Recruitment and Selection in Civil Society Organisations: Examining Prevailing Challenges in the Nigerian Context

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Abstract: *Over the past two decades, civil society organisations (CSOs) have gained increasing significance in global development, especially in countries like Nigeria where they deliver essential services and advocate for social accountability. Unlike the government and private sectors, CSOs depend heavily on human capital, making effective recruitment and selection (R&S) practices critical to their success. However, Nigerian CSOs face a range of internal and external constraints—including limited institutional capacity, inconsistent recruitment systems, donor-driven hiring pressures, and a misaligned labour market that undermine their ability to attract and retain suitable talent. Despite these persistent challenges, empirical research on R&S within the Nigerian CSO context remains limited. This study addresses this gap by using qualitative methods—specifically semi-structured interviews with HR managers, executive directors, and programme leads from selected Nigerian CSOs—to explore the lived realities shaping recruitment and selection practices. The analysis is framed using the AMO (Ability, Motivation, Opportunity) model, which helps illuminate how organisational actors perceive their capacity to recruit effectively, their motivation to do so under current constraints, and the opportunities available for improvement. Findings reveal that while staff often demonstrate strong motivation to enhance R&S outcomes, their ability and opportunity are constrained by structural limitations, informal hiring processes, and a lack of strategic HR planning. The paper concludes with context-specific recommendations aimed at strengthening R&S systems, addressing organisational inefficiencies, and improving overall human resource effectiveness within Nigerian CSOs. By applying the AMO framework, this study offers both theoretical and practical insights into the human capital challenges affecting the third sector in Nigeria*

Keywords: Nigeria, civil society organisations, NGO, recruitment and selection challenges, AMO-Model, performance

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, civil society organisations (CSOs) have experienced a substantial increase in relevance and influence across the global development landscape, particularly within African nations (Williamson & Rodd, 2016). This rise in significance is closely linked to global policy frameworks such as the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and their successor, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), launched in 2015. These frameworks assigned CSOs an integral role not only as service delivery actors but also as accountability agents or 'watchdogs' tasked with monitoring governmental development efforts (Dattler, 2016). In countries like Nigeria, CSOs have been pivotal in promoting participatory development, driving social accountability, and providing critical services in health, education, and governance reform.

Nigeria, often referred to as the "Giant of Africa," boasts a population exceeding 200 million people, making it both the most populous country and the largest economy by GDP in Africa (World Bank, 2020). Despite this demographic advantage, Nigeria faces persistent human capital challenges. A mismatch between available workforce skills and labour market demands—characterised by high unemployment and underemployment—has created significant barriers to organisational performance across sectors, including CSOs (Adisa et al., 2017; Yaro, 2014). These human resource constraints have direct implications on the effectiveness, sustainability, and impact of CSOs. Unlike private and public sector organisations, CSOs rely heavily on human capital—staff skills, competencies, attitudes, and commitment—as their most critical asset for driving innovation, advocacy, and community development (Akingbola, 2015; Brunt, 2016).

The recruitment and selection (R&S) function widely recognised as a cornerstone of organisational performance, serves as the gateway to securing the right talent (Dessler, 2005). It encompasses a series of deliberate processes designed to identify, attract, and select individuals with the qualifications and motivation necessary to support the mission and strategic goals of an organisation (Ahmad & Schroeder, 2002). Literature emphasises that effective recruitment and selection are linked to competitive advantage, reduced employee turnover, enhanced morale, and increased productivity (Boxall, 1996; Tanova, 2003; Tyson, 2006). Conversely, weak R&S practices may result in disengaged staff, poor performance, and resource wastage—dynamics that are particularly detrimental in resource-constrained CSO environments.

Despite the significance of R&S to organisational success, there remains a dearth of empirical research focusing on recruitment and selection challenges within Nigerian CSOs. Many of these organisations operate without formal HR departments or clearly defined hiring protocols, and external pressures, from donor expectations to socio-political dynamics often complicate the hiring process. Understanding the factors that shape recruitment and selection practices in this context is therefore crucial.

It is within this backdrop that this study situates its inquiry. Using qualitative methods, specifically semi-structured interviews with HR managers, executive directors, and programme leads in selected Nigerian CSOs, the study explores the internal and external factors that hinder effective recruitment and selection. By examining these lived experiences and institutional realities, the paper aims to illuminate the underlying challenges and propose contextually appropriate strategies to strengthen recruitment and selection processes within the Nigerian CSO sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section aims to explore literature relevant to this paper in order to distil key terms and draw out theories and concepts which offer handles to explain how training can contribute to addressing the challenges of recruitment and selection in CSOs in Nigeria. First off, the key concepts of recruitment and selection, training and CSOs are explored in general terms. This is then followed by a detailed exploration of literature on these typologies as they apply to Nigeria. Thus, the second component will examine the challenges of recruitment and selection in Nigeria and the challenges of CSOs. Thirdly, the AMO model will be introduced and examined for how it captures individual needs for performance outcomes. Finally, as this chapter provides context on what already exists in literature, expectations and a conceptual model are formulated based on these findings and scientific theory to which the empirical sub-questions follow. The results of which is confronted with the theoretical framework in the discussion section.

Recruitment and Selection

Recruitment and selection are universally recognised in human resource management (HRM) literature as fundamental processes that significantly influence organisational success and sustainability (Argue, 2015; Armstrong, 2012). These twin functions serve as the gateway through which organisations access the human capital necessary to drive performance, innovate, and achieve strategic objectives. Effective recruitment involves identifying staffing needs, crafting accurate job descriptions, and attracting a diverse and competent applicant pool using both traditional and contemporary sourcing strategies, such as advertisements, recruitment agencies, and increasingly, digital platforms like job portals and social media (Stone et al., 2006; Tucker, 2012; Cappelli, 2001). Selection, in turn, is the evaluative phase that entails screening, assessing, and ultimately choosing candidates who best match the role requirements and fit the organisational culture (Taylor, 2005; Gamage, 2014).

The literature consistently emphasises the strategic value of these processes, highlighting their role in shaping workforce quality, enhancing employee engagement, and contributing to long-term organisational stability (Gatewood, Feild, & Barrick, 2015; Breaugh, 2008). The principle of "Person-Environment Fit" (Caplan & Harrison, 1982; Kristof, 1996) underscores the idea that alignment between employee attributes and organisational conditions leads to better job satisfaction, higher retention, and improved performance. Conversely, poor recruitment and selection practices often result in mismatches that can increase turnover, inflate training and onboarding costs, and negatively affect organisational reputation (Chidi, 2013; Adisa et al., 2017).

Over time, scholarly focus has moved beyond procedural efficiency to a more strategic and evidence-based approach, considering broader factors such as employer branding, candidate experience, and diversity and inclusion (Highhouse, 2008; Boxall & Purcell, 2016). There is also increasing recognition of the need to balance standardisation with contextual sensitivity, particularly in regions or sectors where conventional HR frameworks may not fully apply. For instance, globalisation and technological change have forced organisations to rethink recruitment strategies to remain competitive in dynamic and often uncertain labour markets.

Moreover, recruitment and selection are no longer viewed as isolated HR functions but as integral components of organisational strategy. Their design and implementation can either reinforce or undermine broader goals related to innovation, service quality, and workforce development. As such, HR practitioners and researchers alike advocate for continuous review and adaptation of these practices to respond to evolving workforce expectations, legal frameworks, and societal demands.

In summary, recruitment and selection are not only operational necessities but also strategic tools that determine who joins an organisation, how they contribute, and how well the organisation adapts to internal and external challenges. Their effective execution is crucial for developing a resilient, high-performing, and engaged workforce.

Civil Society Organisations
Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), also referred to as 'third sector' organisations, are fundamentally designed as grassroots initiatives (United Nations, 2019). Unlike the public sector (first sector) and for-profit private sector (second sector), CSOs are not created to generate profit for founders nor are they primarily state-funded (Popowska & Lunski, 2014 in Brunt, 2016). Nevertheless, they often collaborate with both government and business sectors to implement social development programs (Edwards & Sen, 2000).

Edwards and Sen (2000) conceptualise CSOs as representing the 'public sphere', with a focus on collective well-being, achieved through cooperation across diverse values, cultures, and traditions (Chaplowe & Tjega, 2007). Human capital is central to achieving development outcomes in CSOs, which aligns with Barney's (1991) Resource-Based View that posits sustainable competitive advantage comes from resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and imperfectly mobile. In the CSO context, such a resource is clearly human talent (Brunt, 2016).

Despite the critical role CSOs play, particularly in the global South and in contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), literature on basic human resource (HR) practices in this sector remains limited. Where available, such literature tends to underscore the importance of HR without detailing the *how* of implementation (von Eckardstein & Brandl, 2004). Moreover, the cooperative ethos of CSOs—which discourages competitive advancement at the expense of others—sets them apart from the profit-driven private sector and the politically influenced public sector (Ehrehburg, 1999; Edwards & Sen, 2000).

Civil Society Organisations in Nigeria

In Nigeria, an estimated 500,000 CSOs operate across multiple sectors, including health, education, gender advocacy, governance, and agriculture (USAID, 2020). These organisations range from loosely organised community-based and faith-based groups to formally registered NGOs and professional associations (Chaplowe & Tjega, 2007). They play an important role in promoting transparency and social accountability. Notably, CSO-led efforts have contributed to the recovery of approximately $1.73 billion in stolen assets from public officials through advocacy and pressure (USAID, 2020).

Yet, the effectiveness of Nigerian CSOs is often undermined by internal challenges, especially weak human resource capacity. Research has shown that many CSOs lack access to structured training, effective HR practices, and strategic recruitment processes (Abrokwah et al., 2018). While technical staff frequently benefit from capacity-building efforts, HR staff tend to be overlooked, despite their critical role in managing talent, ensuring strategic alignment, and improving organisational performance (Brunt, 2016). This deficit contributes to poor recruitment outcomes, talent mismanagement, and broader organisational inefficiencies.

Prevailing Recruitment and Selection Challenges: The Nigerian Context

Recruitment and selection are central to human resource management and play a vital role in shaping organisational performance. However, organisations across sectors and geographies face persistent challenges in executing these processes effectively. Given the limited scholarly attention to the recruitment and selection challenges specific to civil society organisations (CSOs) in Nigeria, this paper draws from broader research on recruitment constraints in Nigeria, alongside literature on CSOs in the Global South. This dual approach is justified by the recognition that both internal organisational and external institutional pressures shape HRM practices (Boon et al., 2009).

In the Nigerian context, Adisa et al. (2017) highlight several systemic barriers affecting recruitment and selection. These include;

Ethnic Categorisation: This is where recruitment is influenced by ethnoreligious affiliations rather than merit, particularly due to policies such as the Federal Character Principle (Adamolekun et al., 1991). Although intended to ensure national inclusivity, this policy often compromises competence in favour of representation. Nyambegera (2002) argues that the bureaucratic structure of work in Africa is heavily influenced by ethnoreligious and political issues. Such societies give attention to 'ethnic categorisation' which has an impact on the criteria governing job allocation as it becomes ethnically biased. While it is difficult to draw the conclusion that this challenge affects recruitment processes in Nigeria assumptions can be made that ethnic preferences makes objective recruitment a difficult task in the country (Bohnet, 2016 cited in Adisa et al., 2017). For example, in a study by Yaro (2014) managers across all sectors in Nigeria admitted to having a preference for hiring individuals based on ethnic and religious affiliation. Within the Nigerian public sector, the 'Federal Character Principle' enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution to ensure equal representation in national public service institutions reflecting the language, ethnicity, religion, and geographic diversity of the country has inadvertently promoted recruitment based on ethno-religious and regional considerations in the public sector (Adamolekun et al., 1991). Although the issue of equality and representation is important in a developing country like Nigeria which has over 370

languages and 270 ethnic groups and history of civil war, Adisa et al. (2017) argue that this representation system places equality over excellence and competences and is harmful to organisational performance.

Gender and Age Biases: Some ascriptive factors attributes individuals are born into, such as gender, age, ethnicity, and marital status, significantly influence the recruitment and selection process in Nigeria. Unlike meritocratic systems where employment decisions are primarily based on qualifications, competencies, and performance, Nigerian organisations often reflect broader societal hierarchies and traditional values in their hiring practices. For instance, Adisa et al. (2017) found that employers frequently prefer male candidates for most roles, while women are selectively considered for positions like marketing, and only under restrictive conditions—such as being young and unmarried. Alarmingly, the study highlighted cases where female employees were made to sign contracts that prohibited pregnancy during the tenure of their employment. This practice not only violates ethical standards but also reflects how entrenched gender biases shape employment decisions in ways that marginalise women and infringe on their reproductive rights.

Moreover, Nigeria's traditional sociocultural systems often link power, respect, and decision-making authority with age and male gender, a dynamic that also manifests in organisational recruitment practices. The reverence for seniority, rooted in cultural norms, leads to the systemic sidelining of young professionals, regardless of their qualifications or competencies. As a result, young and capable candidates—especially women—are frequently overlooked for senior or technical roles based solely on these ascriptive criteria (Adisa et al., 2017). This interplay between societal norms and organisational behaviour presents a significant barrier to equitable and inclusive talent management. It undermines the principles of objectivity and fairness in recruitment, contributing to a workforce that may not reflect the best available talent, thereby impacting organisational performance and innovation potential.

In essence, these findings underscore the deep entanglement of social structure and HR practices in Nigeria. They also highlight the pressing need for reforms that not only address discriminatory practices but also sensitise HR practitioners and policymakers to the long-term value of merit-based recruitment in promoting diversity, equity, and organisational excellence.

Employee Retention: This emerges as a significant challenge within the third sector, particularly in the aftermath of the recruitment and selection process. Mallick (2019) highlights that while securing the right candidates is crucial, the difficulty of retaining these individuals is equally pressing and often underestimated. Mallick argues that retention considerations should be embedded in the selection process itself, yet this integration is frequently overlooked by HR personnel in civil society organisations (CSOs). This oversight contributes to high employee turnover, undermining organisational stability and continuity. The failure to consider long-term employee engagement and satisfaction during the hiring process results in mismatches between employee expectations and organisational realities, ultimately leading to premature exits and loss of institutional knowledge.

In support of this perspective, Batti (2014) attributes low retention rates in CSOs to the inherent characteristics of the sector. Many CSOs operate on short-term donor-funded projects and are heavily reliant on fluctuating grants. This financial and structural instability constrains their ability to prioritise sustainable human resource strategies such as capacity building, career development, and long-term contractual arrangements. As a result, employees are often subjected to uncertain job tenure, limited professional growth opportunities, and inadequate support systems—factors that collectively discourage long-term commitment to the organisation.

Furthermore, Mallick (2019) expands on the issue by drawing attention to the broader volatility of the third sector, especially in the context of developing nations. The ever-changing political and economic landscapes in many third-world countries contribute to the instability of CSOs, making them less attractive to skilled professionals. This volatility diminishes the sector's ability to recruit and retain high-calibre talent, further compounding the challenge of achieving meaningful and sustainable development outcomes. When CSOs are unable to attract or retain skilled personnel, their capacity to implement community-based interventions and promote social change is severely limited. Consequently, the persistent retention challenges not only affect internal operations but also hinder the overall impact and legitimacy of CSOs within the communities they serve.

Technological Advancement: This has transformed recruitment and selection globally, yet their impact on Nigerian civil society organisations (CSOs) presents unique opportunities and challenges. While digital platforms and AI-driven recruitment tools can potentially increase efficiency, widen candidate pools, and improve the quality of hires, Nigerian CSOs often face significant barriers to fully leveraging these technologies (Stone et al., 2015; Upadhyay & Khandelwal, 2018). Many CSOs operate with limited financial resources, outdated IT infrastructure, and a shortage of skilled HR personnel capable of managing and implementing advanced digital recruitment systems (USAID, 2020; Brunt, 2016). This technological gap constrains their ability to adopt innovative recruitment practices that larger organisations or private-sector firms may easily access (Koch et al., 2018).

Moreover, the risks associated with algorithmic bias and depersonalisation are particularly concerning in the Nigerian context, where social and cultural dynamics already influence recruitment decisions (Adisa et al., 2017). AI systems may unintentionally reinforce existing biases related to gender, age, or ethnic background if not carefully designed and monitored, potentially exacerbating exclusion of marginalized groups in a sector striving for inclusivity and equitable representation (Bogen & Rieke, 2018; Chukwu & Okoro, 2019). Additionally, the depersonalisation of recruitment through technology conflicts with the relational and trust-based nature of Nigerian CSOs, where personal networks and community ties remain critical in hiring processes (Brunt, 2016).

Furthermore, many Nigerian CSOs depend heavily on donor funding and project-based grants, which limit their capacity to invest in sustained technological upgrades or HR development initiatives (Batti, 2014; USAID, 2020). This volatile funding environment reduces the priority placed on integrating advanced recruitment technologies, hindering talent attraction and

retention (Mallick, 2019). As a result, Nigerian CSOs often continue relying on traditional recruitment methods, such as word-of-mouth and informal referrals, which, while culturally appropriate, may restrict access to a broader and more diverse talent pool (Chaplowe & Tjega, 2007).

To address these challenges, there is a need for tailored digital recruitment solutions that consider the resource constraints and socio-cultural context of Nigerian CSOs. Capacity-building programs that equip HR staff with digital literacy and ethical AI use, combined with donor support for technology adoption, could help Nigerian CSOs harness technological advancements while minimizing risks of bias and depersonalisation in their recruitment and selection processes (Brunt, 2016; Upadhyay & Khandelwal, 2018).

Unemployment Rates: Nigeria's labour market is heavily impacted by persistently high unemployment rates, often recorded in double digits, which creates a highly competitive environment where a large number of job seekers vie for a limited number of vacancies (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023; World Bank, 2022). This imbalance places significant pressure on recruitment officers and human resource personnel who must navigate the influx of applications, many of which come from candidates willing to bypass established recruitment procedures through unethical practices such as bribery, nepotism, or falsification of qualifications (Adisa et al., 2017; Okoye et al., 2020). Such practices not only undermine the fairness and transparency of recruitment but also adversely affect organisational performance by admitting unsuitable candidates.

Compounding this challenge is the declining quality of education in Nigeria, which has been widely documented as inadequate to prepare graduates with the skills and competencies required by employers (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008; Adeyemo, 2018). This educational shortfall results in a talent pool that is often mismatched with job requirements, forcing organisations to make difficult compromises in their hiring decisions. Many firms, especially those bound by legal frameworks restricting foreign hires, are constrained to recruit locally despite the shortage of qualified personnel (Adisa et al., 2017; Uzonwanne, 2019). This scenario leads to a cycle of inefficiency where roles may be filled by underqualified candidates, impacting productivity and increasing turnover rates.

Within the civil society sector, particularly in Nigerian and broader Global South contexts, these recruitment challenges are magnified. The CSO sector often operates under tighter budget constraints and volatile funding environments, limiting their capacity to attract and retain skilled employees (Batti, 2014; USAID, 2020). Furthermore, the scarcity of locally-focused research on recruitment and selection in Nigerian CSOs means that much of the existing knowledge is extrapolated from studies conducted by international organisations or research on CSOs in other developing countries (Brunt, 2016; Chaplowe & Tjega, 2007). This lack of context-specific literature hinders a full understanding of the nuanced challenges Nigerian CSOs face in attracting talent and implementing effective recruitment practices tailored to their unique socio-economic and cultural environment.

Therefore, addressing recruitment and selection challenges in Nigeria's labour market, and particularly within the CSO sector, requires a multifaceted approach. This includes tackling systemic issues such as improving educational outcomes, enforcing transparent recruitment processes, and generating locally relevant research to inform policy and practice (Adisa et al., 2017; Brunt, 2016). Additionally, there is a critical need to develop recruitment frameworks that consider Nigeria's socio-economic realities, legal restrictions, and the operational peculiarities of the third sector to enhance the effectiveness and fairness of talent acquisition.

Funding Constraints: Funding limitations significantly hinder effective recruitment and selection in Nigerian civil society organisations (CSOs). As non-profits largely dependent on donor funding and project-based grants, Nigerian CSOs face financial uncertainty that prevents them from planning long-term staffing or offering competitive salaries (Batti, 2014; Akingbola, 2015). This makes it difficult to attract and retain qualified personnel, especially in specialised roles, as many professionals prefer the stability and compensation of the public or private sector (Mallick, 2019).

Donor restrictions also limit spending on administrative costs like HR functions, resulting in underdeveloped recruitment systems and reliance on informal hiring practices (Brunt, 2016; Chaplowe & Tjega, 2007). Furthermore, short project durations and limited job security contribute to high staff turnover, weakening institutional memory and continuity (USAID, 2020). For smaller, community based CSOs, the lack of funding often means no formal HR departments, further compounding the challenge. Overall, without consistent and flexible funding, Nigerian CSOs struggle to professionalise their recruitment processes or invest in long-term human capital development.

This paper adopts the **Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) model** as its theoretical framework to explore recruitment and selection challenges in Nigerian civil society organisations (CSOs). The model offers a structured lens for analysing how organisational capacity, internal motivations, and institutional conditions shape hiring outcomes in resource-constrained and often informal third-sector environments. The AMO model suggests that individual and organisational performance is driven by three interconnected components: **Ability (A)**, **Motivation (M)**, and **Opportunity (O)** (Appelbaum et al., 2000). In the context of Nigerian CSOs, which often operate in resource-constrained, informal, and politically influenced environments, the AMO model helps explain why recruitment systems frequently fail to deliver optimal results, even when best practices are known. According to Boxall and Purcell (2016), individuals perform when they have a combination of all three (3) components which is formulated as P= f(A,M,O)

- Ability (A): individuals can do the job because they have the necessary skills and knowledge needed to perform

- Motivation (M): individuals can do the job because they either want to, feel like it or have to perform

- Opportunity (O): individuals can do the job if they are provided with the support, structure or environment to perform

Figure 1: Boxall and Purcell's (2016) AMO model of Individual Performance
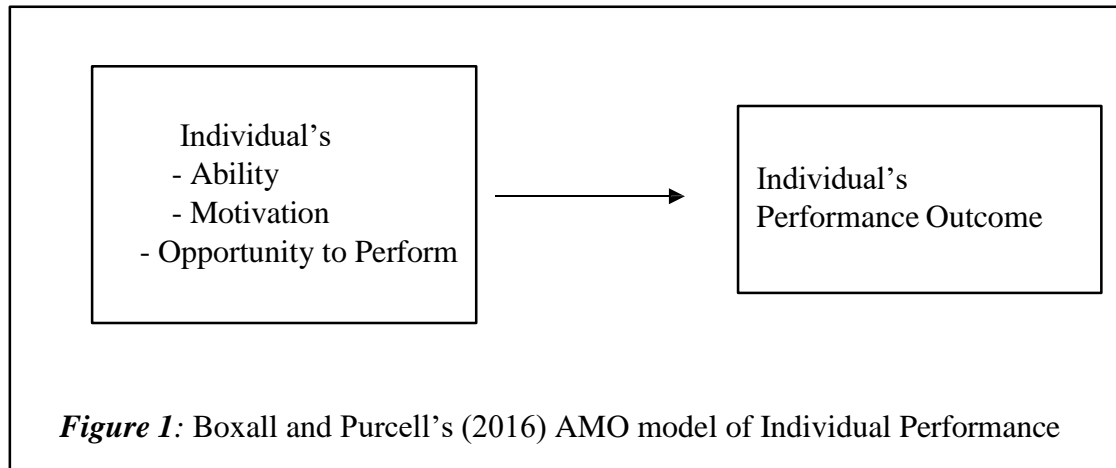
Applying the AMO Model to Recruitment and Selection Challenges in Nigerian CSOs

1. Ability (A): Candidate Suitability and Workforce Quality

In Nigerian CSOs, a mismatch often exists between job requirements and the available labour pool due to systemic issues such as educational deficiencies and skill gaps in the workforce (Adisa et al., 2017). The **"Ability"** component reflects the challenge of attracting applicants who possess the requisite competencies, experience, and adaptability for civil society work. This challenge is compounded by the informal nature of some CSOs and the absence of structured recruitment strategies, which can lead to poorly defined job roles and inadequate screening processes.

2. Motivation (M): Organisational Commitment to Merit-Based Recruitment

The **"Motivation"** element considers the willingness and commitment of organisations to pursue transparent and merit-based hiring. In many Nigerian CSOs, motivation to recruit ethically and effectively is undermined by contextual realities such as nepotism, gender bias, political interference, and the pressure to fill positions quickly due to project timelines (Adisa et al., 2017; Brunt, 2016). In such environments, even when qualified candidates exist, hiring decisions may be influenced by social connections or external expectations, diminishing the integrity and fairness of the recruitment process.

3. Opportunity (O): Structural and Procedural Support for Effective Hiring

Finally, **"Opportunity"** pertains to whether the organisation provides the structural conditions and autonomy required for fair and effective recruitment. Many Nigerian CSOs operate within centralised, founder-led, or donor-driven systems where recruitment procedures are either informal or constrained by funding timelines and reporting requirements (Batti, 2014; USAID, 2020). This lack of institutionalised HR frameworks means that recruitment processes are often reactive rather than strategic, limiting opportunities for long-term workforce planning or consistent application of selection standards.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a **qualitative, exploratory research design** to investigate the recruitment and selection (R&S) challenges experienced by civil society organisations (CSOs) in Nigeria. An exploratory approach is deemed appropriate due to the limited availability of empirical research focused on HR practices within Nigerian CSOs. The design is intended to uncover nuanced perspectives and gain an in-depth understanding of how recruitment and selection processes are shaped by contextual realities, organisational culture, and structural constraints (Boeije, 2010). Data collection was conducted through **semi-structured interviews** with HR personnel, programme managers, and administrative staff in selected CSOs across Nigeria. This method was chosen for its flexibility and ability to elicit rich, detailed insights while allowing respondents to express their experiences in their own terms. The sampling strategy focused on purposive selection to ensure participants had relevant knowledge and involvement in recruitment and selection activities. Finally, data were analysed using **thematic analysis**, allowing patterns, themes, and categories to emerge inductively from the data. This approach was consistent with the study's interpretive orientation and goal of generating grounded understanding of the recruitment and selection challenges in the Nigerian CSO context.

To ensure the relevance and depth of the data collected, participants were selected based on a defined inclusion criterion. All participants were required to have significant involvement in the recruitment and selection (R&S) processes within their respective CSOs. Participants were identified and contacted with the assistance of the development Research and Projects Centre (dRPC), which facilitated access to suitable CSOs. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to capture a diverse range of views across different types of Nigerian CSOs, including community-based, faith-based, health advocacy, and professional associations. A total of eleven CSO types were represented to reflect the sector's diversity. While the sampling was not intended to generalise findings, it aimed to uncover meaningful qualitative patterns and sector-specific insights. Invitation letters were emailed directly to potential participants in

managerial roles. In addition, formal requests were sent to their organisations to secure institutional permission. Only those with both individual willingness and organisational approval were included in the study.

To gather empirical insights for this paper, semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary qualitative data collection method. This approach was chosen for its capacity to facilitate in-depth conversations, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences with recruitment and selection in Nigerian CSOs. Semi-structured interviews provided a balance between structured consistency across participants and the flexibility needed to explore sensitive or nuanced issues in detail. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to share detailed perspectives, while a limited number of closed questions helped elicit specific information. This format proved effective in engaging participants and generating rich, relevant data. Despite the known limitation of potential bias in qualitative interviews (Bryman, 2015), the method was considered suitable for the exploratory aims of the study and the nature of the subject.

The interviews were conducted virtually between May 16th and 25th, 2025, using Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and, in one case, WhatsApp. Of the 20 participants initially contacted 14 interviews were completed, and 10 were ultimately used in the analysis. Some interviews were excluded due to withdrawal of consent or other reasons. Each interview lasted approximately 27 minutes on average, contributing to a robust dataset that reflects diverse viewpoints across the Nigerian CSO landscape.

Following each interview, transcripts were produced within 24 hours, and a one-page summary was shared with participants for verification. While some participants confirmed the summaries, others saw the step as unnecessary, but this step was necessary for quality assurance purposes. The transcriptions included not only spoken words but also non-verbal cues, expressions, and culturally specific slang to preserve the full context of the conversations. This attention to detail helped prevent the loss of important meaning during analysis, as nuances in participant responses, especially in a diverse and expressive context like Nigerian CSOs, were critical to understanding recruitment and selection challenges. The data was analysed using thematic analysis, a method widely supported by Braun and Clarke for its flexibility and adaptability to qualitative research. This approach enabled the researcher to identify patterns and themes through systematic coding, guided by the research questions and theoretical framework**. Using NVivo software**, open coding was conducted on all transcripts, allowing the researcher to refine and merge codes into broader themes and subthemes.

Validity: This study ensured **internal validity** by implementing measures that enhanced the accuracy of data collection and interpretation. Confidentiality and sensitive question phrasing encouraged honest responses. Post-interview summaries were also shared with participants for validation, reducing researcher bias. In terms of **external validity**, while qualitative research is generally not aimed at generalisability, this study attempted transferability through purposive sampling and participant diversity. However, due to the limited research in this area, findings are intended to identify qualitative patterns rather than make broad generalisations about the Nigerian CSO sector.

Reliability: While qualitative research does not allow for strict measurement of reliability, steps were taken in this study to enhance **consistency and trustworthiness**. To reduce bias, the researcher used participant verification by sharing interview summaries for confirmation and relied on an intermediary organisation (dRPC) to manage access to participants. This helped minimise direct researcher influence. Additionally, all interviews were recorded and transcribed within 24 hours to preserve accuracy. Although repeatability is often difficult in qualitative interviews, the use of purposive sampling selecting a diverse group of CSOs allowed for a degree of replicability, suggesting that the findings may be relevant across similar organisational types within the Nigerian CSO sector.

Ethical Consideration: This study adhered to strict ethical standards to ensure the protection and privacy of participants. In line with GDPR guidelines, informed consent was obtained from all participants through e-signed forms, and the study's purpose was clearly communicated by both the researcher and the facilitating organisation (dRPC). Participant anonymity and confidentiality were carefully maintained, especially for those who feared potential retribution. Identifiable details were omitted or generalised, and all data, including recordings, transcripts, and consent forms were securely stored on OneDrive platforms, to be deleted after the research concludes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents and analyses findings from 11 interviews, focusing on the central research topic: *recruitment and selection (R&S) challenges faced by civil society organisations (CSOs) in Nigeria.* It begins by identifying key R&S challenges reported by interviewees, all of whom held significant responsibility in their organisations' hiring processes and provided detailed insights into the recruitment cycle. Their roles included everything from job advertisements to onboarding. Drawing from this experience, all interviewees confirmed encountering various R&S challenges unique to the CSO sector.

Table 1: Summarized Challenges Identified

CHALLENGES	SELECTED QUOTE EXTRACTIONS	POSITION OF INTERVIEWEE
Donor Pressure	"..when donors give funding they expect you to work on their terms."	Management
Gender Issues	"…it is hard to employ women because they are not applying and the ones that do apply do not stay long…"	Management
Digitalisation	"…this new normal is the reality HR professionals have to face and we are in no position to realize this…"	HR
Limited Funding	"Our major challenge is obtaining funds for payment of recruited staff."	Management

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Low Retention	"We recruit them, train then and when they are well trained, they leave to another organization that pays better…"	Management and HR
Fake Resumes	"…applicants 'package' their curriculum vitae in a way that makes them irresistible, only to discover later that the applicant do not really have the skills contained in the CV"	Management and HR
Nature of the Labour Market	" …applicant might have submitted various applications in several organisations and when they are called to be offered the job, you find that they have taken up a job elsewhere."	Management and HR
Nepotism	"…even before the interview they had already decided who they will give the position to…"	Management and HR
Skill Gap	"Applicants are unemployable, and few have knowledge of development work."	Management and HR
Government Policies	"The state government of one of the key states we support made a policy that only the indigenes of the state should be recruited…"	HR
Unemployment	"The unemployment rate in this our country means the volume of applications are enormous and carefully reviewing the CVs for the most suitable candidates is quite daunting…"	Management and HR

Donor Pressure: A unique recruitment and selection challenge identified by participants in Nigerian CSOs, one not previously highlighted in existing literature is the donor-driven pressure to hire specific individuals, particularly females or those perceived as "socially able." interviewees noted that their organisations, which relied on funding from international donors, or intermediary agencies, often faced implicit or explicit expectations to meet donor preferences in hiring. This pressure was especially prevalent when donors or their representatives preferred to see women involved in project implementation, reflecting broader diversity or inclusion agendas.

While some interviewees viewed this expectation as an opportunity to build a more diverse workforce, many expressed concerns about the impact on organisational performance. The difficulty of finding competent candidates who met donor preferences often forced CSOs to choose between maintaining funding and hiring based strictly on merit. In some cases, participants shared experiences of being compelled to accept underqualified candidates under threat of losing grants. This external interference in recruitment decisions led to mismatches between staff capacity and project demands, ultimately compromising both effectiveness and organisational autonomy.

Digitalisation: A notable recruitment and selection challenge identified by HR professionals in Nigerian CSOs relates to the limited digitalisation of HR processes, an issue that directly links to technological advancements discussed in the literature. While modern recruitment increasingly relies on digital tools for efficiency, interviewees described the lack of resources to support full digital transformation as both "frustrating" and "debilitating." Despite

organisational expectations for high-level performance, the absence of adequate infrastructure hindered their ability to implement technology-driven solutions in recruitment and selection.

This technological gap particularly affected processes such as background checks and the ability to screen large volumes of applications, critical steps in selecting competent candidates. The problem was further amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic when online interviews became necessary. Several participants admitted they were unprepared for this shift due to insufficient technological support, highlighting a significant disconnect between expectations and operational realities. While existing literature acknowledges the importance of technological advancement in modern HR practices, this study uniquely highlights how the lack of digital readiness in Nigerian CSOs exacerbates recruitment challenges, making it difficult to adapt to evolving demands.

Limited Funding: The difficulty in securing consistent grant funding as a major recruitment and selection challenge within Nigerian CSOs can be seen. This financial constraint directly affects their ability to attract and retain experienced, qualified personnel. As one interviewee noted,

> *"Those that have met the criteria most times wouldn't accept the salary we are willing to offer and afford, so we end up with candidates who do not meet the requirements."*

This funding issue forces many CSOs to rely on volunteers or part-time staff who may lack the capacity to fulfil the responsibilities of the role effectively. Even when such individuals are recruited, limited budgets restrict the provision of adequate training or professional development, resulting in underperformance and high turnover. This challenge is not entirely new and has been identified in prior literature as a common problem in the civil society sector, where organisations often depend on external donor funding to operate (Banks & Hulme, 2012; Lewis, 2014). However, what makes this issue particularly peculiar to Nigerian CSOs is the combination of unstable funding streams and a relatively small pool of skilled professionals willing to work for lower pay in a competitive labour market. Moreover, some interviewees observed that even unqualified candidates now demand higher salaries, placing CSOs in a difficult position where neither affordability nor competence is guaranteed. This reflects a sector-specific dilemma where financial insecurity not only limits recruitment capacity but also undermines the strategic development of human capital essential for sustainable impact.

Low Retention: Interviewees reported low retention rates as a persistent challenge in the Nigerian CSO sector. A key reason cited was "job hopping," where employees join CSOs primarily for training or temporary experience before moving to better-paying positions, often with international organisations. This trend is driven by a misconception that donor funded CSOs offer high salaries, sometimes paid in foreign currencies, attracting candidates with misplaced motivations. Many participants expressed frustration over hiring individuals who lacked the right values or long-term commitment, resulting in frequent turnover and prolonged vacancies. Additionally, some recruits viewed CSO jobs as stopgaps while awaiting more stable civil service roles, perceiving development work as low status compared to government positions associated with prestige and influence. Another retention challenge is specific to

CSOs operating in conflict-prone regions like North-Eastern Nigeria. These organisations often struggle to recruit and retain staff due to the high risks associated with terrorist activities and insecurity in these areas. Participants shared that employees are reluctant to remain in such positions due to safety concerns, causing critical roles to remain unfilled for extended periods. This regional challenge compounds the broader issue of retention in the sector, highlighting the unique vulnerabilities and constraints faced by Nigerian CSOs in maintaining a stable workforce.

Government Policies: As all CSOs function within the society and have to abide by the policies set by the government, participants found some of these policies rather unfavourable. CSOs operating within states and not the capital often times face policies that affected their ability to recruit and execute the project accordingly. One of the policies imposed that affected the recruitment process stated that only indigenes of a particular state could be recruited by CSOs working in that area. This posed an issue as many applicants did not have the skills or experience to fill in the positions.

All the challenges explained in detail above were identified by participants from the CSO sector. However, this did not mean all the challenges were unique to the CSO sector as many participants identified these challenges as issues faced by all sectors in Nigeria or were more prominent in the CSO sector as captured in the table below:

Table 2: **Challenges and Sectors Affect**

CHALLENGES	ALL SECTORS	NGO SECTOR
Donor Pressure		X
Gender Imbalance	X	
Digitalisation	X	
Limited Funding		X
Low Retention		X
Fake Resumes	X	
Nature of the Labour Market	X	
Nepotism	X	
Skill Gap	X	
Government Policies		X
Unemployment	X	

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Notably, many of the participating CSOs in this research did not have dedicated HR personnel or staff as for many, all HR decisions were made by management. In the findings of this research, only three (3) participants were in HR positions. Granting that this research did not focus on statistical generalisation, there was a noticeable difference in perspective from the participants based their position. This research still considered all participants 'HR staff' as

they had sole or major responsibility of HR practices like recruitment and selection. Being one of the main gaps this paper aimed to fill and as the first step in answering the central research question, the R&S challenges faced by Nigerian CSOs were examined. From the responses of participants, eleven (11) challenges emerged which are discussed as either being internal or external challenges.

Internal Challenges
From the challenges identified in the findings, 4 were considered unique to the CSO sector and included: pressures from donors, limited funding from donors, low retention, and government policies. These challenges were considered internal, meaning only affecting the CSO sectors in Nigeria. The challenge of donor pressures and limited funding were challenge that stemmed from funders, again, a factor peculiar to the CSO sector as they are solely reliant on funding for sustainability and survivability which comes from grants applied to. In addition, the challenge of low retention and high employee turnover was also a common theme as applicants come into the CSO sector for the wrong reasons (either with an expectation of salaries in foreign currency or to await employment in the public sector). Another reason for the low retention was linked to the missions of the CSO sectors as 'aiding and development' sectors which was not always an easy job like the posting of employees to conflict areas or Furthermore, the unfavourable government policies that affected the CSO sector was a challenge that could not be easily placed as there is no telling how and if it affects other CSOs.

External Challenges
The other 7 challenges identified are distinguished as external challenges as thy affect all organisations in Nigeria which could not simply be ignored as they also affected the CSO sector. These included: skill gap, gender imbalance, digitalisation, fake resumes, the nature of the labour market in Nigeria, nepotism and the high unemployment rates in the country. As challenges that exist as a result of the systems and economic situation in the country, many of these challenges were intertwined as they led to other challenges of R&S. For instance, the high unemployment rates in Nigeria meant that the volume of applications when a position was advertised was enormous thereby creating the problem for the recruiter to sift through all the applications for the best candidate. The lack of digitalisation only worsened the situation as it was time consuming sorting out the pile of applications. In addition, the nature of the Nigerian labour market made it difficult to recruit the best suitable candidate as many applicants lacked basic skills and knowledge of development work. This was explicitly attributed to the system of education in Nigeria that was unfortunately too 'bookish' and not practical. This may also explain why applicants resort to fake resumes in order to secure job opportunities they know they are not qualified for.

The challenge of nepotism was one that received mixed responses At first, this was seen as a challenge that affected every sector and could exist in any country, making it inevitable. However, it only became a challenge when unqualified friends and family members were employed especially in a sector where human capital is paramount for its success and sustainability which participants in HR positions emphasised on.

Confrontation with Literature

Based on the literature and the conceptual model, a number of expectations were derived. This section aims to confront those expectations with the empirical findings of this paper. The first expectation was that the challenges faced by CSOs in Nigeria will be a combination of the challenges faced by all sectors in Nigeria and CSO sectors in the global south. This expectation is confirmed as the empirical findings found that the challenges faced by Nigerian CSOs was a mixture of external and internal challenges unique to the CSO sector with less of the internal challenges.

Secondly, the expectation that all three (3) components of the AMO model is needed to understand how the challenges is also confirmed as many participants stated they had the skill but did not have the opportunity to utilise the skill. In addition, the expectation that (M) will be intrinsic as a result of the sector is confirmed as participants could see the effect of these challenges for organisational success and sustainability and not for monetary rewards were an individual is said to be extrinsically motivated. This was consistent with Boxall and Purcell's (2016) explanation of vocational interests. The AMO model was able to capture the needs of HR as the conceptual model (see fig. 2) suggested that through theories identified using the AMO model, challenges could be understood in greater depths to how it affected performances

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the prevailing challenges that Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) face in the Nigerian context, specifically in the areas of recruitment and selection. Drawing on qualitative data from sixteen in-depth interviews across different types of CSOs, the research has illuminated a complex interplay of internal and external factors that hinder effective recruitment and selection within the sector. While some challenges align with broader HR issues, such as limited funding and high staff turnover, others are uniquely shaped by the structural and contextual realities of Nigerian CSOs. A significant finding of the study is the influence of donor expectations and informal pressures on hiring decisions. Participants highlighted how funders or intermediary organisations often demand the recruitment of specific candidates, particularly women or "socially able" individuals, regardless of competence. This form of external interference, which has not been widely discussed in existing literature, compromises merit-based recruitment and can result in hiring unqualified personnel. Financial constraints also emerged as a recurring challenge, with many organisations unable to offer competitive salaries, thereby limiting their ability to attract and retain experienced staff. As a result, CSOs often rely on volunteers or part-time workers, which in turn affects project outcomes and organisational efficiency. Technological limitations, particularly the lack of digitalised recruitment systems, were also identified as barriers. Participants described difficulties in processing large volumes of applications, conducting background checks, and adapting to remote hiring during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, high attrition rates due to job-hopping, misaligned expectations, and fear of working in conflict zones, especially in the North-East, further compound the recruitment crisis. These findings underscore the precarious and often reactive nature of HR practices in the sector.

In conclusion, while the recruitment and selection challenges facing Nigerian CSOs are diverse and often deeply embedded, understanding their unique context is key to addressing them effectively. Although not the central focus, the study also found that HR training, where available, can support more structured and informed hiring practices. However, structural issues such as funding instability, external interference, and sector-wide undervaluation require systemic change. Future interventions must therefore be multifaceted, addressing both capacity-building at the organisational level and broader reforms in how the CSO sector is supported and governed.

This study has identified several unique recruitment and selection challenges that are either underrepresented or entirely absent in existing literature on Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), particularly in the Nigerian context. While much of the global HRM discourse focuses on corporate or public sector practices, the complexities specific to CSOs, such as donor interference, insecurity in conflict regions, and systemic underfunding, remain critically under-researched. As such, there is an urgent need for further empirical studies to explore these challenges in greater depth and to develop context-appropriate frameworks for addressing them.

A significant finding from this research is the influence of donor agencies on hiring practices. Participants reported being pressured to employ specific candidates, especially women or individuals perceived as "socially appropriate "often as an informal condition of receiving funding. While such practices may be well-intentioned, they compromise recruitment integrity and organisational autonomy. Future research should examine the extent and impact of donor-driven hiring within CSOs, particularly in the Global South, to inform policies that balance diversity objectives with merit-based recruitment.

Another notable gap in literature is the economic constraints that force CSOs to hire underqualified personnel or rely heavily on volunteers. This study revealed how limited budgets result in the rejection of qualified candidates who demand competitive salaries, leaving organisations with staff who may lack the necessary skills or long-term commitment. These practical realities are rarely captured in theoretical discussions of recruitment strategies. It is recommended that future research investigate the relationship between funding structures and talent acquisition in non-profit settings, as well as explore sustainable financial models that enhance hiring capacity.

Technological limitations in the recruitment process also emerged as a challenge, particularly in screening, conducting interviews, and processing large volumes of applications. While digitalisation in HR is a major theme in broader literature, the failure to account for its uneven application in low-resource CSOs represents a critical oversight. This study recommends both practical support for CSOs to acquire basic digital tools and further research into how technological adaptation can be made more inclusive and scalable across diverse CSO contexts. Staff retention issues were also widespread and driven by factors that are unique to CSOs, such as the project-based nature of funding, job insecurity, and misaligned employee expectations. Participants noted that many recruits viewed CSO roles as temporary steppingstones or sought employment under false assumptions about salary and job status. These motivations and their impact on organisational stability deserve closer academic scrutiny. Future research should

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investigate the motivational dynamics of CSO employees and propose retention strategies that are grounded in local labour market conditions and cultural perceptions of non-profit work. In addition, CSOs operating in conflict-prone regions face acute difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff due to safety concerns. This reality, although critical, is barely discussed in existing HRM literature. More research is needed to explore how organisations in such high-risk environments can build resilient recruitment systems, possibly through remote work options, inter-organisational collaborations, or context-specific incentive schemes.

Finally, there is a need for collective advocacy by CSOs and academic institutions to highlight these sector-specific recruitment issues and influence donor policies that often exacerbate them. Strategic partnerships between researchers, practitioners, and funders could yield data-driven solutions that are both feasible and responsive to ground realities. A more robust body of knowledge focused on CSOs in the Global South is essential for building sustainable, effective, and autonomous organisations that can fulfil their missions without compromise.

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