

Impact of Good Leadership and Administration on Nation Building in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria despite its abundant resources and potential, faces challenges of good leadership and administration that impede its nation-building and development. Poor governance, weakened institutions, politicised policies, and mismanagement of public funds have led to stagnation, impacting national unity, economic stability, and public trust. This study examines the role of ethical, performance-driven leadership in unlocking Nigeria's development and promoting a cohesive, prosperous nation.

It focuses on how leadership quality influences nation-building, impact of administrative efficiency on public service delivery, and key governance challenges. Using document analysis as the primary research method, the study identifies leadership inconsistencies, lack of vision, and a transactional approach as major barriers to progress. However, the study also recognises examples where ethical leadership has driven development, showing that competent and purpose-driven leadership can foster progress.

The study concludes that addressing governance challenges such as political patronage, corruption, and centralisation is essential, and recommends amongst others that anti-corruption campaign should be intensified alongside accountability, merit-based recruitment, decentralisation of governance, and investment in leadership development to achieve sustainable growth and nation-building.

Key words: Good Leadership, Administration, and Nation Building, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Nation building is viewed in this study as the long-term internal process of building the social, economic and political foundations of a state and a process of self-sustaining national

development. Nation-building is a dynamic and continuous process through which a country develops the political, economic, social, and institutional foundations necessary for sustainable growth and unity (Unya & Onyemauwa, 2022). Central to this process are the principles of good leadership and effective administration, both of which serve as the bedrock upon which strong and resilient nations are built. Good leadership provides the vision, direction, and moral compass needed to inspire collective purpose and mobilise citizens and institutions towards common goals. It encompasses qualities such as integrity, transparency, accountability, empathy, and the ability to make sound decisions in the face of complexity and change (Shiyanbade, B., & Lamidi K. O. (2017)).

On the other hand, good administration refers to the structured, consistent, and efficient implementation of policies, laws, and public services through well-functioning institutions. It ensures that the plans and aspirations articulated by leadership are transformed into practical outcomes that benefit the broader society. Together, leadership and administration form a symbiotic relationship—while leadership sets the agenda, administration operationalises it, ensuring continuity, efficiency, and stability in governance (Essien, 2015).

In many developing nations, including those in Africa, the absence of visionary leadership and weak administrative systems has hindered progress and deepened socio-economic disparities. Conversely, countries

that have successfully advanced national development often credit their progress to accountable leadership and capable bureaucracies.

Background to the Study

The interplay of leadership, governance, nation building and development administration is elaborate and inseparable. This is due to the fact that the context of leadership, both in theory and in practical is a learned process, not an innate quality, focusing on transformational leadership that inspires and motivates followers by translating vision into reality, the effects of governance is dependent on its national growth procedures. Warren Bennis, a prominent authority on leadership, once mentioned that 'leadership is like beauty: it's hard to define, but you know it when you see it.' That might not be further from the reality. The study is concerned with the impact of good leadership and administration on nation building in Nigeria. It tries to discover the ideas of public administration and management in the national growth context, leadership function, leadership culture in Nigeria context and difficulties of leadership in modern Nigeria by a close evaluation of the institution of political leadership.

In accordance with Abdulsalam (2007), the interests of Riggs and Pye in the connection between nationwide development administration and the environmental forces, particularly those that represented by the economic sector stakeholders and the social values respectively, Katz accentuate the technical demands for efficient development administration such as finance, manpower, information, logistics, and various other relevant variables. Obiozor (2015) opines that Nigeria is a country birthed in optimism in 1960 at independence however has its 65-year lived in a state of uncertainty and unpredictability. Within those years as well, all types of evaluation and conclusions have been put together on crucial problems responsible for what has ended up being a Nigerian dilemma over nation building and national development. This is due to the fact that all nations compared with Nigeria in 1960 have made huge progress, developed reasonably stable political and economic systems. When compared with third world nations in the 1960s, such as nations in Asia like Singapore, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea in an interval of thirty years, the latter ended up being the Asian Tigers

Obiozor explained more that while the former are immersed in seasonal violent wars, armed conflicts and little scale insurgencies, cross-border terrorism, unrelenting economic situations, financial corruption, famine, diseases and hardship political instability, among others, which have come to be emblems of the African continent. What made the distinction? In the light of the dilemma, this study tries to take a look at how leadership and good governance have connected and the effects of their connections on nation building within the Nigerian context.

There is no doubt that there are crises in the nation, they consist of all the crisis of political, social and economic development identified by Olugbade (1987) in Lucan Pye. Efforts at dealing with the dilemma have been utter failure since the problems have not been dealt with instead we have been busy chasing after the shadow. Among Nigeria's fault lines was for long time attributed to leadership failures and others were defective political and economic structures. Ele (2013) opines that there is often presumed the collapse of state structures, whether through defeat by an external power or as a result of internal mayhem, leads to a vacuum of political power. This is seldom the situation.

The mechanisms whereby political powers are exercised might be much less formalised or constant, however fundamental concerns of how best to guarantee the physical and economic security of oneself and one's dependants do not just vanish when the institutions of the state break down. Non-state actors in such circumstances might exercise differing levels of political power over local populations, sometimes offering fundamental social solutions from education to healthcare. Also where non-state actors exist as parasites on local populations, political life goes on.

Unfortunately, in Nigeria today, a lot of leaders have had the tendency to plunder, defraud, embezzle, mismanage and at the same time envy one another with impunity and relish, (Bamidele 2012). He went further to reveal that the leaders have likewise been possessive, egoistic, self-centered, individualistic, callous, greedy and deceptive. The leaders and their regimes/administrations/governments were deeply engrossed in excessive acts of

corruption, impropriety, mismanagement and squanderism. Hence, this study seeks to examine the effect of good leadership and administration in nation building.

Statement of the Problem

Since the achievement of independence in 1960, Nigeria has been battling with the issues of nation building. These issues have been the inability of Nigerians to raise a genuine leader whose dedication to the efficient advancement of the nation would certainly be patriotic and nationalistic.

The succeeding governments since independence have been characterized by imperfections, consequently making good governance an illusion (Binger B.T, 2010). Throughout the civilian and military regimes in Nigeria, the majority of the leaders have been unable to come up with programs and efficient plans that ought to be advantageous to the Nigerian nation. The majority of these leaders have been after selfish gains and thus accumulate riches for themselves.

It is axiomatic that the high quality of leadership in a nation impacts the degree of development. Poor leadership and bad governance can yield to political instability and underdevelopment. Nigeria is honored with a wealth of mineral resources and a vast land. It is not a daydream to anticipate Nigeria to soar high like the widely known economic titans of the global north, however still, Nigeria wallows in socio-economic, political and infrastructural decadence and sluggishness.

To this end, it comes to be a point of concern for one to start to picture how Nigeria will ever rise from decadence and her impoverished state being that those that are meant to steer the wheels of the nation to the country emancipation and prosperity lack the sanity and morality to do so.

Objectives of the Study

1. To critically examine how the quality of leadership influences nation-building and developmental outcomes in Nigeria.
2. To analyse the impact of administrative efficiency and institutional capacity on public service delivery and policy implementation.
3. To identify strategies for strengthening leadership and administrative systems in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The followings were specifically designed to be the research questions for this study:

1. To what extent has the quality of leadership influences nation-building and developmental outcomes in Nigeria?
2. impact of administrative efficiency and institutional capacity on public service delivery and policy implementation?
3. What are the strategies for strengthening leadership and administrative systems in Nigeria?

Significance of the Study

This research work is of great relevance to the society at large. This is applicable to the government, the readers of this research work and to the researcher as a problem shared, they say is a problem half solved.

This study will be beneficial to the government in the sense that, the weak-points and shortcomings of all the sectors of the nation would be pinpointed and displayed based on findings thus proffering reliable solutions and measures to be taken so as to attain the lofty height of good administration and national development.

The benefit of this research work to the readers is that hopefully at the time they are done with reading of the work, they will be upgraded intellectually and also will be highly informed of the administration of the current administration, including the weaknesses, strengths success and achievement of both the past and present administration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Visionary Leadership and National Progress

Visionary leadership plays a pivotal role in steering a nation toward sustainable growth and development. It involves leaders who are forward-thinking, capable of inspiring their citizens, and committed to long-term goals that transcend immediate political or personal gains (Hermanto et al., 2021). In the context of nation-building, visionary leaders are crucial in setting a clear and compelling direction for the country's future, crafting policies that address the needs of both present and future generations. This type of leadership fosters unity by creating a shared vision that resonates with the diverse segments of society, thus aligning the efforts of citizens, institutions, and the government towards common national objectives.

A visionary leader not only anticipates challenges but also actively works to overcome them by promoting innovation, technology, and education to create new opportunities for economic and social development. In nations where leadership lacks vision, progress is often hindered by short-sighted policies, inconsistent goals, and a focus on immediate rewards, leading to stagnation and division. Conversely, a visionary leadership model prioritises the long-term welfare of the country, encourages systemic reforms, and ensures that policies are designed with an eye on future generations (Chanda & Chitondo, 2024).

Moreover, Bian et al. (2024) explained that visionary leaders can inspire trust and confidence, vital components for nation-building. When citizens believe in the ability of their leaders to navigate complex challenges and create a better future, they are more likely to engage in constructive societal activities, such as voting, civic participation, and supporting national development programmes. In essence, visionary leadership is a cornerstone of national progress, providing a sense of purpose, direction, and unity that propels nations towards lasting development.

Institutional Development and Strengthening

Institutional development and strengthening are foundational to the success of nation-building, as they ensure that the structures responsible for governance and service delivery are efficient, transparent, and accountable (Chanda et al., 2024). Strong institutions are essential for the effective implementation of policies, the protection of citizens' rights, and the maintenance of social order. Institutions such as the judiciary, legislative bodies, law enforcement, and public service sectors must be built on a solid framework of professionalism, ethical standards, and operational capacity to serve the public good.

In countries with weak institutions, governance becomes fragmented, and public trust diminishes, leading to inefficiencies, corruption, and poor service delivery. Strengthening institutions involves investing in human capital, improving organisational structures, and fostering a culture of integrity and accountability. It requires creating systems for transparent decision-making, effective oversight, and consistent enforcement of laws and regulations. Institutional reforms that prioritise merit-based recruitment, career development, and professional training for public servants contribute significantly to enhancing the capacity of government agencies to meet the evolving needs of the population.

Additionally, institutional strengthening provides the framework for sustaining democracy and good governance. It ensures that political transitions do not disrupt the continuity of governance and that policies and projects initiated by one administration are carried forward and built upon by succeeding governments. Well-established and resilient institutions provide stability, which is critical for attracting investment, fostering economic growth, and ensuring that the country can adapt to changes, whether internal or external. Ultimately, institutional development and strengthening empower the state to deliver on its promises to its citizens, thereby driving national progress and cohesion (Dare & Dare, 2019).

Public Trust and Civic Engagement

Public trust is the cornerstone of any functioning democracy, as it fosters the relationship between the government and its citizens. When citizens trust their leaders and public institutions, they are more likely to comply with laws, support policies, and participate in nation building efforts. A lack of trust, on the other hand, can lead to widespread apathy, disenchantment, and even civil unrest. For a nation to progress, its leaders must demonstrate transparency, consistency, and accountability in their actions. Public trust is cultivated when citizens perceive their government as acting in their best interests, showing integrity, and fulfilling promises. Consequently, effective governance hinges on building and maintaining this trust, as it forms the basis for constructive citizen engagement and national cohesion.

Also, Silaban et al. (2024) write that civic engagement plays a crucial role in strengthening democracy and fostering national unity. When citizens are actively involved in the governance process, whether through voting, community initiatives, or public consultations, they contribute to shaping policies and holding leaders accountable. Civic engagement encourages a sense of responsibility and ownership over national progress, enabling individuals to feel invested in the well-being of the state. It also facilitates the collection of diverse perspectives, ensuring that policies reflect the needs and aspirations of all societal segments. Therefore, fostering public trust and promoting civic engagement are mutually reinforcing; when one thrives, the other flourishes, resulting in a more informed, active, and cohesive citizenry that works together to achieve national goals.

Strategic Policy Implementation and Continuity

Effective policy implementation is a fundamental aspect of national development, as it transforms plans into tangible outcomes. However, the success of policy implementation is largely dependent on its strategic alignment with the country's long-term development goals. A well-crafted policy should not only address immediate challenges but also contribute to sustained progress over time. Moreover, to achieve meaningful results, policies must be executed with clarity, consistency, and sufficient resources. The involvement of various stakeholders, including government agencies, the private sector, and civil society, ensures a collaborative approach to overcoming implementation challenges. Importantly, a focus on monitoring and evaluation can help assess the progress of policies and make necessary adjustments for better outcomes.

Equally critical is the need for policy continuity, which ensures that national objectives are pursued with a sense of long-term vision. In many cases, new administrations abandon policies implemented by their predecessors, often due to political differences or a desire to assert their agenda (Weaver, 1986). This disruption can lead to wasted resources, stalled reforms, and confusion among the public. Therefore, institutionalising policy continuity through frameworks that transcend political cycles is vital for sustainable development. Such continuity allows for the accumulation of long-term achievements, facilitates deeper institutional integration, and ensures that the nation's trajectory remains stable, regardless of the political climate. In this way, strategic policy implementation and continuity serve as the bedrock for a resilient and progressive nation-building process.

Anti-Corruption Measures and Transparency

Anti-corruption measures and transparency are essential for building trust between the government and its citizens, and for ensuring that national resources are used effectively for the common good. Corruption not only diverts funds meant for development but also erodes public trust in institutions, making governance inefficient and unsustainable. To combat corruption, it is crucial to implement stringent laws and regulations that penalise corrupt practices, along with the establishment of independent anti-corruption bodies that can operate without political interference. These bodies should be equipped with the power to investigate and prosecute corruption at all levels of government, sending a clear message that corruption will not be tolerated. Additionally, promoting transparency in government processes, such as public procurement, budgeting, and resource allocation, enables citizens to hold leaders accountable, reducing opportunities for embezzlement or misuse of public funds.

Still, transparency fosters a culture of openness, which enhances the effectiveness of government policies. By making information regarding government spending, contracts, and decision-making processes easily accessible

to the public, the government can increase accountability and prevent the misuse of power. This not only helps deter corrupt behaviour but also empowers citizens to participate actively in governance and development processes. Transparent systems of governance, such as open data platforms and public audits, ensure that leaders are held accountable for their actions. Ultimately, when anti-corruption measures are properly enforced and transparency is prioritised, the integrity of public institutions is strengthened, paving the way for effective governance and fostering national development.

Long-Term Planning and Sustainable Development

Long-term planning is critical for fostering sustainable development and ensuring that a nation's progress is not only immediate but also enduring. It requires a forward-thinking approach where leadership focuses on creating policies that align with both current needs and future demands. In this context, long-term planning involves identifying and prioritising key areas of development such as infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic diversification. Rather than focusing on short-term political gains or populist measures, effective leadership should prioritise strategic investments that ensure the nation's resources are used efficiently and equitably over time. Sustainable development goals must integrate economic, social, and environmental considerations, creating a balanced approach that ensures future generations can thrive without compromising the ability of the current generation to meet their needs. Without a clear vision of where a nation is headed in the long run, development risks being fragmented, short-sighted, and unsustainable (Fallah Shayan et al., 2022).

Moreover, the success of long-term planning hinges on the stability of institutions and the political will to implement policies that endure beyond individual leadership cycles. Building a robust institutional framework is necessary to ensure that policies and strategies are continuously carried forward, regardless of changing administrations. This stability fosters confidence among the public, private investors, and international partners, who are more likely to engage in projects that promise long-term returns. Additionally, sustainable development demands a participatory approach, where citizens, local governments, and private sector stakeholders are involved in the planning and decision-making processes. This inclusiveness helps to ensure that development plans are realistic, practical, and responsive to the needs of all sectors of society. Thus, long-term planning, when combined with strong institutional frameworks and widespread participation, becomes a powerful tool for achieving enduring national progress.

Finally, long-term planning requires adaptability, as external factors such as global economic shifts, technological advancements, and environmental challenges may alter the course of development. While a strategic plan provides direction, it must also be flexible enough to accommodate unforeseen changes. Leaders must regularly evaluate and adjust policies to address emerging challenges and opportunities, ensuring that development goals remain relevant and achievable in an ever-changing global landscape. By integrating foresight with adaptability, nations can create a sustainable foundation for economic growth, social well-being, and environmental stewardship that will benefit generations to come.

METHODOLOGY

For this study on the impact of good leadership and administration in nation-building, a document analysis method was employed as the primary research approach. This involved a comprehensive and systematic review of secondary sources relevant to the topic. Data was collected from a variety of sources, such as academic journal articles, government publications, conference papers, and other pertinent materials. These resources provided valuable insights into the crucial role that effective leadership and administration play in the development and progress of a nation. Through this analysis, the study examined key aspects of leadership, governance structures, and administrative practices, as well as the challenges and successes encountered in fostering national growth and stability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from this study underscore the undeniable link between the quality of leadership and the state of nation-building and development in Nigeria. Leadership in the Nigerian context has largely been characterised by inconsistency, lack of vision, and a failure to prioritise the collective good. This has created a ripple effect,

stunting national growth, weakening institutions, and breeding a culture of public mistrust and civic disengagement (Daramola & Etuk, 2020).

One of the most striking patterns identified is the dominance of transactional over transformational leadership. Many political leaders ascend to power through patronage networks and ethnic alliances rather than demonstrable competence or a clear developmental agenda (Abou Ltaif & Mihai-Yiannaki, 2024). As a result, leadership is often reduced to a tool for wealth accumulation and political survival, rather than a platform for service delivery and national progress. This type of leadership undermines the core pillars of nation-building—unity, institutional development, social justice, and economic inclusivity—by reinforcing division and fostering inequality.

Furthermore, the lack of continuity and long-term planning has been a recurring theme. Each administration tends to abandon the projects and policies of its predecessor, regardless of their merit. This absence of strategic continuity, coupled with a culture of politicising development agendas, has led to stalled reforms and wasted public resources. For instance, infrastructure projects are frequently initiated but left uncompleted across successive regimes, while national development plans often remain unimplemented or poorly executed due to shifting political priorities. The result is a nation constantly starting over, never building on past achievements, and perpetually lagging behind its potential.

The study further finds that where leadership has shown elements of integrity, decisiveness, and a clear developmental vision, there have been pockets of success. For example, targeted reforms in the banking, agriculture, and anti-corruption sectors—particularly during periods of strong political will—have yielded measurable progress. These examples highlight that leadership does have the capacity to drive development when guided by purpose, competence, and national interest. However, such successes are often short-lived or isolated, due to the absence of systems that institutionalise good leadership practices beyond individual personalities (Abdulai et al., 2025).

Another critical insight from respondents is the role of leadership in shaping national identity and civic trust. Poor leadership erodes public confidence in the state and alienates citizens from governance processes. This leads to political apathy, reduced voter turnout, resistance to state policies, and a general sense of disconnection from the idea of a unified national project. In contrast, when leadership is inclusive, transparent, and responsive to the needs of diverse groups, it fosters a shared sense of belonging and purpose, which is essential for nation-building.

Essentially, the study confirms that, according to Shiyanbade and Lamidi (2017), the quality of leadership in Nigeria plays a decisive role in determining the success or failure of nation-building efforts. Developmental outcomes are significantly influenced by whether leadership is visionary, ethical, inclusive, and strategically oriented. To achieve meaningful progress, there is a pressing need to reform leadership recruitment and evaluation processes, strengthen accountability mechanisms, and nurture a new generation of leaders committed to long-term national transformation rather than short-term political gains. Without addressing the leadership deficit, any attempt at nation-building is likely to remain superficial and unsustainable.

The study reveals that administrative efficiency and institutional capacity are central to the success of public service delivery and policy implementation in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the current administrative landscape is marred by systemic inefficiencies, overlapping functions, weak coordination, underfunding, and a debilitating lack of professionalism. These issues have collectively hindered the ability of government institutions to translate policies into tangible outcomes, thereby weakening public trust and stalling national development (Ogwola & Uranta, 2022).

A key finding is the pervasive bureaucratic bottleneck that slows down service delivery across all tiers of government. Decision-making processes are often lengthy, over-centralised, and bogged down by red tape, which not only frustrates citizens but also deters investment and innovation within the public sector. According to Damon (2025), Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) frequently operate in silos, with poor data sharing, duplication of efforts, and unclear lines of accountability. This institutional fragmentation results in policy implementation gaps and a disconnect between policy intentions and the realities on the ground.

Moreover, many public sector workers lack the technical capacity and motivation required to deliver services effectively (Okeke, 2020). Issues such as poor remuneration, lack of merit-based promotions, limited access to continuous training, and the politicisation of appointments have led to low morale and minimal productivity among civil servants. In several cases examined, it was discovered that even well-designed policies failed because the administrative machinery was too weak or too compromised to carry them out. For example, public health interventions, education reforms, and agricultural schemes often suffer implementation failure due to insufficient logistical support, weak monitoring and evaluation systems, and a lack of institutional continuity.

Institutional capacity is also severely constrained by financial mismanagement and corruption. Resources allocated for public services are frequently diverted or underutilised due to poor procurement practices, the absence of transparency, and weak oversight. This leads to a cycle where institutions are not just inefficient but also distrusted by the public they are meant to serve. Without confidence in the state's ability to deliver, citizens increasingly turn to informal or private alternatives, further undermining the legitimacy and relevance of public institutions.

However, there are positive examples where administrative reforms have led to improved service delivery. For instance, the digitalisation of certain government services, such as tax administration and passport processing, has shown that with the right systems, capacity building, and political will, administrative efficiency can be achieved. These successes underline the fact that institutional failure is not inevitable, but rather a consequence of neglect and poor governance choices (Diouf, 2025).

The study affirms that administrative efficiency and institutional capacity are not just technical issues—they are foundational to achieving sustainable development and delivering the dividends of democracy. Strengthening public institutions through civil service reform, professional development, transparency measures, and improved inter-agency coordination is critical. Without a capable and responsive administrative structure, even the most visionary policies will remain aspirations on paper, and nation-building will continue to be undermined by ineffective governance.

Finally, this study identifies a range of entrenched governance-related challenges that have significantly impaired Nigeria's ability to build a resilient and inclusive state. These challenges are both structural and behavioural, manifesting in leadership practices, administrative dysfunction, institutional decay, and a disconnection between government and the governed. The findings highlight that the country's governance crisis is not merely a function of inadequate resources or policy gaps, but deeply rooted in the absence of a coherent and accountable system for managing public affairs.

One of the foremost challenges is the politicisation of governance. According to Okoi & Iwara (2021), leadership positions—both elective and appointive—are often filled based on loyalty, ethnicity, or political patronage rather than merit and competence. This undermines the professionalism of public institutions and creates an environment where mediocrity thrives. It also fosters a “big man” culture in leadership, where leaders operate above scrutiny, weakening transparency and distorting the policy process. As a result, policies tend to serve elite interests rather than the broader national agenda, and institutions lose their credibility in the eyes of citizens.

Corruption remains another critical barrier. The study found that systemic corruption continues to cripple governance at all levels, eroding the capacity of institutions to perform their basic functions. From inflated contracts and ghost workers to misappropriated public funds and opaque budgeting processes, corruption has created a trust deficit between the state and its citizens. It also undermines efforts at reform, as anti-corruption initiatives are often selective, short-lived, or weaponised against political opponents rather than pursued as genuine accountability mechanisms.

The centralised nature of Nigeria's governance architecture also emerged as a significant hindrance. Overconcentration of power and decision-making at the federal level stifles innovation and responsiveness at the subnational level. States and local governments often lack the autonomy and capacity to design and implement context-specific solutions. This top-heavy governance model limits citizen participation, weakens local accountability, and delays service delivery.

Despite these challenges, the study also revealed avenues for reform. Respondents and secondary data analysis pointed to several actionable strategies that could strengthen leadership and administrative systems in Nigeria. First is the institutionalisation of merit-based recruitment and performance management systems across all levels of government. This would improve professionalism and morale in public service and ensure that capable individuals occupy leadership and technical roles.

Second, governance structures must be decentralised to empower subnational governments with greater fiscal and policy autonomy. This would enhance responsiveness to local needs and allow for more tailored development interventions. Third, there must be a shift from personality-driven leadership to system-driven governance. This can be achieved by strengthening democratic institutions such as electoral bodies, oversight agencies, and civil society organisations to enforce accountability, transparency, and citizen participation.

Sustained investment in leadership development programmes, administrative training, and institutional reform is essential. The study concludes that strengthening governance in Nigeria is not a one-off event but a continuous process requiring political will, institutional stability, and citizen engagement. Without confronting these foundational issues, both leadership and administration will continue to fall short of the transformative role they are meant to play in Nigeria's journey toward sustainable development and nation-building.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Transformational Leadership Theory which provide a suitable framework for understanding how effective leadership can inspire national development, institutional reforms, and citizen participation necessary for nation-building.

Propounders and origin of Transformational Leadership Theory

The Transformational Leadership Theory was developed by James MacGregor Burns in 1978 and further expanded by Bernard M. Bass in 1985. The theory posits that leaders can transform society by inspiring followers to transcend personal interests and work towards collective goals.

According to Burns (1978), transformational leaders motivate followers through a compelling vision, moral values, and commitment to societal progress. Bass (1985) further explained that transformational leadership consists of four major dimensions such as:

- **Idealized Influence:** Leaders serve as role models, demonstrating integrity, accountability, and ethical behaviours that followers admire and emulate.
- **Inspirational Motivation:** Leaders communicate a clear vision that inspires citizens and institutions to pursue national goals collectively.
- **Intellectual Stimulation:** Leaders encourage innovation, creativity, and problem-solving to address developmental challenges.
- **Individualized Consideration:** Leaders recognize the needs of citizens and provide support that promotes growth, inclusion, and empowerment.

Relevance of the Theory to the Study

The Transformational Leadership Theory is highly relevant because nation-building requires leaders who can inspire national unity and patriotism, promote institutional reforms, encourage citizen participation in governance, drive economic and social development, establish accountability and transparency and create sustainable development strategies.

In the Nigerian context, transformational leadership can help address governance challenges such as corruption, poor service delivery, weak institutions, and lack of policy continuity.

Application of the Theory to Nigeria

The persistent challenges of underdevelopment, corruption, political instability, and weak institutions in Nigeria can largely be attributed to the absence of transformational leadership. Many political leaders have focused on personal or group interests rather than national development objectives.

Transformational Leadership Theory therefore provides an appropriate framework for analyzing how leadership quality affects nation-building and development outcomes in Nigeria. The theory helps explain why countries with visionary and ethical leaders tend to experience rapid development, while countries with poor leadership often remain underdeveloped despite abundant resources.

Case Studies of Successful Leadership Initiatives in Nigeria

Agricultural Transformation Agenda (2011–2015): Led by Akinwumi Adesina, the initiative modernized agriculture through direct distribution of farm inputs to farmers using mobile technology, reduced corruption in fertilizer allocation, increased food production, and created employment opportunities.

Banking Sector Reforms (2004–2009): Led by Charles Soludo, the reforms strengthened the banking industry through consolidation, improved financial stability, increased public confidence, and attracted greater investment into the Nigerian economy.

Public Finance and Anti-Corruption Reforms: Led by Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the reforms improved transparency in government finances, reduced revenue leakages, enhanced accountability, and contributed to Nigeria's successful debt relief negotiations.

Lagos State Governance Reforms (1999–2007): Led by Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the reforms increased internally generated revenue, improved infrastructure, strengthened public institutions, and enhanced service delivery across Lagos State.

Pension Reform Act (2004): The reform introduced a contributory pension system that improved pension administration, reduced fraud, protected workers' retirement savings, and created a sustainable pension management framework.

These initiatives demonstrate that effective leadership, transparency, innovation, institutional strengthening, and long-term planning can significantly improve governance, economic development, and nation-building in Nigeria. They provide practical examples of how transformational leadership contributes to national progress and sustainable development.

Case Studies of Successful Leadership Initiatives in Nigeria

Ajaokuta Steel Project: The Ajaokuta Steel Project was established to drive Nigeria's industrialization and reduce dependence on imported steel. However, poor leadership, policy inconsistency, corruption, and mismanagement led to decades of underperformance despite huge government investments. The project remains largely unproductive, representing a major failure in national development planning.

Power Sector Reforms: Successive governments introduced reforms aimed at improving electricity generation and distribution. However, weak implementation, corruption, inadequate infrastructure, and policy discontinuity have prevented the sector from achieving its objectives. Nigeria continues to experience persistent power shortages, which negatively affect economic growth and industrial development.

National Development Plans and Policy Discontinuity: Many development programmes introduced by successive administrations, such as the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Vision 2010, Vision 20:2020, and several economic development plans, suffered from poor implementation and abandonment by succeeding governments. The lack of continuity, long-term commitment, and institutional support limited their effectiveness and developmental impact.

Anti-Corruption Campaigns: Despite the establishment of agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission, corruption remains widespread due to

political interference, selective prosecution, and weak enforcement mechanisms. This has undermined public trust and reduced the effectiveness of governance reforms.

These failed initiatives reveal recurring leadership challenges in Nigeria, including corruption, lack of accountability, weak institutions, policy inconsistency, poor implementation, and inadequate long-term planning. The failures demonstrate that without visionary leadership, strong institutions, and sustained commitment to national goals, development programmes are unlikely to achieve their intended objectives or contribute meaningfully to nation-building.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The profound connection between leadership quality and the success of nation-building in Nigeria reveals that inconsistent leadership, transactional practices, and a lack of long-term vision have hindered national growth. Leadership in Nigeria often prioritises patronage and personal survival over developmental goals, undermining key aspects of nation-building such as unity, institutional development, and social justice. Moreover, the lack of continuity in policies and programmes further impedes progress, with each administration discarding previous initiatives, resulting in stalled reforms and wasted resources. However, examples of successful reforms show that leadership can drive progress when guided by integrity, competence, and a clear vision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Institutionalisation of Merit-Based Recruitment and Performance Management Systems:** To enhance professionalism and trust in public service, Nigeria should implement transparent, merit-based recruitment processes, ensuring that positions are filled based on competence, not political affiliation. This should be coupled with a robust performance management system that sets clear, measurable targets for public servants at all levels, with regular evaluations.
2. **Decentralisation of Governance and Empowerment of Subnational Governments:** Nigeria must decentralise governance by granting states and local governments greater autonomy over fiscal management, policy formulation, and implementation, enabling localised, context-specific development strategies.
3. **Strengthening of Oversight and Accountability Mechanisms:** To curb corruption and enhance transparency, independent oversight bodies should be empowered to hold public officials accountable, with regular public reporting on government performance and expenditures.
4. **Investment in Leadership Development and Institutional Capacity Building:** Long-term leadership programmes focused on ethical governance, strategic planning, and public sector management should be created for both elected officials and public servants. Investment in continuous training for civil servants will further improve administrative efficiency and policy implementation.

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