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POLICY; THE PROSPECT AND GLOBAL BENCHMARK.**¹Ekpe, Denny Edet,² Isong, Oyokunyi Effiong & ³Anso, Sylvester Bassey¹Department of Public Administration Abia State University, Uturu²Department of Accountancy, Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa Campus³Dept. of Computer Engineering Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot OsuruaEmail: ¹dennyekpe@gmail.com ² isongoyokunyi@gmail.com³anso.sylvester@akwaibompoly.edu.ng

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ABSTRACT

The world has move from analog to digital era, the implementation of paperless policy initiatives within Nigeria's civil service system is a welcome development; seeking to modernize administrative processes to join the global communities as government worldwide transit from traditional paper-based systems to an era of digitalization in providing e-governance service delivery, digital document management systems, and electronic service mechanism in enhancing administration, create efficiency, transparency, and citizen service delivery. This paper examines the challenges and opportunities of transitioning from traditional paper-based systems to paperless policy and analyzes the current state of Nigeria's civil service, effort on digitization in last the past administration. The prospect, and challenges ahead in meeting international best practices considering the policy frameworks, implementation strategies, and operational outcomes as regard to public administration in Nigeria. It's opined there will significant progress in digital infrastructure development, improvements in processing times, cost reduction, and accessibility of government services when successfully implemented and further highlights innovative approaches to overcoming resource constraints, and creating inclusive digital governance frameworks, leadership commitment, Finally, Recommendations strategies for scaling digital initiatives, ensuring cyber security, and maintaining service quality during digital transitions.

Keywords: Paperless, Civil Service, Policy, Digitalization, Public, Administration**INTRODUCTION**

The Nigerian civil service is undergoing a significant digital transformation, with a directive from the Federal Government mandating all Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) to achieve full digitalization and adopt paperless workflows by December 2025. This initiative is part of the Federal Civil Service Strategy and Implementation Plan 2021–2025 (FCSSIP 25), which aims to enhance service delivery and performance management across the civil service. As of 2024, the

implementation of this policy is ongoing, with the government emphasizing the importance of digital skills among civil servants, indicating that non-computer literate individuals may not have a place in the future civil service. Nigeria's public administration, encompassing the civil service, has been undergoing a significant transformation through digitization policies aimed at improving efficiency, transparency, and service delivery. The Nigerian Civil Service, a subset of the broader public service, employs career civil servants across various ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs), with roots in colonial-era organizations established by the British.

It operates under the principles of good governance and transparency, as outlined in Section 169 of the 1999 Constitution. The Nigerian Civil Service has been plagued by inefficiency, corruption, and bureaucratic red tape for decades. In a bid to revamp the system, the Federal Government introduced the Paperless Policy, aimed at leveraging technology to enhance service delivery, transparency, and accountability. However, challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and manual processes have historically hindered effective service delivery. The advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has presented an opportunity to improved the system, and promote transparency

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

2.0 PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

The concept of Public Administration has come of age both in terms of the academic and professional attention it commands, and its usefulness to the society at large. Woodrow Wilson, a onetime president of the United States of America and one of the foundation scholars of the subject defined Public Administration as the detailed and systematic execution of public law. Every particular application of law to him is an act of administration. Willoughby (1927) in Ezeani (2005), who wrote at the time public administration was still at infancy, defined it narrowly as the functions of effectively administering the law as declared by the legislature and interpreted by the judicial organ of government. Simon (1947) defined public administration as the activities of the executive branches of National, State and local governments. For White (1966), public administration consists of "all those operations having for their purpose the fulfillment or enforcement of public policy". To Nnoli (1986), public administration is the machinery as well as the integral processes, through which the government performs its functions. Similarly, Ademolekun (1983) is of the view that the term public administration is commonly used to refer to both the activities concerned with the management of the government business and the study of these activities.

In other words, it is used in two distinct senses, as practice and as knowledge. The basis upon which public administration derives its importance is the well-being of the people. Hence over the ages, different reform approaches have been initiated and deployed in the field of public administration tailored towards improving the quality of public service delivery in Nigeria Public Service. It is important to state from the onset that the public service is a critical instrument of public administration. For instance, Ezeani (2005) defined public service as service within government departments and ministries, parastatals, police force and the armed forces. To Onah (2017) public services are all organizations that exist as part of government machinery for implementing policy decisions and delivery of services that are of value to citizens

The service in Nigeria comprises the following: the civil service often referred to as the core service consisting of line ministries and extra-ministerial agencies; the public bureaucracy, or the enlarged public service made up of the following: services of the state and national assembly's; the judiciary; the armed forces; the police and other security agencies; paramilitary services (immigration, customs, correction service, etc parastatals and agencies-including social services. Commercially-oriented agencies, educational institutions, research institutes, etc. From all

indications, the public service is the whole gamut of services and activities that are organized under government which serve the purpose of ensuring effective and efficient public administration in a given state. Certainly, as Macogonor and Okodudu (2007) in Ita & David (2018) opined, "in every nation or state, the legitimate organ for the valid public interest of the state are the bureaucracies and public service institutions". This function is performed through the implementation of government policies and programmes effectively and professionally.

Whether the citizens of a state can live happily and orderly devoid of much conflicts and confusion may be determined to a large extent by good governance exemplified by the public service to the people (Ita& David, 2018). The early systems of administration were personal, that is based on loyalty to the organization and the state. Early practices often resulted in corruption or misuse of office for personal gain, although the very idea that these are undesirable features of administration itself only derives from the traditional model (Hughes, 1998). The shortcomings of early public administration necessitated a paradigm shift to the traditional public administration. Traditional public administration often referred to as old public administration was influenced by the ideas of Marx Weber, the prevailing approach to public administration for much of the 20th century drew on a model of hierarchy and meritocracy. The watchwords were efficiency and effectiveness in the management of budgetary and human resources (Robinson, 2015). The question of accountability-the question of how administrators know that their work is consistent with the wishes of the people is answered by the accountability of administrators to democratically elected political leaders (Denhardt&Denhardt, 2000)

3.0 Prospects of the Paperless Policy in Nigeria

The Paperless Policy has several prospects in Nigeria one of which is to enhance efficiency in Civil Service Commission. The policy will significantly enhances efficiency by streamlining workflows, reducing costs, improving accessibility, and boosting productivity in Civil Service Commission. By leveraging on digital tools and automation for civil service to achieve faster, more accurate, and cost-effective operations, positioning them for long-term success in a digital-first world. The Automation of processes will not only reduce processing time, but will increase the speed of service delivery cross different Ministries, Department, and Agency of Government own organization.

This will promote Digital records reducing the risk of file loss and corruption. Digital document management systems (DMS) like Alfresco, SharePoint, or Google Workspace log can take every action on a file, including who accessed it, when, and what changes were made. if an employee edits a contract, the system records the user's identity, timestamp, and specific changes, making it easy to track the document's history; unlike paper documents, which can be altered without record, digital systems maintain version histories. Tools like Dropbox or Microsoft OneDrive that allow organizations to revert to previous versions of a document, will help the system in ensuring transparency in case of unauthorized or erroneous changes. The policy when successfully implemented proof tamper systems are used for highly sensitive records, ensuring that once a document is created, it cannot be altered without leaving a clear record.

This is particularly valuable in industries like finance or healthcare, where transparency is critical for compliance. These features will eliminate the opacity of paper-based systems, where it's difficult to determine who handled a document or whether it was altered. By providing a clear, verifiable record of all activities, digital systems will foster accountability and trust among stakeholders. Digital records are a cornerstone of a paperless policy, driving improved transparency by ensuring traceability, reducing file loss, mitigating corruption, and enhancing accessibility leveraging technologies like document management systems, cloud storage, encryption, and organizations accountability to fosters trust among stakeholders.

The Paperless Policy and Combating of Fraud in Public Service

In today's digital world and Public Service Commission, fraud has become a significant concern for Staff and civil Servant in Civil Service Commission. With the increasing complexity of financial transactions, traditional fraud prevention methods are no longer sufficient to protect against the evolving threat of transaction fraud in public offices. Real-time transaction monitoring has emerged as a powerful tool to combat fraud effectively. By constantly analyzing transactions as they happen, Civil paperless policy will enable a spot and respond to suspicious activities right away. This will help prevent potential losses and protect the integrity of operations in civil service. Real-time transaction monitoring is a proactive approach used by financial institutions and businesses to scrutinize every transaction as it happens. This process involves the continuous analysis of transactional data to identify any signs of fraud or suspicious activities. Advanced technologies like machine learning and artificial intelligence help monitor transactions in real time. These systems can quickly analyze large amounts of data. They can also find unusual patterns that may suggest fraud.

Traditional fraud prevention methods mainly relied on manual reviews and post-transaction analysis, which often resulted in delayed detection of fraudulent activities. Real-time transaction monitoring, on the other hand, allows organizations to identify potential fraud as it occurs, enabling them to take immediate action and prevent any financial losses. Let's delve deeper into how real-time transaction monitoring works. When a transaction happens, like a credit card purchase or an online transfer, the data is quickly captured. It is then sent to the monitoring system.

4.0 Global Benchmark and world civil service digitalization

The concept of a Global Benchmark for World Civil Service Digitalization and (paperless Policy) refers to frameworks or indices that evaluate and rank the digitalization efforts of civil services across countries. These benchmarks assess how effectively governments leverage digital technologies to enhance public administration, service delivery, and citizen engagement. The global benchmarks related to civil service digitalization, drawing on relevant indices and findings, with a focus on rankings and insights from available data show that Nigeria appears near the back of the pack (95 th), well behind regional peers such as Rwanda and Ghana and far below digital front-runners like Singapore and Estonia.

There are several global indices used in measuring digitalization in public administration, focusing on aspects like digital infrastructure, e-government services, data-driven governance, and citizen-centric digital transformation.

The most relevant benchmarks includes;

- (i) The InCiSE Index, developed by the Blavatnik School of Government (University of Oxford) and the Institute for Government, evaluates civil service performance across multiple indicators, including digital services. It assesses how central government civil services perform in delivering digital solutions.
- (2) The digital services component evaluates user experience, key enablers (e.g., digital identity systems), and cross-border service capabilities, often using data from the European Commission's e-Government Benchmark.
- (3) The OECD Digital Government Index (DGI) which assesses digital government maturity across 33 member countries, focusing on six dimensions: digital by design, data-driven public sector, government as a platform, open by default, user-driven, and proactiveness

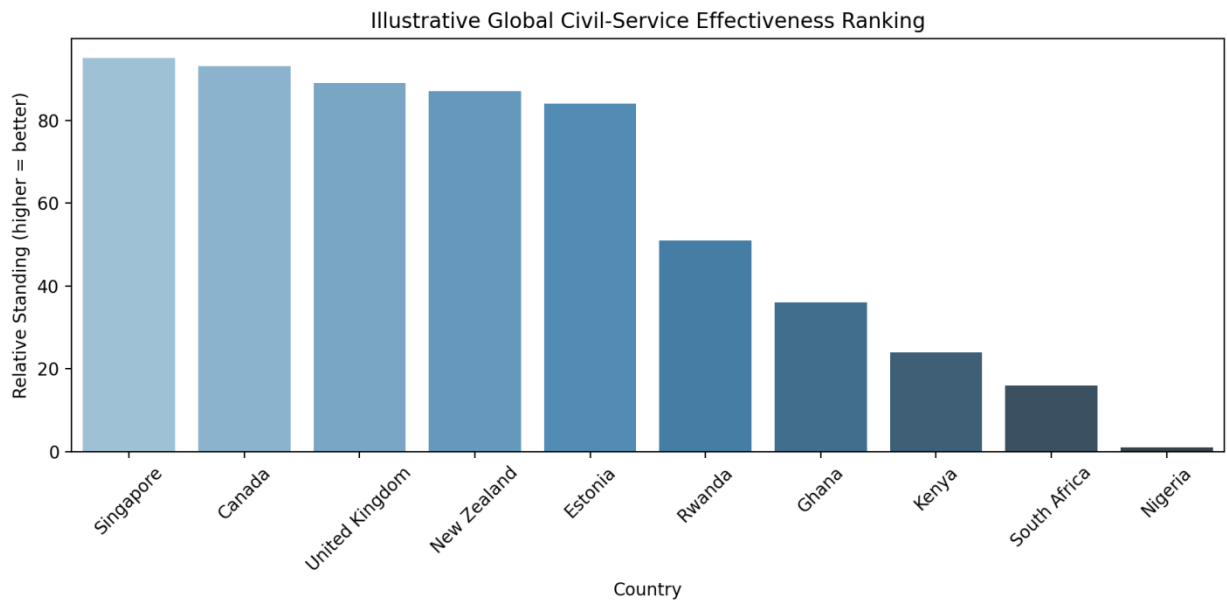


Fig 1: The table lists illustrative global civil-service effectiveness ranks (1 = best). The bar chart flips the ranks so the tallest bars indicate stronger performance.

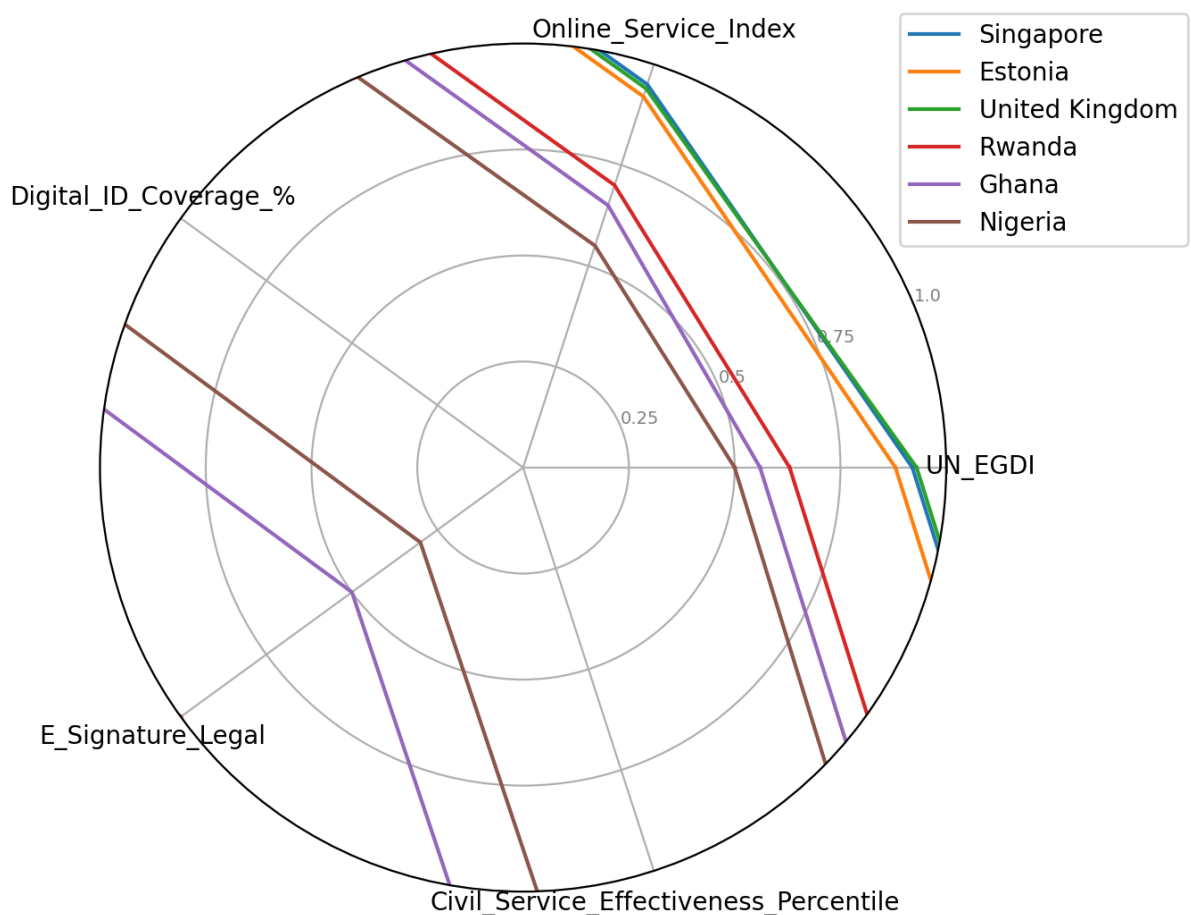


Fig 2: Global Benchmarks for normalized Civil Service Digitalization

4.1 Global index Ranking and Analysis

They are several countries that have successfully implemented the Paperless Policy, providing a benchmark for Nigeria example; The Singaporean government has implemented an e-government initiative, achieving significant efficiency gains and cost savings and the UK government introduced a digital-by-default policy, aiming to make all government services digital by 2025. Furthermore, The US government implemented the Government Paperwork Elimination Act (GPEA), promoting the use of electronic documents and transactions. The result indicated on the chart show that;

(i) Leaders (Singapore, Estonia, UK) sit very close to the outer ring (≈ 1.0) on every axis— UN e-Gov index, online-service depth, near-universal digital-ID coverage, full legal backing for e-signatures and top-quartile civil-service capability.

(ii) Rwanda and Ghana form a solid “upper-middle” cluster: respectable online-service scores and strong legal frameworks, but still catching up on coverage and institutional effectiveness

(iii) Nigeria trails on every indicator, most notably: Digital-ID coverage $\approx 47\%$ vs. $90\%+$ in peers, Partial/weak e-signature regime (0.3 scale score) and Civil-service effectiveness ≈ 30 th percentile globally

5.0 THE IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA’S PAPERLESS POLICY

There is need for foundational enablers in scaling NIN enrollment to $> 80\%$ of adults and enact an unequivocal Electronic Transactions & Signatures Act and focus on a few high-volume workflows such e-payroll, leave requests and memos to lift the “Online-Service” axis rapidly followed by creating intensive digital-skills programme with a target at least 60% of grade-level staff certified on the government e-records platform within two years and Performance dashboard annual report by publishing monthly metrics (same five axes) for every ministry to drive internal competition and transparency

5.1 Comparative Analysis of the Rankings

1. Singapore, Denmark, and Estonia consistently rank high across indices as Top Performers due to Robust broadband and mobile connectivity (e.g., Singapore’s 93% GDP coverage in ICT maturity).

2. In Digital Identity Systems; Estonia’s X-Road and Singapore’s Sing pass enable seamless service delivery with Strong government commitment to AI, cyber security, and e-participation

3. The UK and Australia show strengths in overall civil service effectiveness but lag in digital service delivery. The UK’s lower InCiSE digital ranking contrasts with its high OECD DGI score, suggesting uneven progress are Middle Performers as show in the chart.

4. The US, despite leading in 2023 WDCR, faces challenges from geopolitical tensions and ecosystem fragmentation. Developing nations often struggle with connectivity and digital skills gaps

5.2 Major aspect on The Paperless Policy in Nigeria Civil Service

The Federal Government of Nigeria has prioritized digitization as a cornerstone of civil service reform, primarily through the Federal Civil Service Strategy and Implementation Plan 2021–2025 (FCSSIP25). This policy aims to achieve full digitization of civil service operations by the end of 2025, aligning with global standards and the Renewed Hope Agenda. The Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, Dr. Folasade Yemi-Esan, has emphasized that digitization is critical

for reducing governance costs, enhancing efficiency, and improving accountability. Key aspects of the policy include:

1. *Digital Work Processes*: The Office of the Head of the Civil Service (OHCSF) has transitioned to digital workflows, with personal and policy files scanned and stored digitally. Official correspondence, such as memos and circulars, is now processed electronically via the Enterprise Content Management (ECM) system. (Deborah Tolu-Kolawole, 2025)
2. *Government Email Initiative*: The policy has expanded access to government email services, with slots increasing from 10,000 in 2009 to 100,000 by 2023, facilitated by Galaxy Backbone (GBB). This supports seamless communication and data management across MDAs.
3. *E-Governance and Service Delivery*: The adoption of e-governance tools, such as the Government Service Portal and platforms like Remita, has streamlined processes like payment systems and service delivery. E-governance enhances time efficiency, reduces bureaucratic delays, and improves citizen access to services.
4. *Digital Infrastructure and Skills*: The policy emphasizes infrastructure development, including broadband networks and data centers, alongside capacity-building programs to up skill civil servants in digital literacy. Partnerships with international organizations like Huawei, JICA, and the EU support these efforts through training and funding.
5. *Legal and Policy Framework*: Legislative amendments, such as the Notaries Public Act (2023) and Evidence (Amendment) Act 2023, have enabled the use of electronic records and digital notarization, supporting broader digitization goals.

5.3 Paperless Policy, Progress and Achievements

- Implementation Stages*: As of 2023, significant progress has been made, with MDAs at various stages of digitization. The OHCSF has fully digitized its processes, and all MDAs are mandated to achieve full migration by 2025.
- Efficiency Gains*: Digitization has reduced manual processes, lowered information handling costs, and improved decision-making and transaction times. For example, digital platforms have enabled faster document processing and online applications.
- Transparency and Accountability*: Digital tools have enhanced record-keeping, reducing instances of lost or misplaced records, which has been critical in anti-corruption efforts.
- Global Context*: While 90% of global governments have adopted digital solutions, Nigeria is catching up, with plans to integrate Artificial Intelligence (AI) to further enhance efficiency

5.4 The Challenges and Way forward

Nigeria's paperless policy holds immense potential to modernize governance and enhance service delivery. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, digital exclusion, and resistance to change must be addressed to ensure success. By investing in infrastructure, promoting inclusion, strengthening policy frameworks, enhancing security, and raising public awareness, Nigeria can achieve a sustainable transition to a paperless government by 2030, aligning with its broader digital economy goals. Despite progress, several challenges persist as follows:

1. There is Limited access to ICT infrastructure in rural areas, thereby restricting participation on digital services, exacerbating inequities. There is need for creating more I.T infrastructure access for civil servant in rural areas.
2. In civil service commission many civil servants lack digital skills and resist transitioning from paper-based systems, necessitating robust change management dawn in the commission. To

promote digital skills there should frequency in house train, sponsors courses on digital skills to effective addressed the resistance on paperless transition

3. Data Security play a pivot roles in paperless policy the grown concerns about cyber security and data breaches required standardized protocols and training. There is need to enforce stringent cyber security protocols to protect digital platforms and build public trust and conduct training and re-training of staff who are Cyber Security specialist.
4. Infrastructure Gaps such as unreliable power supply and limited broadband access outside urban centers hinder implementation of job at different level and Adequate funding for digital initiatives is critical, with calls for MDAs to allocate sufficient resources in their budgets to promote digital transformation.

Recommendations

To address these challenges and ensure successful implementation of Nigeria's paperless policy as part of the National Policy for Digital Nigeria, the following recommendations address key challenges and leverage opportunities to enhance efficiency, transparency, and public adoption.

1. To **Expand Internet Connectivity** they should Partnership with private telecom providers to extend high-speed internet to rural areas, prioritizing underserved regions to bridge the digital divide.
2. **In ensuring Reliable Power Supply**, Government should invest in renewable energy solutions, such as solar-powered charging stations, to support consistent electricity for digital systems, particularly in remote areas.
3. **Upgrade of Port Systems** should be implement periodically in digital platforms for port operations, drawing from successful models like Singapore's TradeNet, ensuring regular system maintenance to minimize disruptions ensure there is mandatory digital skills training for civil servants, as suggested by studies on e-governance in Nigeria.
4. Infrastructure Investment should Prioritize broadband expansion and reliable power supply to bridge the digital divide, particularly in rural and foster cooperation among MDAs, NITDA, and private sector partners to ensure data uniformity and interoperability.
5. Public Awareness should be created and Launch digital literacy campaigns for citizens, using local languages and schools to enhance accessibility
6. Cyber security Measures should be Develop for robotic protection of cyber space and real time cyber security frameworks monitoring, evaluation and training of personnel to safeguard data.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria's Paperless Policy within the Civil Service Commission driven by FCSSIP25 is a transformative step toward modernizing governance, enhancing efficiency, and promoting transparency in public administration. By aligning with the National Policy for Digital Nigeria, the initiative aims to streamline operations, reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies, and curb corruption through digitalization by 2030. However, challenges such as inadequate digital infrastructure, low digital literacy, cyber security risks, and resistance to change pose significant hurdles. Addressing these requires strategic investments in rural connectivity, robust cyber security frameworks, comprehensive stakeholder engagement, and targeted public awareness campaigns. By learning from global benchmarks like Singapore and Estonia, Nigeria can overcome these barriers and foster inclusive adoption. Successful implementation of the paperless policy will not only elevate the Civil Service Commission's operational efficiency but also

position Nigeria as a leader in digital governance in Africa, delivering sustainable benefits to its citizens and reinforcing public trust in governance.

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