COVID-19 PANDEMIC, INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE REVOLUTIONIZING OF SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIA: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Peter, ThankGod Oyinmiebi[1]
Ogbor Oghenekpabor Jeremy[2]
Ikuromo Otonbara[3]

[1]Department of Social Studies, Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education, Sagbama, Bayelsa State;
[2,3]Department of Political Science, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Rivers State

Abstract

The covid-19 pandemic led to the global shut down of both private and public institutions in a bid to prevent its spread. Hence, this action which was necessitated to save lives came at the expenses of most institutions responsible for provision of essential services being shut down. Developed nations which were Information Communication Technology inclined adopted strategies that enabled them performed their responsibilities and provide services for its citizens, whilst their underdeveloped counterparts faced difficulties in meeting this responsibility. Nigeria stands as an example of a country with a deficient ICT compliance in its governance structure. As a country with poor ICT culture in service delivery, the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic revealed the inadequacy of the country's public institutions in effectively and efficiently delivering its mandates to citizens – in the area of service delivery – in health, education and security. Thus, this study aims at interrogating the nexus between covid-19 pandemic, ICT and the revolutionizing of service delivery in Nigeria. The paper adopts the assumptions of efficiency conceptual framework and makes use of secondary data. It argues that the covid-19 pandemic has revealed the importance of ICT in service delivery in Nigeria and how its poor usage affects better service delivery. The study recommends that, Nigeria should as a matter of urgency imbibe the implementation of ICT in all its Ministries, Department and Agencies as a mechanism to respond to issues that disrupt its responsibility to citizens.

Keywords: Covid-19, ICT, Service delivery, Nigeria.

Introduction

The Coronavirus, popularly known as the Covid-19 pandemic is an acute respiratory disease, caused by a novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV2 previously known as 2019-nCoV) first recorded began in the Chinese province of Wuhan in December 2019 and consequently spread around the world was declared an epidemic on 30th January of 2020 by the World Health Organization as a public health emergency of international concern, (Gao, Cao, & Yan, 2020) could not be contained as it quickly became a pandemic destroying the world economy and national economies respectively. This growing concern of the negative impact of Covid-19, in curtailing

movement, businesses, schooling, travel and international relations has put the socioeconomic and political lives of nations on a standstill, (World Health Organization, 2020).

Significantly, the covid-19 pandemic affected both developed and developing countries alike with serious socio-economic, political and security challenges. This affected several areas that linked the government and her citizens, as in the bid of government to fight the pandemic certain rights and demands of the citizens were curtailed. In developing countries, the pandemic further raised the issue of ineffectiveness and inefficiency of government in meeting the needs of the people, further compounding the strain that the pandemic brought to the lives of the people, and their public institutions.

Inevitably, service delivery, an essential function of government of the bureaucratic wing of modern government was in exculpable from the pandemic negative grip – in hampering its strategic relevance in meeting the needs of the state. One of the areas that the covid-19 pandemic drastically affected across the globe was public service delivery. The pandemic resulted in a strain in government meeting the needs of the citizens in accessing public goods such as education, adequate health care, security, and other essential needs. More so, the covid-19 pandemic revealed the deficiencies of most public institutions in developing countries. One obvious deficiency that developing countries possess is the paucity of modern information communication technology (ICT) in governmental institutions.

Since the introduction of ICT in the 21st century, ICT has become an effective and efficient means for delivery of services in most private and public sector in the West – especially, in United States and other developed countries. Baridam and Govender (2019) indicated that, the use of ICT in socio-economic development is evident in various sectors of Western nations. In fact, most countries of the world try to embrace ICT in running activities of government (Azemi, et al, 2016). ICT enhances better connectivity between the government and the people, thereby bringing government close to the people. In recent time, many countries have tried to reposition their public service for effective and efficient service delivery through the application of ICT. Consequently, government of nations have taken it upon themselves to carryout various reforms in the public sector by redesigning the structures, systems and processes to improve the delivering of services to their citizens (Adeyeye & Aladesanmi, 2010 as cited in Ewuim, et al, 2016). Despite, the fact that it has been argued by several scholars that Information community technology facilitates better, effective and efficient delivery of services, the adoption of ICT remains a challenge for developing countries, especially Nigeria.

Nigeria as a country is yet to effectively deploy the use of ICT in providing public service for its citizens. As a result, with the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic, services and functions of government that should have been met in the wake of the pandemic was constrained. This is because the traditional method of service delivery in most developing countries and Nigeria in particular has been physical or person-to-person while in the case of ICT it can be done remotely through the use of the web and other quick-to-respond technologies. As such, the outbreak of covid-19 pandemic highlighted the crisis of ICT infrastructures in the country that should have stood as an alternative in meeting the public service needs of the people in the wake of the disruptive impact of the pandemic.

Statement of the problem

The provision of public goods and services remains at the core of governance in modern societies. This is because one of the essential functions of government is to ensure that the people whose mandates and finance are in their custody deserves a better life. It is in a bid to ensure that citizens enjoy services and amenities such as education, health care, security, in a hitch-free and efficient way that the introduction and adoption of information communication technology was made to facilitates.

Hence, underscoring the importance of ICT in efficient service delivery, Adiele (2017, p. 240) stated that:

> The place of ICT in the world cannot be underestimated. It is believed that ICT bridges the gap between the government and the people by way of connectivity, thereby bringing the government closer to the masses. Through this means, the service delivery to the masses has been much faster and a lot easier unlike the traditional way which was characterized with time wasting and bureaucratic bottleneck in the public sector. The modern ICT application has largely given rise to hitch free and effective governance with overall improved service delivery to the masses.

It therefore, stands unarguable that with information communication technology, the processes of governance in service delivery would become more effective, less bureaucratic, modern and consume less resources. (Adulkareem, 2015; Handayani, et al, 2016; Izhar, et al, 2017; Chilaka & Oyinmiebi 2020). Hence, the necessity for better service delivery becomes inevitable. Owning to the above, developed countries of the world have been able to inspire a transformative public service delivery system that is open, transparent, accountable and efficient, (Azemi, et al, 2016). Conversely, developing countries have failed. Nigeria exemplifies this failure as public service delivery in country has continuously been faced with solvable challenges due to the negligence of government in adopting ways and mechanisms that would ensure that public service delivery is met/carried out in the most responsive and effective way, and one of such failure comes from her poor culture of information and communication technology culture, (Chilaka & Oyinmiebi, 2020).

Further revealing the crisis of poor service delivery and the inevitable need for the modernization of public sector in Nigeria was the covid-19 pandemic. The covid-19 pandemic which resulted in the shutdown of physical governmental activities did not altogether created a need for governmental functions to be shut but conversely, demanded for new ways by local and international governmental structures to perform their responsibilities. This demand highlighted the need for an alternative route in service delivery which the utilization of information, communication technology presented – and was successfully used in developed countries. Hence, this study argues that, the need to revolutionized the process of service delivery in the country through the widespread adoption of ICT in Ministries, Departments and Agencies of government became clearer in the period of the covid-19 pandemic outbreak and the consequent shutdown of physical or traditional means of performing government functions. Against the

foregoing, this study interrogates the following research questions; How has the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic revealed the deficiency of ICT in Nigeria's public service delivery?

Objective of the study

Broadly, this study interrogates the nexus between covid-19 pandemic, ICT and service delivery in Nigeria, while examining the issues, challenges and prospect for transforming the public sector in the country. However, the study focuses on the understated objective;

1. To examine the how the outbreak of covid-19 has shown how deficient Nigeria is in the use of ICT in the delivery of public service.

Methodology

This study is majorly a qualitative study that relied majorly on secondary sources of data to interrogate the focus of the paper. Secondary data on the other hand were sourced from relevant journal articles, texts, and publications from the website of reputable medical institutions. Data gathered were analyzed in relevant themes covering extant theoretical positions, conclusion and recommendations.

Information Communication Technology and Service Delivery: A conceptual clarification

The concept Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is fraught with several definitions. Hence, it is difficult to peg a singular meaning to the term, as there are numerous definitions in the literature. Some scholars define the term as a process that involves several forms of activities such as acquisition, storage, processing and dissemination of information by means of utilizing both the soft and hardware of computer technology or devices. For Bature, as cited in Ewuim, et al, (2016) the term Information and Communication Technologies entails technologies or technological devices that enables access to information - digital information through the exploitation of the broad range of telecommunications devices, systems and processes. Similarly, Olasanmi, Ayoola and Kareem (2012) captured in Ewuim, et al, (2016) points that ICT is an umbrella term that comprises of computer and computerized systems, telecommunication, networks and multi-media application that enhances knowledge for the execution of given task which entails skills and processes necessary for carrying out activities in a given context. Corroborating this position, Arugu and Chilaka (2016) avers that ICT encompasses any communication device or application, that may include: radio, television, cellular phones, computer and network hardware and software, satellite systems and so on, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as videoconferencing and distance learning. ICTs are often spoken of in a particular context, such as ICTs in education, health care, or libraries.

Service delivery, in this study is focused on all those actions and provisions made by the government of a country in performing their basic responsibility to their citizens. In this line, service delivery as used in this context is different from that offered by private firms or organization for profit making. Hence, our focus here is on public service delivery. Accordingly, the European commission (2017), argues that the term public service is better understood from the dimension of social contracts – that is the expectation of citizens from their government – this expectation falls under the right of the citizens and the duty of the government. Hence, in

understanding public service delivery it involves the dynamic interactions between government and citizens, state businesses and the fulfilment of citizens needs and other service users, whether directly or by proxy through an intermediary. In addition, it is the totality of the well-recognized services (in form of basic amenities) provided by the state, such as health, education, police, fire service, welfare, social services, etc. also, it is instructive to note that public service is broad involve other forms of government responsibilities to their citizens in the manner of exchange of information or finance takes place: registering, licensing, applying, paying, borrowing, making an enquiry, etc. Public 'services' are mostly intangible, but they also can involve construction works, or the supply of equipment or items.

To highlight the view of Oronsanye (2010), that public service delivery can be seen as a process of meeting the citizens needs through well established state and public institutions. In this view, it involves "the process of meeting the needs of citizens through prompt and efficient procedures." The implication of the above is that behind public service is the established foundation of social contract where government is expectation to interact with the citizens. Thus, implying that this interaction between government and citizens is such that the necessities for living a functional life/good life are met in the most efficient and effective way.

Okafor., et al, (2014) comprehend public service delivery as the result of the intentions, decision of government and government institutions, and the actions undertaken and decision made by people employed in government institutions. They opine that it is the provision of public goods or social (education, health), economic (grants) or infrastructural (water, electricity) services to those who need (or demand) them. Ohemeng (2010) views public service delivery from the light of its key features as doing more with less, empowering citizens, enhancing transparency and holding public servants accountable.

Gafar, (2017), believes that public service delivery has become a buzz word, commonly use to describe particularly, basic services providing by the government such as social amenities like hospital, road, electricity, water supply, market place, customs services, licensing, sanitary services, physical infrastructure, town planning, housing among others. For the Regional school of Public Administration, (2018), public service delivery has been broadly defined as "all contacts with the public administration during which customers, i.e., citizens, residents and enterprises (hereafter referred to collectively as citizens) seek data, handle their affairs or pay taxes. In this context, orientation towards citizens needs to be understood as encompassing all contacts and all tasks performed by the public administration that affect citizens. This broad definition encompasses not only contacts between the public administration and customers, but also the rules regulating those contacts (i.e. the administrative procedures)".

Information Communication Technology and Service delivery in Nigeria: Unravelling the Issues

The inevitability of utilizing ICT in meeting the essential services of the people has been implicated in determining the efficiency of public agencies in the business of service delivery. Evidently, in today's world and how governance is evaluated, the use of technological and other innovative mechanisms in facilitating the processes of government and the delivery of public goods in the public sector has become a major index of accessing governance and how

government decisions affect citizens in the 21st century. Hence, in order to make the process of government in relation to service delivery to be open, transparent, efficient, effective, accountable and participatory constitute a fundamental indicator of efficiency and effectiveness of modern government and their public institutions. In Nigeria, with the traditional process of governance both in service delivery and in performance of its duties characterized as being slow, inefficient, ineffective and devoid of participation of citizens the necessity for ICT becomes a fundamental right of citizens and need for good governance at all levels of government in Nigeria.

In this vein, the adoption, utilization and implementation of ICT becomes a necessary as well as needed tool for meeting essential and basic needs such as the provision of electricity, water, health care, education and other basic citizens' needs, (Subhash & Ravi, 2013). Across the entire globe with the beginning of the 21st century ushering a fundamental change in the processes of governance, and ways of doing businesses in the private sector through ICT there have been a fundamental overhauling of political, economic and social structures of nations of the world. With the introduction of ICT facilitating modern ways of disseminating information, its role in the actual performance of government functions cannot be contested. As such, governments around the world now have a moral responsibility to carry out its functions in the most modernized way but to adopt means that would ensure that services and public goods are provided in the most efficient and effective manner available and possible. It also goes to say that, governments must ensure accountability in doing this, (Subhash & Ravi, 2013).

In the world today and across several countries, the business of government involves the efficient flow of information as a necessary pre-condition for effective meeting the needs of the citizens and in the performance of their core responsibilities such as education, health, security among others. Therefore, the use of ICT is essential in every aspect of citizens'-government interactions. ICT constitute a major element through which governments govern, manage its resources, offer services, and account for its performance (Heeks, 2002). Therefore, information and communication technology has become the driving force to improve public sector efficiency and effectiveness (Kenneth & Justin, 2004).

According to OECD (2003), information technology is a tangible resource in form of equipment or interconnected system of equipment that comprises all methods of technology use to build, store, influence, manage, transmit, interchange, or receive information in its numerous forms. Public service delivery on the other hand, is about providing citizen with services of public interest such as healthcare, qualitative education, energy, transportation, water, and security of life and property. Unlike the demands for services and products from manufacturing firms, the strains on demands on public services are somewhat different and complicated.

Generally, providing public services is a top priority of governments in both developed and developing nations and more important in developing countries if they are to make progress economically, socially and physically – there is a need to put in place structure, systems, processes that facilitates the proper functioning of public institutions – in this case the digitalization of services is necessary for efficiency and effectiveness. A striking feature of the Nigerian public service delivery system – exposes years of poor, slow, inefficient and traditional system that hardly meet the expectations of the people. Given this, citizen's perception of public

service delivery in Nigeria is poor and fall short of expectations due to the evident lapses on how the government renders essential services to the populace.

According to Ewuim, et al, (2016) underscores the relevance of Information and communication technology and public service delivery at all levels of government. In this manner, no level of government whether local or national is exempted from exploiting the beneficial tools and processes that ICT offers governance. Against this thinking, ICT enables the transformation of a public service delivery system in the local government level and the country at large that has been characterized as poor, inefficient and ineffective. In this regard the Nigerian public service system is often the subject of ridicule because of its rigidity, slowness, traditionality. As such, it is a system that is open to several problems such as corruption, transparency and accountability, high cost of administration and wastage hindering its effectiveness. Hence, it goes to say that the deployment of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the public service delivery would introduce huge form of difference in the manner and ways government perform its functions to its citizens.

In essence, ICT in other climes solidifies the social contract between the government and the governed, unlike the case in Nigeria where it only deepens the rift due to its absence or negligent use. ICT in the provision of quality public services reinforces the social contract between government and citizens, which is a key measure of governance and potent indicator of the wellbeing of a society. This is because it opens up the space for systems to interact and demands accountability from government by citizens, it further allows the government gather feedbacks on how well they can improve public services to their citizens.

Covid-19 Pandemic and Public service delivery in Nigeria

The covid-19 pandemic disrupted the entire global system as well as the capacity of national government in performing their core functions. At the core of this disruption is the way and manner that national government provided for its citizens in an era of social distancing, crumbling economy and public health hazard that puts the lives and human security of individuals in a delicate position. As a result of this, the way and manner that government's responds to meeting their needs highlights two important areas; firstly, how national governments were able to muster the capacity to tackle the scourge of the disruptive nature of the pandemic and secondly, the preparedness of countries during the pre-covid era and how they leverage of this preparedness in fighting the pandemic. One of such areas was in the digitalization of the public service delivery processes in a way that its automated nature allowed them (developed countries) thrived.

Broadly, it is instructive to point that Covid-19 pandemic does not only represent what many people term as a public healthcare crisis – which is a very narrow way viewing the pandemic taking note of its deleterious effect on other sector than the health and wellbeing of citizens of various countries. The covid-19 exposes what should be referred to as a "governance crisis". The covid-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on the capacity of most national governments both in the developed and developing countries. Its effects transcended several areas among which were "public services delivery, transparency in emergency procurements, including medical supplies, access to vital public information, effective communication between public institutions,

administration of justice, prevention of gender-based violence and social protection of the most vulnerable population, amongst many other state functions". Hence, at the center of the failure of governance is the inability to meet the needs of the citizens – which is the foundational responsibility of government – and highlight the necessity of public service and a key responsibility of every government.

One area that it negatively affected was in how most government agencies performed their responsibilities. In Nigeria, the pandemic impaired how most government bureaucratic institutions delivered their mandates to the public. As it was difficult, for the civil and public service institutions of government to properly function as an essential machinery of the state which task is in the delivery of public services. Secondly, in most developing countries especial Nigeria, the covid-19 pandemic revealed the vulnerability of most public institution of government as susceptible to corruption and other corrupt practices. The pandemic uncovered several cases of corruption of public servants and institutions where they mismanaged, diverted and misappropriated funds that were supposed to meet the needs of the citizens for personal enrichment. It further highlighted the fact that, the pandemic created new vistas for financial misappropriation.

Accordingly, the UN/DESA (2020), noted that:

> The abrupt and brutal disruption by the Covid-19 pandemic has thrown the public service and public servants into a frenzy, forcing them to not only deal with fighting its spread but trying to manage its accompanying socioeconomic fallout. By threatening disruption of public service delivery, the Covid-19 pandemic touched a cardinal principle of public service, that of continuity.

In many countries, the need to tackle the harm on governance and service delivery by the pandemic made several governments and their institutions to respond to the pandemic by devising new ways and strategies to ensure proper functioning. This made public servants in most developed countries through their public administrative systems to provide a quick adaptative mechanism and re-adjustment strategies as a way of meeting the demand of service delivery and consequently minimizing the negative impact of the covid-19 crisis on the citizens and country at large.

In this manner, many countries especially the developed countries resulted in adopted strategies that are ICT compliant in education, health, and administrative tasks among others. In education, many schools, including colleges and universities, were adopting digitalized form of learning in which online platform and e-learning materials were used to teach and deliver lectures to students. In the area of health, the adoption of telemedicine or e-health or telehealth – that is the utilization of ICT platforms and tools to treat sick patients due to the disruption that the health sector was facing in deploying all its resources in responding to the pandemic. Another dimension was in the dispensation of judicial functions. For instance, marriage was carried out for couples in the courts through video conferencing.

In Nigeria, like in elsewhere, the covid-19 pandemic did not spare the country. Beyond the rupturing of the economy, it handicaps the public institutions as it overwhelms them due to their

lack of necessary infrastructure and the paucity of ICT was not exempted. To further highlight the destructive nature of the covid-19 pandemic on the entire system is in the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic beyond crippling the economy of the country – its impacted was felts in the scarcity that it created – financial scarcity that made the country porous to further infrastructural collapse and breakdown in responding to the needs of the citizens. Again, it is a truism that no country develops beyond the capacity of its economy, also corroborates the fact that the pandemic puts so many socio-economic areas at risk of survival which exacerbated the citizens need for a more responsive government and the government deploying efficient tools and means in meeting these needs.

Consequently, the effect of the pandemic created conditions that suffocated business activities, economic (transportation) and personal travels, food production and agriculture, industrial production due to the short down of production in a bid to contained the virus. The effect of all this is not just limited to the economy, rather it extends to the curtailing, dampening of the capacity of governments. In Nigeria, the most disastrous strain was evident in the oil economy that sustains the nation. In this vein, it created difficulty for many governmental and non-governmental agencies found it difficult to perform their responsibility towards service delivery. The implication of al this ICT is that with the lack of resources, it becomes difficult for the government deploy ICT tools to respond to the needs of citizens that remains a priority even during crisis – unlike the developed counterparts in other parts were the culture of ICT use is well established.

Covid-19 and the effectiveness of ICT in transforming the Public service delivery system in Nigeria: challenges and prospects

ICT stands as a major deterministic factor in today's globalized world due to its capacity in transforming society, its social system as well as structural changes undergoing in society and organizational arrangements, processes and outcomes of most institutions both private and public, (Castells, 2000). Information Communication Technologies, involves several digitalized tools and systems such internet, platforms, networks, phones, apps, and databases, as well as underlying infrastructure, that play pivotal role both in shaping the existing social order, structures and outcomes both in times of national progress (economic or developmental) and conflict/crisis particularly during this time of global pandemic known as covid-19. Hence, the impact and importance of ICT and its usage is multidimensional and goes "beyond identifying, tracing, understanding, managing, treating, and perceiving pandemics", (Wilson & Jumbert, 2018). More importantly, ICT offers the world huge opportunity in responding to the coronavirus crisis with the necessary tools and resources especially in maintaining a social stability during a pandemic/crisis.

Specifically, ICT is instrumental and can offer us – citizens and government the opportunity to provide and receive health care services to the people whilst strengthening government's capacity during the coronavirus health pandemic and after the health crisis. As such, it can be argued that ICT play essential roles in the way service delivery can be met – especially health by facilitating, enhancing and supporting the processes, systems that enable safe relief and treatment of citizens that are affected by the virus, (Columbia University Center for Sustainable Development, 2021). To add, the effectiveness of ICT in revolutionizing the service delivery

service is strongly displaced as it has the capacity to strengthen the ways service delivery can and will be offered in the future. As with the pandemic:

> it has shown itself to be essential both to bolstering long-term resiliency against future pandemics and to resolving the secondary challenges that emerge within a socially distanced environment. However, involving ICT in in pandemic relief and prevention carries with it its own set of challenges involving transparency, accountability, and privacy. Governments which apply ICT must ensure that far-reaching crisis measures do not become permanently entrenched in society, and that measures which are taken are deemed fair, proportional and just, (UNDP Central Europe and Asia 2020).

As evident, the use of ICT is a double-edged sword for developing and developed nations in the provision of service delivery. ICT highlights the existence of capacity; it offers nations effective resources for adaptation and well as tackling challenged posed to the public institution in providing public services. Essentially, as evidenced during the covid-19 global health crisis, where the needed to provide health care, education and other relevant public service needs – ICT offered the quickest, easiest adaptability system in responding to the task of governance at hand. Hence, for developed countries it presented opportunity and in developing countries such as Nigeria it stood as a challenge – worse still added to the crisis that the health crisis created.

According to Xie, et al. (2020), they argue that Information communication technology in service delivery does not only bring the positives alone rather it sometime come as a blend of the positive and negative. They noted that, one challenge that ICT brings to fore is the crisis of information. The need to balance the right form of information in a transparent way that ensures accountability can sometime be burdensome (Xie et al., 2020). As in other cases, there is also the crisis of insufficient information or the availability of unreliable information for decision making by decision makers. Also, despite the strain that ICT may bring to service delivery, overall, it ensures that there are faster responses from the government to the people and society in a way that supports large-scale participation and mass collaborations across local, state and national level of government.

Gap in ICT Infrastructure and the Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

The importance of ICT in responding to service delivery needs in societies – both developed and developing cannot be overemphasized. Also, information and communication technology were effective in charting new pathways in navigating the hurdles of a global pandemic as shown in how most developed nations were able to respond to the health crisis with ICT in providing education, health care, security, welfare and other essential services for her citizens. Unlike Nigeria and most other developing countries it was difficult to go digital due to paucity and sometimes the total absence of ICT technologies in the public sector.

Corroborating the above, the ICT deficiency in the country reflect more of a history of not incorporating technological advancement in the public sector in Nigeria as seen elsewhere in most developed countries. Hence, Maikomo, Targema, and Obun-Andy, (2021) compared the

state of ICT presence in developed societies and the impact this had on the easy incorporation and switch into a digitalized public system for such societies. They noted that:

> To developed societies that had already incorporated digital life substantially into their daily routines prior to the pandemic, the digital switchover was not an issue, and hence, it took them no time at all to adjust to the new normal in both public and private spheres. However, the situation in developing societies grappling with the challenge of serious technological backwardness was entirely different, as the digital switchover presented new challenges that were hinged on underlying technological deficits, facilitated by poor infrastructural development that could have supported a robust digital switchover, (Maikomo, Targema, & Obun-Andy, 2021).

Adopting ICT by developed countries, they were able to address some of the socio-economic effect of the on how both public and private sector keep work especially in the area of service delivery going on (Venkatesh, 2020), hence, rather than the shutdown service delivery as a result of limiting work – using ICT working from home became the new normal in order to ensure remain unaltered, (Carroll & Conboy, 2020). Evidently, Nigeria remained stuck to their traditional person-to-person system of service delivery amidst the call of government to limit the spread of the pandemic through social distancing. Therefore, what should have been done through the effective deployment of ICT became herculean due to the lack of ICT infrastructure in the country.

Graphically painting the grim condition of ICT deficiency in Nigeria in the Covid-19 pandemic era, was the argument of Ozili (2020) that holds that the utilization of ICT have revolutionized several countries social, political and economic condition and have directed them in the path of developed. In this regard, the level of socio-economic growth that these nations enjoy is traceable to the advancements made in information, communication technologies, (Ozili, 2020). Conversely, the trajectory of Nigeria—like many other developing countries—only shows how the country is lagging in adequately utilizing the potentials of ICT for their overall socioeconomic transformation and revolution. Therefore, the period of the COVID-19 health pandemic worsened the outcomes of the economy and significantly public service delivery as it was heavily reliant on face-to-face interactive system in meeting the needs of the citizens.

Ozili (2020) stresses that in order to have surmounted this negative condition. Nigeria through the process of public service digitalization is/was expected to ensure that it adopts ICT in facilitating:

> a robust and well-developed digital economy. That would have played a major role in driving speedy recovery from the economic crisis ignited by the pandemic. Sadly, this is lacking at the moment. He argues that elsewhere, digital technology helped many businesses in developed countries to survive the effect of the pandemic. This scenario brings to the fore, the imperatives of a robust digital economy that could facilitate a more dynamic business environment, (Ozili, 2020).

Furthermore, the domestication of ICT in the Nigerian public service delivery space has been a major challenge since its adoption in 2005 by president Olusengun Obasanjo in Nigeria. What

should have been a system geared towards the transformation of the public sector since its supposed introduction has suffered the lack of political will and the country's tight hold of the traditional bureaucratic process of system delivery that allows for slow, corrupt and inefficient service delivery system. As such, in Nigeria there is hardly a process of service delivery that is duly free from the bottleneck, traditional, inflexible person-to-person system.

Evidently, the shutdown of most government institutions from physical contact in order to strengthen social distancing in preventing the spread of the pandemic only resulted in the people been cut off from the process of governance. More so, while the country's western or developed countries counterpart has access to quality and uninterrupted education, in Nigeria education and the educational system was on shutdown due to the lack of the relevant ICT infrastructure in most public schools to transition into e-learning. Revealing that, the gap in ICT in the country further alienates the people to which governance is supposed to satisfy their needs.

Another area where the ICT infrastructural gap was also evident was in the delivery of justice. The closure of courts from the citizen resulted in several delay of justice, postponement of judgement and the delay of businesses – in cases where official documents are needed to be signed. On the other hand, most western countries adopted the use of video conferencing an effective ICT system to ensure that they continuously respond to the service need of the public. Therefore, given this, the covid-19 pandemic did not only reveal the gap in traditional bureaucratic public service delivery system it further strengthens the necessity of ICT adoption and utilization in all of the public service institutions in the country.

Conclusion

The foregoing argument has established the fact that ICT and its corresponding technologies are effective in revolutionizing the outcome and manner public service delivery is done in the country. It highlights that embedded in ICT is the transformative capacity the change the traditional, slow, inefficient and time consume system of system delivery that is prevalent in almost all public institution in Nigeria. What is further striking is the fact that, with the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic and the consequent shutdown of most public institutions, service delivery was seriously affected in the country, whilst it was not so in other developed country where the use of digitalized tools and processes changed the person-to-person system. against this, that we argue that the covid-19 pandemic further reveals the necessity for Nigeria to adopt ICT in all of it public agencies to meet the needs of the citizens as that is the basis of governance. Also, the pandemic highlighted the fact that there exists an ICT gap in the country and it is one that seriously needs to be addressed. Given that, the ICT gap in the public sector only handicap the country and worsen the country's chances at developing as businesses, education, health and other essential areas that should have contributed to the growth of the economy despite the pandemic were all shut down.

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