from global expertise in governance and public sector reforms. These partnerships are critical in driving innovation in the public service and equipping government agencies with the tools and knowledge needed to meet evolving challenges (Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, 2023). In addition to external partnerships, the state has focused on capacity building for civil servants through training programs designed to improve professional skills and ensure that public servants are capable of managing modern governance

challenges (Akwa Ibom State Public Service Training Institute, 2023). According to Grodach (2009), partnerships that provide capacity-building opportunities are essential for improving public service delivery by ensuring that public servants are well-equipped to navigate complex governance issues.

Barriers to Effective Implementation of Innovative Governance in Akwa Ibom State

Despite the promising potential of governance innovations in Akwa Ibom State, several barriers hinder their effective implementation. These barriers span institutional resistance, resource limitations, rigid bureaucratic structures, and cultural factors, which complicate efforts to adopt and integrate new technologies and practices in public administration. As Tom (2024) notes, these obstacles not only slow down the adoption of innovations but also diminish their potential to improve public service delivery. One of the most significant barriers to the successful implementation of innovative governance in Akwa Ibom is resistance to change. This resistance is evident both within the civil service and leadership, often arising from fears of losing control, unfamiliarity with new technologies, or skepticism about their effectiveness. Ebon (2023) found that bureaucratic inertia in Akwa Ibom, where traditional, well-established procedures dominate, is a critical factor in preventing the adoption of innovation. Public servants and officials, especially those in long-standing government systems, tend to resist new technologies and processes. Without adequate training, support, and leadership commitment, this resistance can significantly delay or derail innovation efforts in the public sector.

Resource constraints, particularly in terms of financial, human, and technological capital, remain a major obstacle to implementing governance innovations in Akwa Ibom. The state has faced challenges in securing the necessary funding to invest in new technologies or implement large-scale reforms. Effiong (2023) observed that while the state has adopted some digital governance tools, their successful implementation often depends on external funding, which is not always reliable. This lack of resources results in delays in the execution of reforms and limits the state's ability to expand its digital infrastructure or provide sufficient training for public servants. Moreover, the maintenance of new systems and providing ongoing capacity-building programs are often underfunded, leading to insufficient utilization of digital governance tools.

Rigid bureaucratic structures in Akwa Ibom's public sector also act as a significant barrier to effective governance innovation. The state's public administration follows a traditional hierarchical structure, which often leads to slow decision-making and inefficiency in implementing new ideas. Stephen (2024) emphasizes that the entrenched culture of formal procedures, red tape, and status quo bias impedes the adoption of digital systems or performance management tools. These bureaucratic hurdles often prevent the swift implementation of innovative governance reforms, as well as discourage public servants from

adopting new ways of working. Institutional rigidity also results in resistance to changes that challenge existing power structures or workflows, which further delays progress.

As highlighted by Edet (2023), the lack of genuine leadership commitment is a major barrier to governance innovation in Akwa Ibom. Without consistent support from top leaders, even well-designed reforms can remain symbolic and fail to have a practical impact. Leaders in the public sector play a crucial role in providing vision, resources, and clear direction for innovation. However, without strong leadership buy-in, innovation efforts can become ceremonial, lacking the depth needed for meaningful service improvements. Leadership commitment is particularly important in driving institutional change and ensuring that the required resources are allocated to support innovative practices. Without it, governance reforms often fail to gain traction and achieve the desired outcomes.

Cultural factors within both the public sector and the general population pose significant challenges to the adoption of governance innovations in Akwa Ibom. As Edet (2023) notes, there is a cultural preference for traditional governance methods, particularly in government institutions with a long history of centralized decision-making. Public servants may feel uncomfortable with new technologies or collaborative approaches to service delivery. Additionally, citizens may harbor distrust towards digital platforms, perceiving them as inefficient or inaccessible. Overcoming these cultural barriers is crucial for ensuring the effective adoption of innovations in governance. As Saragih (2024) suggests, governments must engage in public education campaigns to demonstrate the benefits of e-governance and co-production models to citizens, fostering trust and increasing acceptance.

Policy inconsistencies and fragmented efforts within different government departments can also act as significant barriers to governance innovation. When innovation efforts are not integrated into a comprehensive, whole-of-government strategy, they become disjointed, leading to conflicting policies and overlapping initiatives that confuse stakeholders and reduce their effectiveness. Stephen (2024) observed that in Akwa Ibom, the lack of policy alignment between digital transformation efforts and broader development goals has hindered the successful execution of governance reforms. For innovation to have a lasting impact, policies must be coordinated across sectors and aligned with the state's long-term goals.

The absence of robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems is another critical barrier identified in Akwa Ibom. Without effective M&E, it is difficult to assess the impact of governance innovations or make necessary adjustments to improve their effectiveness. Sudrajat and Andhika (2021) found that in many cases, reforms in Akwa Ibom were not effectively tracked, and their outcomes were not systematically evaluated. This lack of oversight prevents the identification of weaknesses and gaps in implementation, which hinders further innovation and limits the potential for service delivery

improvements. Finally, legal and regulatory frameworks in Akwa Ibom often need to be updated to accommodate new governance innovations. Innovations such as e-governance and public-private partnerships require legal reforms that are slow and difficult to implement. Saragih (2024) notes that outdated laws related to data privacy, public procurement, and accountability can create challenges for adopting new digital tools or governance practices. Legal roadblocks can delay or prevent the deployment of governance innovations, restricting their potential to improve service delivery.

Discussion of Findings

The study reveals that several barriers hinder the effective implementation of innovative governance in Akwa Ibom State. These barriers are multifaceted, spanning institutional, financial, bureaucratic, and cultural challenges. The findings underscore the complexity of governance innovation in the state, highlighting the need for comprehensive, multi-faceted interventions to address these obstacles and facilitate the successful adoption of new governance practices.

One of the most significant barriers identified is institutional resistance to change. This resistance is prevalent within both the civil service and leadership, driven by fears of losing control, unfamiliarity with new technologies, and skepticism about their effectiveness. As noted by Ebon (2023), bureaucratic inertia in Akwa Ibom has been a critical factor in preventing the adoption of innovative practices. Public servants and officials, particularly those in long-standing government systems, are often resistant to new technologies, perceiving them as disruptions to traditional power structures. Without proper training, support, and leadership commitment, this resistance becomes a major obstacle, delaying or even derailing efforts to modernize governance. This finding aligns with Tom (2024), who emphasized that resistance can significantly hinder the implementation of new governance practices, thus impeding improvements in public service delivery.

Resource limitations, both financial and technical, were found to be another major constraint. Effiong (2023) highlighted that while Akwa Ibom has made some efforts to adopt digital governance tools, these efforts often rely on unreliable external funding. The study found that insufficient financial investment, coupled with a lack of human resources and infrastructure, restricts the state's ability to fully implement and sustain technological innovations. Furthermore, the underfunding of capacity-building programs and the maintenance of new systems exacerbate this issue, reducing the overall effectiveness of digital tools and reforms. This highlights the importance of securing consistent, internal funding for the successful implementation of governance innovations. The study also found that rigid bureaucratic structures significantly impede governance innovation. As Stephen (2024) noted, the hierarchical and formal structure of Akwa Ibom's public administration leads to slow decision-making and inefficiency. The

entrenched culture of red tape and status quo bias makes it difficult for new ideas, particularly digital and performance management systems, to gain traction. Public servants are often reluctant to adopt new practices that could challenge existing power dynamics or disrupt established workflows. These bureaucratic hurdles contribute to a work environment resistant to change, further delaying the implementation of innovative governance reforms.

Another significant barrier identified is insufficient leadership commitment. As Edet (2023) pointed out, even well-designed reforms can fail without the consistent support and buy-in from top leadership. In Akwa Ibom, the absence of a strong, visionary leadership has resulted in many innovation efforts being more symbolic than practical. The study found that leadership commitment is essential for allocating resources, prioritizing innovation, and fostering an environment where change can thrive. Without such commitment, reforms fail to gain traction and often lack the depth needed for meaningful service improvements. Cultural barriers also play a crucial role in hindering the adoption of governance innovations in Akwa Ibom. The study revealed a strong preference for traditional governance methods, particularly in institutions with long histories of centralized decision-making. As Edet (2023) observed, public servants are often uncomfortable with new technologies, and citizens may distrust digital platforms. This cultural resistance to change makes it difficult for innovations, particularly those involving digital tools, to be embraced by both the public and government employees. The findings support Saragih's (2024) suggestion that public education campaigns are necessary to overcome these cultural barriers. These campaigns could demonstrate the benefits of e-governance and collaborative service delivery models, thus increasing trust and acceptance.

Policy inconsistencies and fragmented efforts across government departments also contribute to the failure of governance innovations in the state. As Stephen (2024) highlighted, the lack of integration and alignment between digital transformation efforts and broader development goals has led to disjointed initiatives. The study found that without a coordinated, whole-of-government strategy, innovation efforts often become ineffective. Conflicting policies and overlapping initiatives create confusion among stakeholders and dilute the impact of governance reforms, further hindering progress. The absence of robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems was identified as another significant barrier. Sudrajat and Andhika (2021) pointed out that many reforms in Akwa Ibom have not been effectively tracked or evaluated. The study found that without a proper M&E system, it is difficult to assess the impact of governance innovations or identify areas for improvement. The lack of oversight has resulted in poorly executed reforms that fail to meet the desired outcomes. Additionally, the absence of feedback mechanisms has hindered the ability to adapt strategies and ensure continuous improvement, further stalling progress in governance innovation.

Finally, legal and regulatory barriers were found to be a significant constraint to the adoption of governance innovations. As Saragih (2024) observed, outdated laws concerning data privacy, public procurement, and accountability create challenges for the introduction of new digital tools or governance practices. The study confirmed that Akwa Ibom's legal frameworks need to be updated to accommodate the growing need for digital governance solutions. The slow pace of legal reforms has delayed the implementation of essential innovations, such as e-governance and public-private partnerships, thereby limiting their potential to improve public service delivery.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the effective implementation of innovative governance in Akwa Ibom State is hindered by a combination of institutional resistance, resource constraints, rigid bureaucratic structures, and cultural biases. These barriers present significant challenges to the adoption of new technologies, reforms, and processes that could enhance public service delivery. While the potential benefits of governance innovation are clear offering improvements in service quality, efficiency, and accessibility the full realization of these benefits requires overcoming these persistent obstacles. Institutional resistance, driven by a fear of change and a lack of understanding, often impedes progress. Coupled with limited financial and technical resources, this resistance delays the rollout of crucial innovations. Additionally, bureaucratic rigidity and societal cultural biases create further hurdles that prevent the smooth integration of modern governance solutions.

However, these challenges are not insurmountable. Addressing them requires a multi-faceted approach that includes capacity building, resource allocation, simplification of bureaucratic processes, and a shift in cultural perceptions towards embracing technological solutions. It is essential for the leadership in Akwa Ibom State to foster a culture of adaptability and openness to change in order to successfully implement governance innovations.

Recommendations

i. **Leadership Commitment and Support:**

Akwa Ibom State should prioritize leadership development and ensure that top leaders are committed to supporting governance innovations. Strong leadership will provide the necessary resources, direction, and encouragement to overcome institutional resistance.

ii. **Invest in Digital Literacy and Training:**

To address digital illiteracy, the state should invest in digital literacy programs for both public

servants and citizens, particularly in rural communities, to ensure that everyone has the skills and resources to engage with e-governance platforms.

iii. **Streamline Bureaucratic Processes:**

Efforts should be made to simplify bureaucratic procedures and reduce red tape in public administration. This will create an environment that is more conducive to adopting innovative governance practices and improve the efficiency of service delivery.

iv. **Promote Co-Production and Citizen Engagement:**

The government should focus on co-production models where citizens actively participate in the design and delivery of public services. Engaging citizens in governance will improve accountability, efficiency, and public trust in government services.

v. **Develop Robust Monitoring and Evaluation Systems:**

The state should establish comprehensive monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the effectiveness of governance reforms. This will enable timely adjustments to be made, ensuring that innovations are successfully implemented and deliver tangible improvements in public service delivery.

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