

MANAGING BUREAUCRACY TO IMPROVE PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY



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IN BRIEF...

- » Public service spending accounts for a substantial share of a country's economic activity and is very important for economic growth
- » Corrupt practices in developing countries are commonplace
- » Reforming management practices can help delegate tasks away from corrupt officials

Public services such as health, transport, and education, account for a substantial share of a country's economic activity. Effective public service delivery is therefore very important for economic growth. In Nigeria, public spending comprises over a quarter (26%) of the country's GDP. Yet, corrupt practices in Nigerian public sector organizations are commonplace.

This IGC study examined how the management practices of public sector bureaucrats affect the quantity and quality of public services delivered. The researchers used data on over 4700 projects from the Nigerian Civil Service linking public sector organizations to the individual projects they are responsible for. With a population of 160 million people, Nigeria is Africa's most populous country but its public sector is ranked in the bottom decile of Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. The country thus represents a leading setting in which to understand the determinants of public service delivery in the developing world.

This IGC study found that management practices that allow a degree of worker autonomy significantly increase project completion rates and project quality. This is particularly the case in organizations where more bureaucrats report observing corrupt practices. The findings - which provide some of the first evidence to quantify the potential gains to public service delivery arising from marginal changes in how civil servants are managed - suggest that the provision of autonomy can help senior managers delegate tasks away from the most unscrupulous officials and thus reduce corruption.