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## INNOVATIONS IN COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE: THE ROLE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS

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### ABSTRACT

The paper examined the role of public administrators in innovations in collaborative governance. The study used secondary method of data collection, which relies on consulting text books, academic journal articles, government documents and circulars, internet sources, and personal observation. The various concepts central to the work (collaborative governance and innovation) were conceptualized. Also, the imperatives of innovations in collaborative governance were explored. An examination of literature reveal that public administrators play tremendous roles in innovative collaborative governance, such as: the selection of teams of innovators, which would determine who to partner with, in a collaborative governance arrangement; clarifying the distinctive roles of the various collaborative actors; enhancing interactions and exchange between participants in collaborative governance; ensuring political support for the search for innovative solutions in a collaborative governance initiatives; directing the collective search for innovative solutions; holding meetings with, and coordinating various collaborative actors; creating a common platform of understanding and mutual cooperation among collaborative partners; ensuring that conflicts are collectively resolved among collaborative partners; creating a sense of urgency that stimulate initiation and sustenance of collaborative governance.

**Keywords:** Collaborative governance, innovation, partnership, public administrator.

### INTRODUCTION

There have been economic and social crises across the globe in recent times, which have threatened the continued existence and social cohesion of several nation-states. These challenges have become insurmountable by traditional institutions of the state represented by government acting as a single actor. Therefore, proffering solution to the aforementioned challenges and similar ones requires negotiations and partnerships between multiple governmental and non-governmental actors (Temmerman et al., 2021). The decision making process of states has been based on public agencies and popular participation by the citizenry (Cosseta & Palumbo, 2014). However, increased societal challenges have made innovative approaches and new governance models and techniques that have the capacity to tap from external sources of knowledge indispensable (Temmerman et al., 2021; Chen, 2017; Wagner & Wilhelmer, 2017).

Societies across are experiencing revolution in telecommunication media through innovations in electronic communication networks which are influenced by advances in science and technology. This telecommunication revolution greatly impact democratic processes across globe; has increased citizens' participation consciousness and has led to dynamic structural transformation of existing governmental paradigm.

The new public management, though far from being able to effectively revolutionize traditional public administration to the level of treating citizens as customers as experienced in the core private sector enterprises, has at least successfully brought about delegation of power in administrative processes, which invariably is a pointer to the goal of collaborative governance (Yao & Ye, 2020). The need for effective delegation of administrative power for effective service delivery calls for innovations in collaborative governance in order to successfully achieve such objective.

Collaborative governance refers to the phenomenon in which various social structures act jointly to address common challenges, achieve goals of social governance, and unleash the benefits of collaborative governance through complementary assistance, cooperation, and integration. First, the actors in collaborative governance are diverse; consisting citizens and organizations. Second, governance entails a process of continuity. Also, the world is dynamic and reforms in public governance are catalyzed by dynamic activities in the social environments. There is no constant public governance model, the constantly changing nature of human society is the determinant of innovations in collaborative governance (Jun & Jun, 2022).

Collaborative governance is based on participation of numerous agencies. Diverse social needs of society have made collaborative governance a necessity. The need to promote modernization of governing capacities of states and governing systems calls into existence the need for innovative collaborative governance (Jun & Jun, 2022). Collaborative governance guarantees full representation of the desires and aspirations of citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) in public policy formulation and implementation (Bason, 2010).

Public service innovation is basically driven by public managers and their employees (FTF, 2013, as cited in Sorensen & Torfing, 2015). “National campaign organizations such as MindLab, Nesta and Government Innovators Network recommend collaboration as a strategy for enhancing public innovation” (Sorensen & Torfing, 2015). There has not been any formidable organizational framework aimed at institutionalizing collaborative governance arrangement. In order to reap the gains of innovation in collaborative governance, it is expedient to rethink the place of public sector leaders and managers in innovative collaborative governance, as well as restructuring the entire framework of public governance (Sorensen & Torfing, 2015).

Jun and Jun (2020) noted that in collaborative governance, the government is restricted to formulation of guidelines and policies for effective public governance, while the specific social issues are the exclusive preserve of specialized social agencies, which are parts of the independent structures in the society. This view situates collaborative governance is a requirement for good governance and sustainable development, where government is confined to the role of steering instead of rowing; while the rowing function is assigned to what has recently been described in public administration literatures as third-party government. Jun and Jun (2022) observed that the participation in public governance brought about by collaborative governance can forestall corruption in governance and enhance democratization and political transparency.

It is true that government does not have the overall capacity to effectively discharge all societal functions. Just like every other institutions, it has its own strength and weaknesses. So, an attempt by government to solve every societal problems irrespective of its strength and capabilities will be inimical to effective governance and sustainable development. Thus, it becomes necessary for government to collaborate with other agencies based on the specialty and expertise of its personnel to provide efficient and effective public service (Jun & Jun, 2022).

Several theoretical studies pioneered the expression, “collaborative public sector innovation” (Hartley et al., 2013; Sørensen & Torfing, 2017). Recently Clausen et al. (2020) revealed a positive impact of collaborative governance on innovation. Hartley et al. (2013) notes that innovations in collaborative governance involves four distinct processes: co-initiation, co-development, co-implementation, and co-

diffusion. Cinar et al. (2022) observe that most studies have not been able to capture the role of individual citizens in collaborative governance. This is despite the significance of citizens' participation in governance and democratic processes.

Sijing (2022) identified traditional barriers as a foremost obstacle to innovations in collaborative governance. Obstacle to innovations in collaborative governance is referred to as innovation resistance (Sijing, 2022). Vedeld et al. (2021) argue that innovation resistance in collaborative governance leads to lack of achievement of set goals in collaborative governance arrangement. The idea of overcoming innovation resistance calls for a better equipped and well organized bureaucracy and seasoned technocratic public administrators, equipped with capacity to stimulate collaborative governance geared towards public service innovations.

This paper is aimed at filling this gap of resistance to innovative collaborative governance through advocating various policy options and approaches to be adopted by public administrators in order to effectively stimulate and sustain effective collaborative governance, especially, between governmental actors and non-state actors with the view to achieve innovations in public service delivery.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Concept of Collaborative Governance

The term "collaborative governance" is derived from the concept "synergetics", propounded German Physicist, Hermann Haken (Sun, 1989, as cited in Jun & Jun, 2020). Synergetics states that when a system is in a chaotic state, the subcomponents or subunits that comprise the system will assume a qualitative change at a certain stage which will transform the system from a chaotic state to a current stable state (Sun, 1989, as cited in Jun & Jun, 2020).

Collaborative governance is a governing framework involving one or more governmental agencies and non-state actors in a joint decision-making process characterized as consensus-orientation, formal and deliberate construction, geared towards the implementation of public policy or the management of public programmes or projects (Ansell & Gash, 2007). Ansell and Gash (2007) advanced preconditions for the engagement in collaborative governance: the collaboration actors include non-governmental actors; collaborative governance is initiated by the government agencies; there is direct involvement of collaborating partners in decision-making, and their roles goes beyond mere consultation; the collaborative governance arrangement is conducted in a formal setting; the decision-making approach in collaborative governance is based on consensus; the end-result of collaborative governance is the formulation and management of public policy.

Thus, Siwach and Chawla (2015) argue that collaborative governance is a type of governance in which public and private actors work collectively in distinctive ways, using particular processes, to establish laws and rule for the provision of public goods. Similarly, Connick and Innes (2003, as cited in Siwach & Chawla, 2015) view collaborative governance "as including representatives of all relevant interests of public and private sectors.

### Actors in collaborative governance

Intergovernmental collaboration is one commonly identified collaboration in public governance (Cinar et al., 2022). Other scholars in separate empirical studies attest to this claim (Walker, 2006; Boris, 2014). Walker (2006) found that collaboration between public administrative agencies stimulates innovations in public sector activities. Another collaboration partners in public governance observed by scholars is public-private collaboration, commonly referred to as public-private partnership (PPP) (Cinar et al., 2022), which Borins (2014) observed to have increased from 28% to 54% in recent times. Other studies that are in agreement with this view of collaboration are: (Osborne & Brown, 2011; Windrum & Koch, 2008; Gallouj Rubalcaba & Windrum, 2013).

Other actors that have been identified to be very active and formidable in achieving innovations in collaborative governance are citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) (Cinar et al., 2022). From the above literatures, it can be deduced that collaboration results from partnership between public agencies, public and private agencies, and public agencies and the citizens, who are in most cases represented by the civil society organizations (CSOs).

Bovaird and Loeffler (2016), Hartley et al. (2013) and Sorensen and Torfing (2011) highlight the positive roles of citizens in ensuring innovation in public governance. Universities have also been identified as significant partners in collaborative governance (Ciner et al, 2022; Demircioglu & Audretsch, 2019). Ongaro and Kickert (2019) note that international organizations, such as Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU), World Bank, European Union, United Nations, and so on, are also actors of collaborative governance aimed at public service innovations.

### **Concept of Innovation**

Innovation does not always imply creating or achieving something entirely new' it sometimes involve adding value to what already exist (Crossan & Apaydin, 2009). A result achieved or a goal attained need to make a positive contribution to an existing process in order to be described as an innovation (De Vries et al., 2015). When added value to an existing process leads to the realization of the goal of the enterprise, innovation is said to have occurred (Knowledge & Innovation Agenda, 2019, cited in Kirk, Meijerink & Avoyan, 2021).

Torfing (2019) views innovation as the conception and implementation of new ideas in a way that challenges existing order, traditional methods and practices that have long been established. Innovation is a broad term that encompasses newness of an outcome; value addition of an outcome with a positive contribution to the system; and a paradigm shift from the status quo or established order (Hartley, 2015). Therefore, any entity that exhibits these aforementioned variables is said to have achieved innovation.

The above description of innovation presents certain unique attributes that can further buttress our comprehension of innovations. Such attributes include: innovation is an idea that is basically new in areas of implementation, and which may not be new to somewhere else. Sturgess (2015) referred to this phenomenon as frugal innovation, that is innovation that is not endogenous or internally driven, but that, which is copied from somewhere and applied to solve problems somewhere else. It is a phenomenon that is implementable; it involves a change from established mode of operation; it does not connote immediate success, it could actually exhibit immediate failure, in order words, it could be based on the principle of delayed gratification.

### **Innovation Process Stages and Collaboration**

Previous studies have established distinct innovation stages for collaboration (Cinar, et al., 2022). Hartley (2016) and Hartley et al. (2013) identify four strategic stages of innovative collaborative governance: initiation, design, implementation, and diffusion. Collaboration can be carried out in each of this stages between a government and non-governmental actors (Torfing, 2016; Hartley, 2016; Borins, 2014). Bason (2010) argue that collaborative actors could co-design strategies of policy implementation with the governmental authority.

According to Hartley (2016), the diffusion stage refers to benefits derived from collaborative governance arrangement; these benefits may be in the form of public service innovations that have the tendency to transcend national boundaries, albeit, with the permission of the country of origin of the collaboration (Borins, 2014). Other studies have shown that the involvement of non-governmental actors in collaborative governance vary across the various innovation stages for collaboration, with collaboration with non-state actors more at the implementation stage than at the initiation and design stages (Sorensen & Torfing, 2018; Voorberg et al., 2015).

However, we argue that the crux of collaborative governance is joint initiation and design of public programmes. The effectiveness of implementation of a public policy is partly due to success at the initiation and formulation stages of the policy. So, a collaboration arrangement that excludes other collaborating actors from the policy initiation and design stages in a collaborative governance arrangement is dysfunctional.

### **Collaborative Governance and Public Service Innovation**

Collaborative governance speed up innovation in public service organizations (Torfing et al., 2020; Verweji et al., 2019; Roberts, 2000). Verweji et al. (2019) observed that a public-private partnership initiatives, which is a form of collaborative governance stimulates creativity and innovation in public service delivery. This indicates that there is a positive relationship between collaborative governance and innovation in organizations involved in collaborative arrangement.

Literature evidence of positive relationship between collaboration and public service innovation (Torugsa & Audretsch, 2019; Demircioglu & Audretsch, 2019). Thus, collaborative governance serves as an impetus to innovations in the public service. It follows therefore, that collaborative governance is a necessary condition for public service innovation. However, literature is silent on specific aspect of collaboration that stimulate innovation, such as partnering with other public or private sectors, or the particular type of private sector partnership that enhance public service innovation.

The foregoing raise the issue of a governance mechanism for governing multi-actor public service innovation; as well as an organized framework to harmonize actions and activities of various actors involved in collaborative governance (Cinar et al., 2022). Provan and Kenis (2008) proposed the centralized and decentralized governance approaches, as well as an extremely centralized arrangement with inherent administrative mechanism to ensure balance of power amongst the collaborative partners. Other scholars proposed two set of parallel institutional arrangement in governing various actors in collaborative governance. These are the bottom-up approach and the top-down governance approach (Sorensen & Torfing, 2017; Vento, 2020). Vento (2020) based on experience from Finland suggests that the top-down approach to be more preferable than bottom-up perspective in collaborative governance.

### **Collaboration across the Innovation Process**

Cinar et al. (2022) reports that co-design is more frequently than co-implementation and co-diffusion, while co-initiation is not a common practice in collaborative governance. On co-initiation, Cinar et al. (2022) found that “co-initiation occur in only a few cases”, and “co-initiation activities were with other public service organizations. In other words, co-initiation is a scarce collaborative governance practice. Lenferink et al. (2014) argue that early private sector involvement in public policy or programme formulation guarantees better success of such policies and programmes.

In terms of co-design, Cinar et al. (2022) revealed that “co-design is the most common collaborative governance practice. Cinar et al. (2022) reported citizens and NGOs are frequent actor at this level of collaborative governance. However, co-initiation is more common than co-design in some countries. This may be due to lower level of political participation of citizens by comparison. Citizens are likely to be more involved in both co-initiation and co-design stages in countries where citizens’ political participation is high.

For co-implementation Cinar et al. (2022) suggests that, within the co-implementation stage, there is high level of collaboration with other public service organizations, alongside a decrease with citizens and enterprise actors (Cinar et al., 2022). The irony of this, is the high level of collaboration with PSOs. If there were to be a collaboration arrangement, the implementation stage should be the primary focus, but the initiation and programme formulation stage should be of priority because whatever is got right at this stage is right. The implementation stage is where badly conceived plans becomes straightened or rectified. Any

collaborative arrangement whether with private or public service organizations, that emphasize co-implementation more than co-initiation and co-design lack sincerity, and such an initiative is just a veneer collaboration or an outright façade.

In co-diffusion, Borins (2014) differentiated between domestic and international co-diffusion. Cinar et al. (2022) found that co-diffusion, which Hartley (2016) described as the secret weapons of public sector is under exploited in collaborative governance arrangements.

### **Imperatives of Innovations in Collaborative Governance**

Collaborative governance as stated earlier refers to agents of government and non-governmental or private sectors acting collectively to administer geopolitical entities, such as cities and countries (Fernando, 2019). Inadequacies of legal framework in any societies leads to diversity of social problems. Collaborative governance is aimed at strengthening legal frameworks that form the foundation of a peaceful and prosperous society (Gostin et al., 2019). Collaborative governance is synergetic in nature, it assists in goal achievement by two or more entities working collectively (Ma et al., 2018). Innovative methods is helpful in discovering novel phenomena and processes that are helpful in public policy implementation.

The implementation of public policies by government or a collaborative governance arrangement in a fair, transparent and effective manner is usually very difficult. Innovations in collaborative governance present a novel approach to solving complex social problems (Cheng et al., 2022, as cited in Sijing, 2022). Collaborative governance demystifies social complexities associated with government and non-governmental sectors (Hong & Ryu, 2019).

Cronin et al. (2022, as cited in Sijing, 2022) holds that public policy implementation processes executed by multiple actors enable the achievement of innovations. Innovative collaborative governance make resources available and provide proper channels of resources allocation for meaningful public ventures. The generation of resources and their deployment to public sector activities is a formidable challenge to governments (Jun & Jun, 2022). Collaborative governance contribute to environmental preservation and sustainability (Singh et al., 2020; Chuang & Huang, 2018). Thus, collaborative governance facilitate resources generation, deployment or allocation, and environmental maintenance.

Innovations in collaborative governance give rise to social innovations in the form of public service that is capable of producing social value that transcends the capacity of existing governance structures (Adams & Hess, 2010). Collaborative governance has been identified as a democratic process (Pereira et al., 2017) that entail collective actions and activities of several policy actors from diverse point of views and orientation (Ziegler, 2017). It is this dimension of the interaction between actors in governance that innovation emerge; as it de-emphasizes the one way single governmental actor efforts aimed at solving social problems (Sorensen & Torfing, 2013).

### **Rethinking the Roles of Public Administrators in Innovative Collaborative Governance**

Public administrators understand that collaborative governance is a dynamic transformative state from existing top-down approach. This could be facilitated if governmental actors move from the role of “promoter” of initiatives to the role of “enabler” or “partner”, sharing leadership and having a distinct function in the collaboration process (Kronsell & Mukhtar-Landaren, 2008). Torfing (2019) argue that communication, organizational structure and good leadership are prime necessities in the achievement of innovation in organizations.

Crossby et al. (2017) opined that strategic leadership is a prerequisite to trust building and achieving complementary benefits. Also, Douglas et al. (2020) noted that the availability of incentives for collaborating actors serves as an impetus for effective collaboration. In the light of the above, the incentives

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needed for the realization of collaborative governance can be better provided by public administrators who are experts in matters of motivation and incentives creation in organizations.

The achievement of innovative collaborative governance is dependent on the cultivation of the right kind of public leaders and managers (Osborne, 2006). The restricted orientation and emphasis on resource utilization and public service performance is a disservice to innovative collaborative governance (Sorensen & Torfing, 2015). Leadership and management of public sector innovation is based on capacity of public administrators to manage disruptive change (Sorensen & Torfing, 2015). Igwe and Ateke (2019) states that management of disruptive change to inform quality public service delivery requires people-oriented servant leadership. It goes beyond transactional or transformational leadership (Parry & Bryman, 2006).

Transactional and transformational leadership approaches are important to the implementation of predetermined policies within public bureaucracy, but they are insufficient in terms of achieving public service goals and practices, and the initiation of new practices and novel design that transcends existing orders, as well as, achieving public service innovation. Thus, the facilitation of innovations in collaborative governance is based on availability of adaptive and 'pragmatic' leadership in the public sector (Sorensen & Torfing, 2015).

Adaptive leadership is centered on the process of integrating and domesticating innovation output in an organization; or institutionalizing the output of innovation within the public bureaucracy (Heifetz et al., 2009). Pragmatic leadership on the other hand, is concerned with cultural and structural transformation of an organization leading to new approaches and paradigm shift, in order to present more formidable approaches to solving problems (Argyris & Schon, 1978, as cited in Sorensen, 2015).

In order to ensure an innovative collaborative governance, public administrators have to embark on a commitment to ensure legitimacy in collaborative process; a commitment to meaningful stakeholders' inclusion; a commitment to stimulate effective participation of stakeholders in the collaborative arrangement (Siwach & Chawla, 2015). A commitment to change from existing order is another paramount role of public administrators in collaborative governance. Others include: a commitment to flexible leadership and shared authority; a commitment to authentic face-to-face dialogue; and a commitment to culture of learning and the identification of common ground (Siwach & Chawla, 2015).

Several roles of public administrators in the achievement of innovative collaborative governance have been identified by Sorensen and Torfing (2015). Firstly, public administrator have the responsibility to select teams of innovators, which would determine who to partner with in a collaborative arrangement; who would be made up of people and organizations with innovation assets, such as acquisition of knowledge, practical experience, creative ideas, resources, formal power, and so on, and inducing them with the appropriate incentives in order to facilitate their participation in the innovation process.

Secondly, public administrators have the task of clarifying the distinctive roles of the various collaborative actors and designing a frameworks to determine each participant's role in the collaborative arrangement. Thirdly, they have to enhance interaction and exchange between participants in collaborative governance by re-emphasizing the need for their mutual dependence on each other's resources. Fourthly, public administrators are saddled with the responsibility of ensuring political support for the search for innovative solutions and also upheld the integrity of the collaborative arrangement.

Fifthly, public administrators are responsible for piloting the collective search for innovative solutions and it is his responsibility to direct and manage the goals and expectations of the collaborating actors; sixthly, it is the duty of public administrators to hold effective meetings with the various collaborative actors, facilitating unhindered communication and activating, as well as motivating those actors who are meeting up to expectation in terms of making contribution to the collaborative initiatives.

Seventhly, public administrators have the responsibility to facilitate trust between actors through the provision of informal social interaction, and creating a common rules and procedures for interaction of collaborative actors and stimulating and entrenching a process of trust-creation through the publicity of trust exhibited by others. Eighthly, they must create a common platform of understanding through a common knowledge base derived from knowledge exchange between and amongst actors and, also, through a collective fact finding missions, as well as developing a common language predicated on collective agreement of key terms and ideas.

Other roles of public administrators in the achievement of innovative collaborative governance include ensuring that the conflicts are constructively resolved, and prevented from being destructive, as well as making sure that irresolvable conflicts as perceived as “joint puzzles rather than allowing them to become road blocks; eliminating barriers to the collaboration arrangement through securing the supports of the chief executive of participating agencies and deciding in advance how the cost and benefits of the innovative solutions would be distributed among collaborative actors; and creating a sense of urgency that would trigger collaborative governance through giving an impression of a situation that deserves an immediate and radical change occasioned by some precarious circumstances or by making reference to opportunity that provides the privilege of altering an existing organizational order.

Public administrators are also expected to assist both old and new actors in the collaborative arrangement to change their orientation through the injection of new and invigorating knowledge; to facilitate the management and negotiation of the risks associated with innovative solutions and coordinate implementation processes to enhance synergy and avoid overlap” (Sorensen & Torfing, 2015); and to ensure that participating actors assume the role of ambassadors’ and use their strong and weak ties to diffuse explicit and tacit knowledge about the innovation (Sorensen & Torfing, 2015).

The deliberate attempt of public leaders and managers to convene relevant actors, facilitate collaboration and co-creation and catalyze the development and realization of innovative ideas need to be supplemented with persistent attempts to build a strong innovation culture in public organizations (Dobni, 2008, as cited in Sorensen & Torfing, 2015). Creating an innovation culture “involves attempts to create flatter and more flexible organizations with clear objectives and strong leadership to breach administrative silos and create borderless organizations with flexible and permeable boundaries. This calls for is a cultural revolution in the public sector that requires a complete rethinking of the way the public sector is organized, governed and led in terms of its relation to society (Sorensen & Torfing, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

Collaborative governance is an innovative governance model that hold the promise to stimulate innovations in public service delivery. It is characterized by formal and deliberate arrangements geared towards implementation of public policy or management of public programmes or projects. This paper observes that collaborative governance is a stimulant of innovations in public service delivery. The paper identified intergovernmental collaboration, public-private collaboration, and collaboration between governmental agencies as different forms of collaborative governance. Other forms of collaborative governance arrangement identified are collaboration with citizens and civil society organizations; and collaboration with universities.

The paper also identified the indispensability of public administrators in collaborative governance and public service innovations. The paper identified that public administrators have salient roles in innovative collaborative governance including the selection of teams of innovators, which would determine who to partner with, in a collaborative governance arrangement; clarifying the distinctive roles of the various collaborative actors; enhancing interaction and exchange between participants in collaborative governance; ensuring political support for the search for innovative solutions in a collaborative governance initiatives;



directing the collective search for innovative solutions; holding meetings with, and coordinating various collaborative actors; creating a common platform of understanding and mutual cooperation among collaborative partners.; ensuring that conflicts are collectively resolved among collaborative partners; creating a sense of urgency that would stimulate and initiate collaborative governance.

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