



SOLUTION APPROACH TO CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS CHALLENGES FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The service delivery in Nigeria has remained a challenged while the erstwhile causes identified and solutions offered in the past have not really helped in the containment. Therefore, there is a need for a new approach to investigate the series of reforms that have been introduced by successive government. Centered on the research question set forth for this paper, sixteen informants who oversee the affairs of ministries and staff matters across different sphere of work force in Nigeria were probed about their perceptions on the possible solutions to the moribund reforms in civil service and service delivery in Nigeria. The sampling design was based on purposive method while Thematic data analysis technique was used to analyze the interviews data. However, qualitative computer data analysis software (NVIVO 10) was used to facilitate the process of storing, sorting, coding, analyzing and preparation of representation of the data. Arising from this, the paper established the nexus of solutions in relation to restructuring that requires creating enabling environment, carrying out employment by merit and federal character, introduction of comprehensive staff welfare and purging of corruption in the civil service. Similarly, as part of attempt to find answers to these challenges it was discovered that regular re-training of civil servants, improvement in the management of information and feedback to, the need for continuity of policy implementation and Prompt Response to public Complaints. Meanwhile, this study's findings have significantly contributed to the understanding of the spiral of the challenges of the civil service reform through the solutions advanced by this study. These are imperative because identification of solutions could create efficient strategies for governments and lessons for civil servants.

Keywords: Civil service reforms, service delivery, federal character, Nigerian Labour Congress, Federal Ministry.

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, the contributions of Civil Service in promoting sustainable and equitable economic growth are receiving increasing attention, however, what constitute the helixes that informed the abysmal service delivery of civil service in Nigeria in spite of several reforms have received adequate attention. Meanwhile, efficient and effective management of the Civil Service are critical to sustainable socio-economic development of a nation. Justifying the challenges from one perspective, Anazodo, Okoye, and Chukwuemeka (2012) disclosed that the Civil Service in Nigeria is of colonial creation and inherently, there

have been many challenges restraining its service delivery. Consequently, necessitated the clamour for reforms in the Nigeria Civil Service as well as further studies to examine the reform.

Similarly, Igbuzor (2015) notes that public service is expected to play a vital role in delivering services across a country. Over the years, there has been poor service delivery by the public sector in Nigeria leading to the launch of the Nigeria Service Delivery Initiative by the former President Olusegun Obasanjo, GCFR in March, 2004. The Federal Government signed a social compact with all Nigerians (SERVICOM) to improve citizen satisfaction by promoting service excellence in Public Service. In another words, the Nigerian Civil Service has undergone numerous structural and operational reforms, both before as well as after independence, however there is no outstanding progress in the quality of service provided to the citizenry. Presently, there is still weak nationwide consciousness due to earlier introduction of the regionalization policies that stimulated ethnicity and sectionalism in the rank and file of staffers in the service.

On the basis of this, the study underscored the context for service delivery which necessitates the need for reform of the public sector to be able to deliver efficient, effective and responsive services. Corroborating this, Paul, Usman, and Ali (2013) emphasized that among the contents of the institutional reform project, the civil service reform is the most critical one that attempts to humanize the civil service by introducing a system of federal character in the employment and appointment. The quest for the involvement of workers' union in the transformation of the Nigerian Civil Service begins from the belief that there cannot be any meaningful civil service reform implementation without disciplined civil servants.

2. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The service delivery in Nigeria has remained a challenged while the erstwhile causes identified and solutions offered in the past have not really helped in the containment. Based on this, therefore, there is a need for a new approach to investigate the series of reforms that have been introduced by successive government. This therefore was the drive for this paper's application of System Theory for the understanding of the problem and the proffering of solutions. Meanwhile, the Systems Theory is an interdisciplinary theory about every system in nature, in society and in many scientific domains as well as a framework with which we can investigate phenomena, such as civil service reform, from a holistic approach (Capra, 1997).

Based on this therefore, from the perspectives of system theory, significantly also, this paper will be contributing to knowledge and understanding of the foundation of failed civil service delivery which is based on certain factors within the environment therefore makes it imperative for solutions towards achieving successful reform. Meanwhile, in corroborating the holistic objectives that guided this paper, Mele, Pels and Polese (2010) highlighted that the systemic perspective argues that a phenomenon like civil service delivery, cannot be easily understood simply by breaking it up into elementary parts and then reforming, instead there is a need to apply a comprehensive idea to underscore its functioning. Buttressing this, Gibson (2017) describes the focus of system theory as that which sees the society as a

complex arrangement of elements, including individuals and their beliefs, as they relate to a whole.

From another perspective, The System Theory can be linked to this paper based on the approach that civil service reform is seen as a holistic system, characterized by a high degree of integration between the factors intervening in the process of value creation, that is, service delivery (Grant, Shani & Krishnan, 1994). Consequently, in relation to this paper, the paramount factors that support the process of civil service reforms and by implication the service delivery are enumerated.

3. METHODOLOGY

Centered on the research question set forth for this paper, sixteen informants who oversee the affairs of ministries and staff matters across different sphere of work force in Nigeria were probed about their perceptions on the possible solutions to the moribund reforms in civil service and service delivery in Nigeria. The sampling design was based on purposive technique while thematic analysis technique was used to analyze the interviews data. Researcher followed Creswell(2012)guidelines to carry out data analysis stages. However, qualitative computer data analysis software (NVIVO 10) was used to analyze the data. According to Creswell (2012) it is used to facilitate the process of storing, sorting, coding, analyzing and perpetration of representation of the data.

The analysis commenced with open coding where data transcribed were scrutinized line by line to describe perceptions within data (Creswell, 2012). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) this makes it disposed to purifying as well as identifying borrowed existing concepts. Next to this is the analysis of axial coding, which was applied to construct conceptual links between a category and its subcategories. After that, concepts and sub-concepts were described more by selective coding, that is an assimilative process of selecting the principal category, methodically connecting it to other categories, validating those relationships by exploring for confirming and disconfirming examples, and stuffing in categories that required additional improvement and development (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In order to protect the confidentiality of informants the study used pseudonym to report the perceptions of the informants in line with the advice of (McCann & Clark, 2003). As noted by Creswell (2009), researcher must be mindful of how to protect the anonymity of individuals, roles and incidents in the research through the use of pseudonyms for both individuals and places of data collection sometimes. In NVivo 10, individual respondent was addressed as Informant, with abbreviation used in the model as Inf. FME, FMF, NGO, NLC, HSF and SU representing respectively.

4. FINDINGS

The article is based on the data collected from the in-depth interviews conducted with sixteen informants drawn from Federal Ministry of Finance, Federal ministry of education Nigeria, Head of Service of the Federation, Association of Senior Civil Servants of Nigeria, Trade Union Congress, Non-Government Organization and Nigerian Labour Congress.

The aspiration of the reform is ensuring that Nigerian public service works efficiently and effectively for the people (Oronsaye, 2009). Buttressing this point, Ikelionwu (2011)

highlighted that there have been no less than 10 major commission reports on the problems of the civil service in Nigerian. In view of this, the quality of the civil service was severely hampered by cultural, structural, institutional and other management defects in that sense, there is a need for workable solutions on service delivery reform. The findings based on the analysis through NVivo software revealed two sub-themes and eight sub sub-themes as shown in Figure 1.

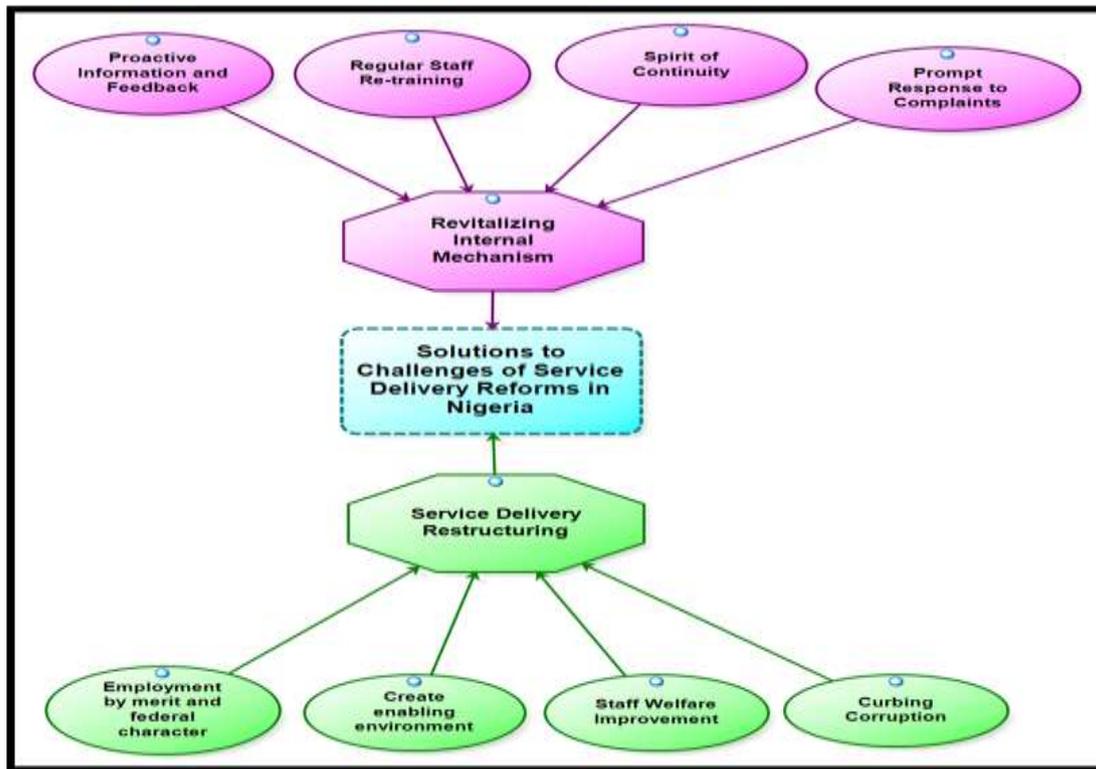


Fig 1: Emerged themes on solutions to challenges of service delivery reforms in Nigeria

4.1 Service Reform Restructuring

In order to adequately ensure proper reform of civil service in Nigeria, there is therefore the need to embark on realistic, workable and practical reforms that have human face rather than the usual cosmetic approaches. According to Ikellionwu (2011), foremost of all, there is need for the government to create enabling conditions of service. This has to do with guaranteeing acceptable salary in addition to other economic motivations. If this is accordingly and faithfully executed, civil servants will be discouraged from using unscrupulous means to survive and from clients and the public in general.

Meanwhile, establishing the nexus of solutions in relation to restructuring, the emerged response shows that solutions can be derived by creating enabling environment, through employment by merit and federal character, when staff welfare is given priority and if adequate public private partnership is ensured.

4.1a Create Enabling Environment

As part of the solutions in the area of reform structuring of civil service in Nigeria, the need to create an enabling environment for workers and their operations have been emphasized.

Most of the informant across various ministry and agencies agreed that doing this will go a long way in making the reform a success. According to informant FME1 for instance, the solution can come if, “the government look into and create enabling environment for people to invest both domestic and foreign investors”. In the same light, informant NLC succinctly put it thus, “the right infrastructure and good environment must be provided’.

However, looking at it from another perspective, Informant HSF3 acknowledged the problem and therefore suggested the way out thus, “people should be allowed to further their education that is growth and advancement while on the job, a lot of sensitization need to be done, and E government is required. However, the perception of the informant HSF3 is in consonance with the position of Achimugu, Chukwurah and Ochala (2013) that ICT is a tool for reforming public service. In addition to this and consistent with these concerns, informant SU2 emphasized that, “staffs are not being motivated to do their job because they were not properly taking care off. So, there is need for government to look into their welfare considering the prevailing economic situation of Nigeria”.

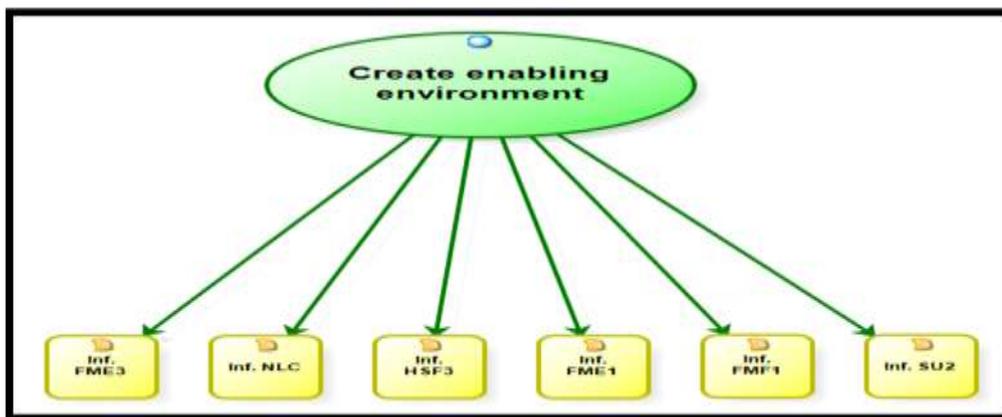


Fig. 2: Informants perceptions on the impact of enabling environment as a solution

4.1b Employment by Merit and Federal Character

In order for the reform of civil service to be successful, the policy of federal character and sound appointment principles need to be ensured. According to Igbuzor (2017) to address these weaknesses and to find solution to this challenge, there is the need to build capacity as well as implement change programmes in human resource management, planning, policy co-ordination, public finance management, service delivery and accountability in budgetary matters. If these procedures are improved with due process, expertise, proper guideline and the problem will be constricted.

Though, the problem persists in many ministry and agencies, however, informant emphasized the appropriateness of this principle in some government ministry. For instance, Informant FME3 noted thus, “Am speaking for ministry of education, staff placement is done based on the field of discipline”. Meanwhile, Informant FME2 reacted saying, “service delivery can be improved, if professional is placed on the job based on their field of discipline”. Consistent with these concerns, Informant NGO1 emphasized that, “Service delivery in Nigeria can be improved if government intensify their effort, increase fund, and the right caliber of personnel should be put at the right place”

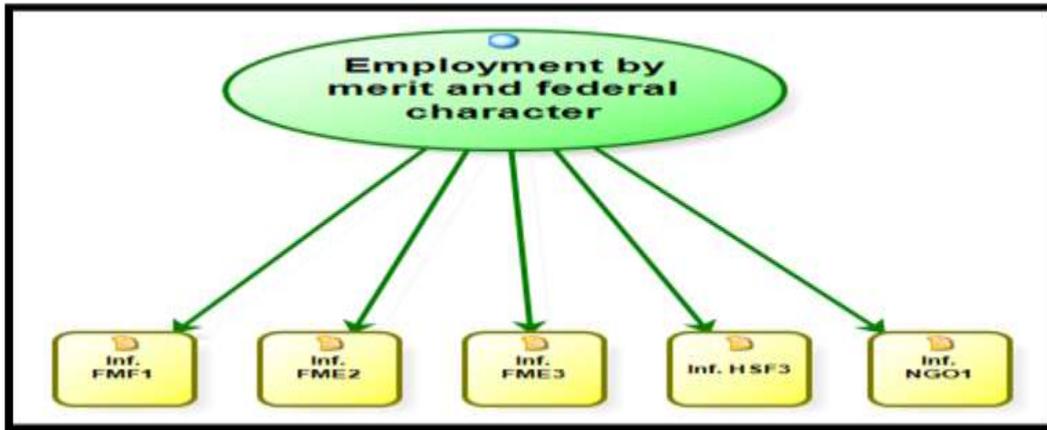


Fig. 3: Perceptions on federal character and employment by merit as a solution

4.1c Staff Welfare Improvement

The underlining reason for reform in the civil service is the quest to bring about improvement in both the processes and quality of service delivery. Therefore, any effort directed at service improvement whether in terms of reequipping, retooling, provision of requisite infrastructure without strong consideration for staff salary increment from time to time will be difficult.

In relation to this, findings from this studies’ interview also showed that attention to workers’ salary is important. For instance, Informant FME1 sounded that, “there should be adequate funding, and standard to be followed by every government that comes into power”. Elaborating on this observation, Informant SU2 copiously said:

Service delivery to the people can be improved only if the people delivering this service are well motivated, meaning that their welfare needs to be enhanced. Take a look at the salary of the civil servants and compare with the inflation there is nothing to write home about if we are to face the reality (Inf. SU2).

Another Informant, who was coded as Informant FME3 echoed similar concerns but specifically noting that, “there should be increase in minimum wage/workers salary, this in turn will enhance the efficiency and the productivity of the organization”.



Fig. 4: Perceptions on the need for staff welfare improvement as a solution

4.1d Curbing Corruption

Because corruption has been one of the furthestmost impediments to the successful implementation of civil service reform in Nigeria, most of the informants have concluded that except corruption is checked among the administrators, there cannot be a way out. For instance, informant NGO2 noted that, “The moment we make efforts in stopping corruption being perpetuated by the administrators the better the civil service reform in Nigeria”. Acknowledging this view, informant NGO1 emphasized that, “One of the main solutions for a successful reform is to prevent corruption which is rife among civil servants”. Expressing the same perception, Informant NLC reiterated that, “The reform of civil service would have been a success but for high level corruption among civil servants. Most divert the resources meant for the implementation of the reform”.

Looking at it from another perspective, Informant SU2 recognized the improvement that have taken place since the introduction of the new reform thus, “Though corruption has been a major problem in the growth of Nigeria of which civil service is not an exception, but there is an improvement now with the government in place”. Corroborating this line of views was Informant TUC who explained that, “Corruption has been a problem but the reform is succeeding now in this area”.

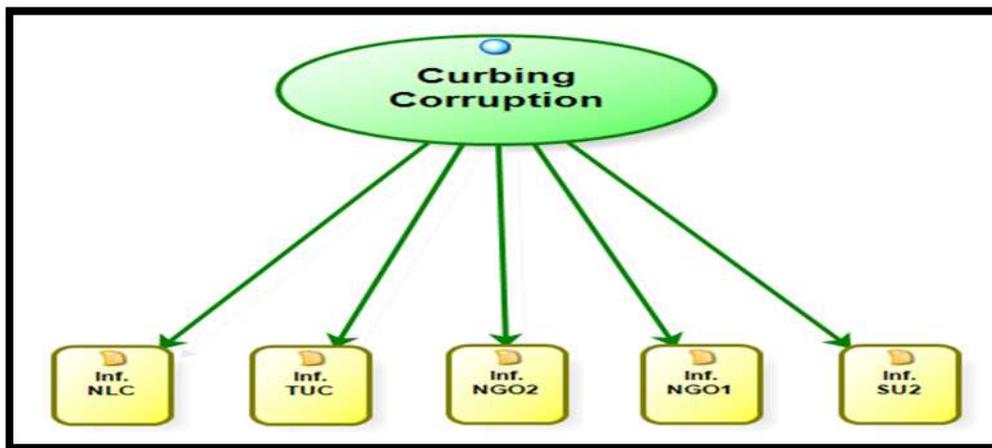


Fig. 5: Informants’ perceptions on need to stop corruption as a solution

4.2 Revitalizing Internal Mechanism

The Nigeria administrators who took over the leadership position in the Civil Service imbibed the colonial approach of wealth acquisition for self-glorification and self-superiority at the expense of citizen needs. This heightened the appalling performance of the Civil Service and as a result the under development of the country. In view of this, there is a clamour for reforms in the Nigeria Civil Service as the solution. Therefore, as part of attempt to find answers to these challenges, this study’s interviews revealed four sub sub-themes.

4.2a Regular Staff Re-training

It has been identified that one area where there a need for improvement in the public civil service in Nigeria is in the area of competent staff recruitment. Most of the complain about delivery of services bothered on the capability of staff. Based on this reason, informant NLC

aply called for the training and retraining of staff, “training and retraining of workers”. Elaborating on this further, informant FME1 echoed thus:

Based on my own perception, it is a good thing for one to be a professional because if you are not a professional in the field you cannot perform effectively, take a look at a building engineer for instance, if you are not a building engineer you can work in terms of bridge construction (Inf. FME1).

Describing how this can bring solution, Informant HSF2 explained that, “Service delivery reform help civil servants to be responsible and deliver services in an orderly manner”.

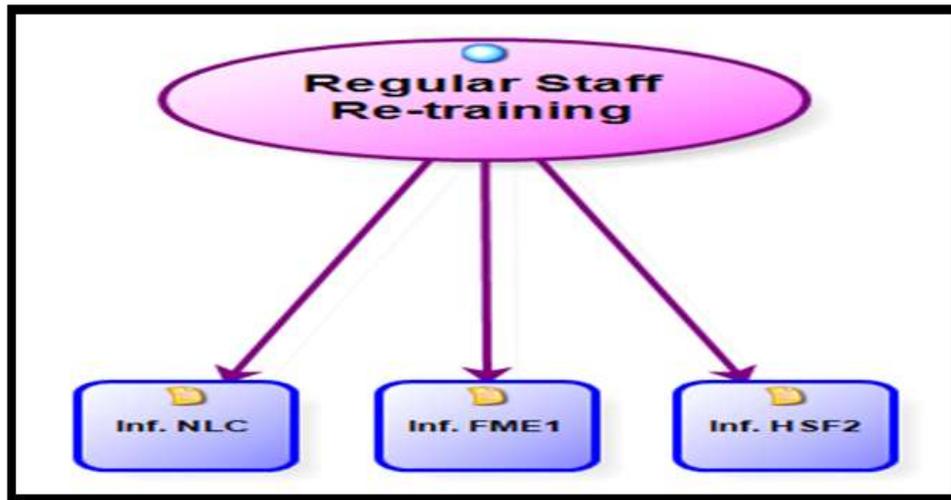


Fig. 6: Perceptions on the need for regular staff re-training as a solution

4.2b Proactive Information and Feedback

The reform in the civil service in Nigeria has brought about a measurable improvement in the management of informant and awareness among all stakeholders. Though, some Nigerians are still of the opinion that the awareness is not significant. However, according to Ikelionwu (2011) the reform has assisted in providing information for decision making as well as adequate awareness about the reform.

One of the representative of Non-Governmental Organizations in Nigeria, Informant NGO2 concisely disclosed that there is need for improvement in the reform as regards awareness thus, “There is a need to sensitize people and in doing this we involve relevant government agencies for team work”.

Corroborating this line of views was the representative of the Nigeria Labour Congress, the union protecting the interest of all Nigerians workers, Informant NLC, who explained that, “more awareness campaign is required. Awareness campaign through radio, television, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, and so on is required”. In relation to all that have been said, Informant HSF3 reiterated that, “public awareness, and even in some ministry within the MDAs they are struggling to accept this policy”. Therefore, to achieve this, Informant FME4 disclosed that, “Service delivery in Nigeria, needs more radical reform”.

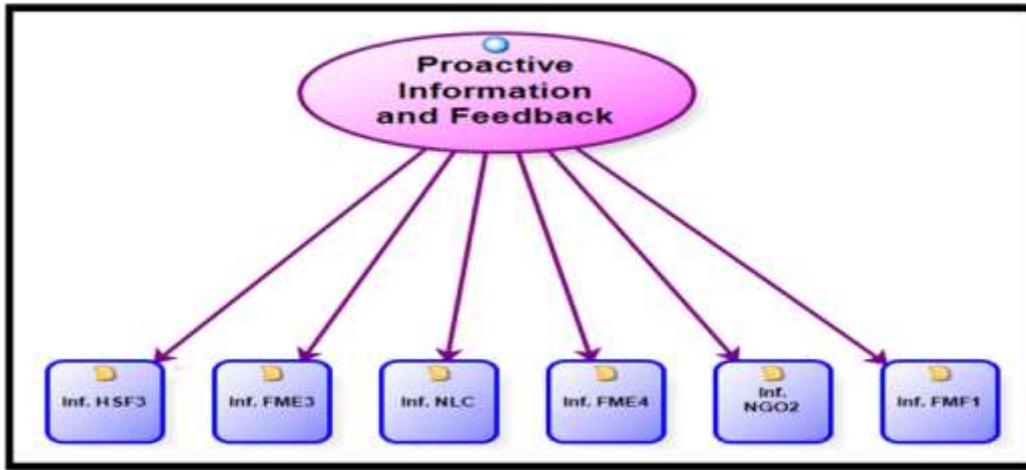


Fig. 7: Perceptions on the need for proactive information and feedback

4.2c Spirit of Continuity

One of the challenges of the civil service reform policy of the government is the absence of link and continuity of policy implementation from one government to the other. According to SU1, “Service delivery can be improved if only there is continuity in our policies and programmes. Again, government should be fully committed and made fund available for the exercise”. Consistent with these concerns, Informant FME1 copiously described the situation thus:

The preceding government should be able to imbibe the spirit of continuity and once that is done it will pave way for speedy and rapid development. The moment we have a good plan and that every government that comes into power is being mandated to follow to the later or invariably continuity of projects then, things will be better (Inf. FME1).

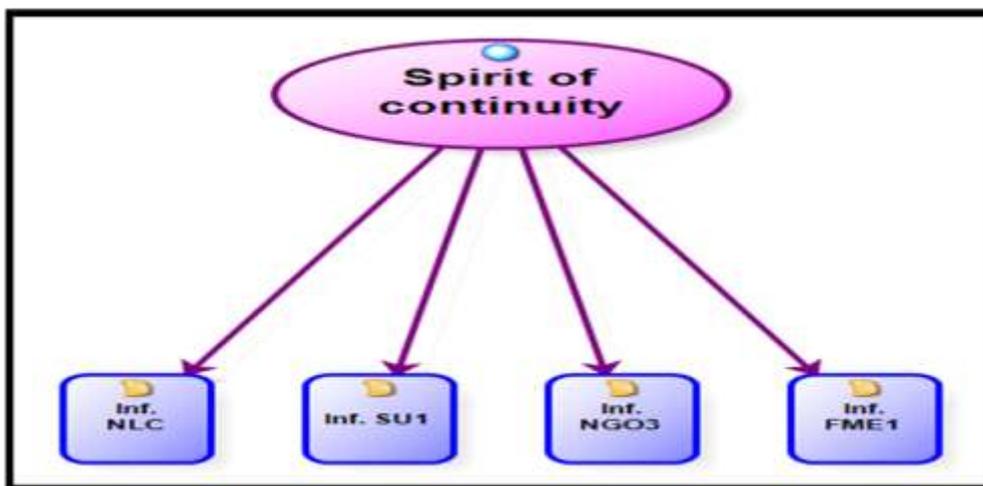


Fig. 8: Continuity of policy implementation is required as a solution

4.2d Prompt Response to Complaints

The present state of activities in the Civil Service appears that the variables accountable for poor perceptions and image in the Nigerian Civil Service have not been dealt with and so the problem still lingers. One of such variable as identified by scholars (Anazodo, Okoye, &

Chukwuemeka, 2012) is the delayed and refusal to always to respond to complaints and grievances of the populace. It is against this background that the researcher tries to examine the extent they were able to solve problems of inefficiency and ineffectiveness regarding peoples complains. According to informant FME4, “civil servants must render services to the satisfaction of the masses at the right time that is the charter itself. Reasons for service delivery, is for provision of enhanced services to the customers”.

Another Informant, who was coded as Informant SU1 echoed similar concerns noting that, “The Nigeria civil service need to improve on their customer’s relationship as it has to do with service provision”.



Fig. 9: Perceptions on need to respond promptly to complaints as part of the solution

5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study’s findings have significantly contributed to the understanding of the spiral of the challenges of the civil service reform through the solutions advanced by this paper. These are imperative because identification of solutions could create efficient strategies for governments and lessons for civil servants. Therefore, it can be concluded that based on the findings of this paper, civil service reforms carried out over the years in Nigeria had not really achieved the aims and objectives intended. The realization of this necessitated the findings which discovered that part of the solutions for civil service reform are the need to restructure service delivery reform and improving internal mechanism. There have been some challenging areas that encumber the actualization of a very successful civil service reform but the application of these solutions is believed to have tendency of smooth service delivery.

Therefore, in answering the objective set earlier on, this paper has drawn together previous gaps relating to the solutions required for handling civil service reform in Nigeria. This paper has been consistently driven at every section by the system theory. Consequently, one of the significant theoretical implication established by this paper is that it provides the overall perspectives on the way forward for the challenges of several civil service reforms that have been introduced but not effective in Nigeria.

In view of this, the following recommendations become imperative. Having acknowledged the problems in the Nigerian Civil Service from independence till date and offered solutions

on how to improve the service, what Nigeria government needs now is to adopt the solutions bearing in mind the country's social and economic environment. Again, the implementation strategy and monitoring systems of the Civil Service are to be taken seriously so that the Nigerian Civil Service would be qualitative service delivery and result oriented geared towards the achievement of the nation's socio-economic development.

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