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Leadership Innovation Through Transparency and Accountability for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract: Several studies have shown that leadership plays a pivotal role for the growth and development of a Nation either developed, underdeveloped or developing. This can only be seen through leadership strategy known as leadership innovation initiatives (LII). Against this premise, this paper examined leadership innovation through transparency and accountability for sustainable development in Nigeria. The theoretical framework for the paper is Transformational Leadership Theory by James MacGregor Burns in (1978). Within the context of framework, this paper depended on secondary sources of data obtained from textbooks, journals, internet and other published articles relating to the study. The paper found out that, an innovative leader is the one that has the capacity to think and bring out issues that would put it on the trajectory of development such as, vision, transparency and accountability mechanisms. Furthermore, the paper reveals some of the hurdles faced by leaders that affects her sustainable development to include; absence of political ideology, lack of vision and institutional imbalances. The paper also reveals ways of enhancing leadership innovation through accountability and transparency by enhancing civic engagement, public participation and ethical standards of the public service. The paper concluded that leadership innovation enhances good governance, economic stability, social cohesion, and institutional integrity to Nigeria's growth and development.

Keywords: Accountability, Innovation, Leadership, Sustainable Development, Transparency.

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Introduction

No nation across the globe can succeed without a leader, every society set her goals and the actualization of these goals can be materialized by leaders that are visionary and innovative. Lee Kuan Yew, leadership in Singapore (1959–1990). Played a central role in shaping Singapore's transformation from a poor, resource-scarce Island into one of the world's most prosperous and efficient nations. One of the major problems in the recent times has been lack of innovation, accountability that is pivotal to leadership in Africa and Nigeria in particular. It is due to lack of openness on the side of leaders that this paper is birthed on the issue of accountability and transparency. On the other hand, innovation brings about high level of performance and change of a given organization. Concerns regarding responsible leadership and accountability in public administration persist, especially in this era of transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Consequently, accountability remains one of the major challenges facing modern leadership in Nigeria (Chan & Rosenbloom, 2010).

Achieving sustainable development in Nigeria is not only establishing policy structures but also on the competence and integrity of its leadership which is central to driving the country's socio-economic progress. With the global transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the more expansive Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there is a growing need for leaders to demonstrate innovation, openness, and accountability. Leadership that embraces change, upholds ethical standards, and encourages public participation which is essential for building institutional trust and improving governance outcomes (Agboola et al., 2017; Akinbode & Shadare, 2019; Igbokwe et al., 2024). Nevertheless, Nigeria faces persistent leadership challenges, including corruption, lack of transparency, and fragile accountability systems, all of which hinder sustainable development efforts (Ojo, 2021). This study investigates leadership innovation through accountability and transparency.

Conceptual Framework

Leadership

Leadership refers to the act of directing,

inspiring, and motivating people or teams toward a shared objective or vision. It includes establishing a clear path, encouraging cooperation, and managing obstacles and transitions. It can arise in different situations and is not confined to official positions, it is often characterized by qualities such as honesty, compassion, and sound judgment (Amuda-Kannike & Shiyanbade, 2023).

Leadership is a multifaceted concept that refers to the ability to influence, guide, and motivate individuals or groups to achieve specific goals. It is not solely about holding a formal position of power but involves inspiring others through vision, integrity, and effective communication. According to Northouse (2021) as quoted by Igbokwe et al., (2024) leadership is "a process whereby an individual influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal". This definition emphasizes on the relational and dynamic nature of leadership, where influence, rather than authority, is central.

According to Jacob and Jacques (1990), "Leadership is a process of giving purpose (meaningful direction) to collective effort, and causing willing

effort to be expended to achieve collective purpose." The implication of this definition is that, leadership has to do with the ability of the leader to show the right path to the group or people he leads and to be able to make them see the need to go the way he wants them to go. Roger (2012) wrote that:

Leadership is showing the way and helping or inducing others to pursue it. This entails envisioning a desirable future, promoting a clear purpose or mission, supportive values and intelligent strategies, and empowering and engaging all those concerned. (Roger, 2012:9).

From this definition it follows that the led are ignorant or that they do not know the way, or by extension, they are "blind." They therefore use the eyes of the one leading them to see. The one that is leading them sees for them, and beyond that, he helps them, persuades them, convinces them to see the brighter future, and implores them to endure the pains they are bound to suffer in the process of going to their 'promise land.' Thus, LII as a strategy for effective leadership and sustainable development drawing insights from Singapore "Lee Kuan Yew" innovative and honest leadership

development initiatives that took the country from the third world to first world.

Furthermore, no society can survive without leadership, hence it is a panacea for development and transformation of a society, an innovative leader captured in the paper means a leader that is able to think and bring out new ideas that would transform the trajectory of a nation, this can be actualized through accountable and transparent process (Igbokwe et al., 2024).

Take for instance the case of Singapore which show that, poverty is not destiny. With visionary and innovative leadership, sound policies, and national discipline, even resource poor nations can become First World countries. Nigeria, with its vast human and natural resources, has the potential but must learn from Singapore's model of leadership, discipline, economic diversification, accountability, transparency and institutional reforms that changed her developmental trajectory.

Innovation

The concept of innovation is used closely with leadership, hence the inability to

innovate may make a leader or organization not to attain its optimal goal, and this is so because of the evolving dynamic society human beings leave in and the change which is constant. Innovation consists of the generation of a new idea and its implementation into a new product, process or service, leading to the dynamic growth of the national economy and the increase of employment as well as to a creation of pure profit for the innovative business enterprise. Innovation is never a one-time phenomenon, but a long and cumulative process of a great number of organizational decision-making processes, ranging from the phase of generation of a new idea to its implementation phase. New idea refers to the perception of a new customer need or a new way to produce. It is generated in the cumulative process of information-gathering, coupled with an ever-challenging entrepreneurial vision.

Through the implementation process the new idea is developed and commercialized into a new marketable product or a new process with attendant cost reduction and increased productivity (Urabe, 2023). According to Twiss,

(2021) innovation is a process that combines science, technology, economics and management, as it is to achieve novelty and extends from the emergence of the idea to its commercialization in the form of production, exchange, consumption. Bringing the two concepts together therefore, leadership innovation is new, creative, and transformative ways of governing, managing public affairs, and solving national problems.

Leadership innovation can therefore be seen as the process of leader adopting new dimensions of that thinking that is geared towards doing something new for the benefit of all and sundry.

Accountability

Accountability is seen as answerability for one's action or behaviour. That is to say, in the performance of duties, the persons performing the assigned duty must be held responsible by the ones or those who have assigned him or her the duty. It implies the notion of hierarchy of subordinate and superordinate relationship in a social group whether such a group is the family, community, social, political or economic organization which has specific aims, objectives or

goals. It is a key concept in the civil service and good governance. Not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organizations that ought to be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders who is accountable to whom varies depending on whether decisions or actions taken are internal or external to an organization or institution.

Accountability is answerability for one's action or behavior. That is to say that, in the performance of duties, the persons performing the assigned duty must be held responsible by the ones or those who have assigned him or her the duty, this is why Sorkaa (2003) argues that accountability as the obligation of a subordinate to the superordinate to be answerable to the superordinate in carrying out assigned duties and the exercising of discretionary powers.

Transparency

Transparency refers to openness or clarity. It is the accessibility to public information that is important and necessary about issues or matters. Transparency means that decisions taken

and their enforcement are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations. It also means that information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement. It is a state of showing that government activities is based on the openness to the general public as a whole. Transparency symbolizes a mechanism of promoting good governance and public trust in a democratic and modern public administration. In democratic and modern public administration, the principle of transparency is a controlling element against maladministration and corruption and the promoter of good governance and accountability toward protection of public interest of the citizens' rights.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is wide concept in public administration, it is generally seen as progress, environmental sustainability, and social fairness, ensuring that current human needs are met without endangering the ability of future generations to satisfy theirs. It gained prominence in the late 20th

century as a response to rising environmental issues, persistent poverty, and social inequalities. A key definition, widely accepted today, was introduced in the (1987) by Brundtland Report by the World Commission on Environment and Development. The report described sustainable development as a form of advancement that fulfils present demands while preserving resources and opportunities for future generations (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

The Central to the idea of sustainable development are three interconnected pillars: economic sustainability, environmental preservation, and social justice. Economic sustainability focuses on promoting growth and productivity in ways that support livelihoods and essential infrastructure while safeguarding finite resources. (Sachs, 2015). In addition, sustainable development requires moving away from extractive or harmful growth models toward approaches that protect the natural environment. It acknowledges that environmental resources are limited and that ecosystems and human life are closely linked.

For example, practices like deforestation and unsustainable farming might yield short-term economic advantages but ultimately harm the environment over time. As a result, sustainable development advocates for the use of renewable energy, eco-friendly farming, green technologies, and circular economy principles that emphasize recycling and waste reduction (UNDP, 2020). These methods help societies become more resilient and capable of adapting to ongoing challenges such as global warming and species extinction.

Historical Overview of Leadership in Nigeria

The issue of leadership is as old as man existed, from the pre-colonial to post-colonial. But for the sake of this paper, the leadership would be looked from the period of independence in 1960 to the present era.

Nigeria gained independence in 1960, entering in to a democratic parliamentary system under Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and President Nnamdi Azikiwe. Leadership during the First Republic was characterized by regionalism and ethnic competition,

reflecting colonial legacies. The Northern People's Congress (NPC), led by Balewa, dominated federal politics, while regional parties like the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) and Action Group (AG) controlled the east and west, respectively (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

Leadership styles were often autocratic, influenced by traditional hierarchies, as nationalists like Ahmadu Bello relied on aristocratic authority (Audu, 2024). Corruption, ethnic favoritism, and political intrigues undermined governance, leading to a legitimacy crisis (Ejimabo, 2013). The 1964–1965 elections, marred by violence and rigging, exposed the fragility of civilian leadership, culminating in the 1966 military coup that deposed Balewa (Udogu, 2001).

The 1966 coup, led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, witnessed the beginning of prolonged military rule, characterized by centralized, authoritarian leadership. General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi's brief tenure introduced Decree No. 34, aiming to unify Nigeria but fuelling ethnic tensions, leading to his assassination (Audu, 2024; Adeoti,

2025). Subsequent leaders, like Yakubu Gowon (1966–1975), Murtala Muhammed (1975–1976), and Olusegun Obasanjo (1976–1979), adopted command-and-control styles, reflecting military discipline (Falola & Heaton, 2008). The Second Republic (1979–1983), under President Shehu Shagari, briefly restored civilian rule but was plagued by corruption and economic mismanagement, leading to another coup in 1983 (Alabi, 2023). Military regimes under Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993) and Sani Abacha (1993–1998) were marked by corruption, human rights abuses, and patronage networks sustained by oil wealth (Chatham House, 2022). These regimes prioritized regime survival over national development, with Abacha's rule notably brutal, exemplified by the execution of the Ogoni Nine (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

Democracy and Contemporary Leadership trend in the Nigeria's fourth Republic

The Fourth Republic, beginning in 1999, marked Nigeria's return to civilian rule under President Olusegun Obasanjos. Leadership patterns shifted toward

democratic and transformational styles, though autocratic tendencies persisted due to entrenched political elites (Ojokuku et al., 2012). The National Assembly, comprising the Senate and House of Representatives, became a key institution, with leaders like Senate Presidents David Mark and Ken Nnamani navigating complex ethnic and political dynamics (Ige, 2021). However, leadership challenges persisted such challenges like, corruption, ethnic competition, and weak institutional accountability (Alabi, 2023).

Studies suggest that a mix of autocratic and participative leadership styles enhances organizational performance in Nigeria, particularly in small enterprises (Audu, 2024). Transformational leadership centers on vision and employee development, been advocated to address Nigeria's leadership deficits (Abasilim et al., 2019). Despite democratic progress, issues like electoral fraud and elite capture continue to hinder effective governance (Chatham House, 2022).

Cultural and Structural Influences on Leadership in Nigeria

Nigeria's leadership patterns are deeply influenced by its cultural diversity and structural challenges. Ogbogu and Ademola (2018) notes that culture shapes leadership through shared assumptions learned from solving societal problems. In Nigeria, ethnic diversity and historical divisions foster a leadership environment where loyalty often prioritizes ethnic or regional interests over national unity (Ejimabo, 2013). Corruption remains a pervasive challenge, with participants in Ejimabo's study (2013) citing it as a major barrier to effective leadership. The colonial legacy of executive dominance and weak legislative oversight continues to shape governance trajectory in Nigeria, with the legislature struggling to enforce accountability (Alabi, 2023). Additionally, Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy, rooted in Pan-Africanism, has influenced leadership priorities, particularly in regional diplomacy under leaders like Tafawa Balewa (Nwalie, 2022).

Why Leadership is Critical to Nigeria's Development

Leadership is pivotal to Nigeria's development, serving it is the fulcrum for

addressing the nation's multifaceted challenges and unlocking its vast potential. Nigeria, endowed with abundant human and material resources, has struggled to translate these assets into sustainable socio-economic progress due to persistent leadership deficits. Some of these factors that makes leadership critical to the Nigeria's development include:

Leadership as a Catalyst for Effective Governance: Effective governance is the backbone of national development, and leadership is its driving force. In Nigeria, the public sector, which shapes policies and drives economic progress has often been marred by corruption, mediocrity, and inefficiency due to poor leadership. The absence of visionary leaders who prioritize national interest over self-preservation has deepened governance crises, leading to policy reversals and weak institutional frameworks. According to Duke (2012), inept and corrupt leadership has significantly hindered Nigeria's development, with leaders often adopting a Western model that fails to address the country's unique socio-cultural diversities. This nuance necessitates a paradigm shift toward

leadership deep rooted in Nigeria's cultural values and aspirations, as proposed by the author's call for a return to the visions of the nation's founding fathers.

Leadership in Nigeria must foster accountability and transparency to strengthen governance structures. The prevalence of "chop-I-chop" politics, characterized by cronyism and partisanship, has eroded public trust and stalled development initiatives. Anekwe (2020) identifies leadership deficiencies as a critical barrier to socio-economic progress, emphasizing that leaders must embody moral integrity and a commitment to the rule of law to reverse this trend. By establishing robust anti-corruption institutions and ensuring their independence, leaders can create an environment conducive to sustainable governance, as recommended by studies examining Nigeria's public sector challenges.

Economic Development through Strategic Leadership: Economic instability in Nigeria, marked by poverty, unemployment, and infrastructural decay, is a direct consequence of leadership failures. Transformational

leadership, which inspires and mobilizes followers toward a shared vision, is essential for economic revitalization. Ughulu (2024) argues that transformational leadership can positively impact organizational and national outcomes by fostering innovation and adaptability. In Nigeria's context, such leadership could drive economic diversification, reducing dependence on oil and promoting sectors like agriculture and technology. For instance, the failure to nurture Nigeria's potential as a global economic player, as anticipated at the 1962 Geneva World Economic Conference, underscores the need for leaders who can translate vision into actionable policies.

Leadership also plays a critical role in resource management. Nigeria's rich natural resources have been mismanaged due to corrupt practices and a lack of strategic foresight. Bankole and Olaniyi (2014) highlight how leadership crises have prevented Nigeria from leveraging its resources for socio-economic development, resulting in a "failed state" trajectory. Effective leaders must prioritize equitable resource distribution and implement policies that address

poverty and food security, as suggested by Yagboyaju (2020). By fostering an enabling environment for investment and infrastructure development, such as reliable power and transportation systems, leaders can catalyse economic growth and enhance Nigeria's global competitiveness.

Fostering Social Cohesion and National Unity:

Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious landscape presents both opportunities and challenges for development. Leadership is central in bridging divides and fostering of social cohesion which is essential for national stability. Ethnic and religious crises, necessitated by poor leadership, have exacerbated social fragmentation and hindered development efforts. Ejimabo (2013) notes that leadership in Nigeria's Eastern Region has often lacked inclusivity, contributing to regional disparities and unrest. Leaders must adopt a participatory approach, as described by Lewin's democratic leadership style, to promote social equality and involve diverse groups in decision-making processes.

The imposition pattern of leadership

selection, where leaders are often appointed rather than elected through meritocratic processes, has further entrenched division. Duke (2012) critiques this practice, arguing that it results in leaders with limited experience and vision, who fail to address Nigeria's complex challenges. To foster unity, leaders must embrace Plato's leadership education theory, which emphasizes the cultivation of intellectually and morally equipped leaders. Sholarin (2016) advocates for this approach, suggesting that educating leaders in ethical governance can initiate policies that promote sustainable political development and social harmony.

Building Institutional Integrity and Capacity:

Strong institutions are vital for sustainable development, and leadership is the linchpin for their establishment and maintenance of Nigeria's institutions weakened by corruption and a lack of ideological grounding, as evidenced by frequent policy reversals and eroded professional standards. Folarin (2013) asserts that the leadership crisis in Nigeria stems from a failure to build institutions that can withstand political

volatility. Leaders must prioritize institutional reforms that enhance accountability and efficiency, such as those recommended by studies on Nigeria's public sector.

Challenges Confronting Leadership in Nigeria

Since independence in 1960, Nigerian leadership has been plagued by a persistent absence of transparency and accountability. In a society where corruption is deeply rooted, it is nearly impossible to for a transparent and responsible governance system. Successive Nigerian governments have consistently failed to uphold these principles. A truly accountable government listens and responds to the needs of its citizens. This accountability is best sustained through a robust legal system and the independence of the judiciary. Citizens should have the right to challenge governmental misconduct through legal means, this has resulted to the fact that Nigeria has struggled in this area, as corruption permeates all tiers of governance. This widespread corruption is closely linked to weak systems of accountability and a lack of transparency.

Public offices are frequently misused for personal enrichment (Ogbogu & Ademola, 2018).

a. Absence of Political Ideology:

The lack of clear political ideology has been a major drawback in Nigeria's political landscape, particularly since the return to democracy in 1999. Ideology refers to a set of beliefs or principles shared by a group, often serving as a guide for political and social behavior. Political ideologies define ethical and strategic visions for governance, while epistemological ideologies shape understanding of knowledge, reality, and decision-making. In Nigeria, political elites tend to form a parasitic class, exploiting state structures for personal economic gain rather than contributing productively to national development. The excessive politicization of the state reflects a raw struggle for power, influence, and resources. Political contests lack ideological depth and are instead driven by narrow, self-serving ambitions (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

b. Lack of Visionary Leadership:

Nigeria's leadership crisis is also characterized by a failure to develop and execute long-term development

strategies. Leaders often prioritize short-term objectives that align with election cycles or patronage networks rather than national progress. According to Eze (2015), the absence of a national vision leads to reactive rather than proactive leadership, thereby compounding Nigeria's social and economic problems. This means that Nigerians leaders don't take steps to ameliorate the future occurrences, rather they wait until something happen, the language of we are going to do everything possible to bring the culprits to book has been a compound name in Nigeria.

c. Weak Institutional Capacity:

Fragile institutions is another barrier to effective leadership in Nigeria. Many lacks the independence, professionalism, and authority necessary to uphold the rule of law and implement policies effectively. As Akinola (2018) notes, the weakening of institutional checks and balances paves the way for excessive executive control and widespread inefficiency in governance.

d. Ethno-religious Divisions:

Ethnic and religious diversity, while a potential strength, has often undermined leadership in Nigeria. Leaders are

frequently compelled to appease ethnic and religious factions, leading to appointments and decisions based on favouritism rather than merit system. This fosters a sense of exclusion and exacerbates national disunity. As observed by Suberu (2015), the manipulation of identity for political purposes continues to obstruct national cohesion and development in Nigeria overtime.

Mechanism for enhancing Leadership innovation on Accountability and Transparency

Leadership in Nigeria for decades been hindered by endemic corruption, lack of transparency, and weak mechanisms for accountability. These deficiencies have severely undermined democratic consolidation, national development, and public trust in governance. To address these challenges, it is essential to explore various strategic and systemic ways to enhance leadership through accountability and transparency. These ways include the following:

a. Strengthening Institutional Frameworks: One of the most effective way to promote accountability and

transparency in Nigeria is through the strengthening of institutional frameworks. Institutions such as the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), the Office of the Auditor-General of the Federation and Public Complaint Commission must be given full autonomy and adequate funding as well as legal backing to operate independently of political interference. According to Adeoti (2025) argues that the weakness of Nigeria's anti-corruption institutions is often attributed to political control and insufficient operational independence. An effective institutional framework ensures that those in leadership positions are held accountable for their actions through regular audits, financial disclosures, and prosecution for misconduct. Transparent institutions also discourage impunity and enhance the credibility of public officeholders.

b. Promoting Freedom of Information and Access to Public Records: Another essential strategy is to enforce and expand the implementation

of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act. The FOI Act, enacted in (2011), grants citizens the legal right to request public records and documents without undue restrictions. When properly enforced, this law can foster transparency by exposing irregularities, inflating contracts, budget padding, and other forms of mismanagement. However, the level of compliance with this law remains low across many government institutions. A study by Ojo (2014) as cited by Adeoti (2025) indicates that public servants often ignore FOI requests or delay responses, thus undermining its impact. To improve this, civil society organizations and the media must continue to mount pressure on public institutions to adhere strictly to the provisions of the Act. Additionally, public education campaigns should be launched to make citizens aware of their rights to information.

c. Enhancing Civic Engagement and Public Participation: Leadership accountability cannot be achieved in isolation from the people. An informed and active citizenry is central to promoting transparency in governance. Through civic engagement, citizens can demand answers, critique public policies,

and influence decision-making. In Nigeria, however, civic participation is often low due to political apathy, fear of victimization, and a lack of awareness of civic rights. Enhancing civic education in schools, communities, and public institutions can help to inculcate a culture of accountability from the grassroots level. Moreover, participatory governance where citizens are consulted during budget formulation, policy planning, and project execution should be institutionalized. According to Ogbogu and Ademola (2018), participatory governance promotes local ownership and reduces elite domination of the political space.

d. Leveraging Digital Technology and E-Governance: In the digital age, technology can serve as a powerful tool to enhance leadership accountability and transparency. E-governance platforms such as open budget portals, digital procurement systems, and real-time project monitoring dashboards can reduce corruption and increase public access to information. For example, the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) in Nigeria has introduced online tendering processes to minimize human

interference and manipulation. Similarly, the Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) utilizes digital tools to track revenues from oil and gas operations, making the data available to the public. According to Akande (2021), digital transparency tools, when backed by political will, significantly improve governance outcomes by exposing inefficiencies and empowering citizens to demand better services.

e. Enacting and Enforcing Ethical Standards in Public Service:

Leadership in Nigeria can also be enhanced through the establishment and strict enforcement of ethical codes for public officeholders. These codes should include clear guidelines on conflict of interest, asset declaration, nepotism, bribery, and abuse of office. The Code of Conduct Bureau is mandated to ensure compliance with such ethics, but enforcement has been weak due to political compromise and lack of transparency in the declaration of assets. Leadership training programs focused on ethics and accountability must be made mandatory for all elected and appointed officials. As Akande (2021) argues, the

problem with Nigeria is one of leadership failure, and this can only be addressed by instilling a strong sense of moral responsibility in public officials.

f. Implementing Transparent Electoral Processes: Leadership begins with how leaders emerge. Transparent electoral processes are critical in ensuring that public officials are truly accountable to the people. Electoral transparency involves the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) must be reformed to ensure neutrality, competence, and transparency. In addition, digital voter registration, biometric verification, and electronic transmission of results can help reduce electoral fraud. As noted by Ojo (2014), democratic accountability is only meaningful when elections reflect the genuine will of the people. Leaders who gain power through manipulated elections are unlikely to be accountable to citizens.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the paper is Transformational Leadership Theory by James MacGregor Burns in (1978).

This theory emphasizes motivating and inspiring followers to go beyond their personal interests in pursuit of broader organizational or collective goals. Its thrust is driving meaningful change by nurturing and empowering individuals through clear vision, motivation, critical thinking, innovation and personalized support. This leadership style enhances team commitment, innovation, and a strong sense of direction. For example, transformational leaders often question conventional methods and promote new ideas and solutions, helping organizations grow and adjust to evolving circumstances (Bass & Riggio, 2006). They also build strong relationships by being genuine and ethical, which deepens trust and encourages long-term dedication among team members in a given society.

Relevance of the transformational leadership theory

Transformational leadership is closely related to leadership innovation through accountability and transparency because it essentially supports values that reflect these ideals. At its core, this leadership style is rooted in ethics and strong values,

which help build trust and dedication among followers. Transformational leaders are honest, open, and takes responsibility for one's actions key elements that support transparent leadership is by demonstrating ethical conduct and encouraging clear communication, they help create a culture where transparency is not just accepted but becomes a standard practice.

Transformational leadership encourages innovation by mentally engaging team members, promoting fresh ideas, independent thinking, and the courage to challenge outdated systems. This readiness to embrace new approaches, along with a dedication to collective goals, makes innovation more inclusive and lasting. Accountability is another vital aspect of this leadership approach. Through personalized attention, transformational leaders set high expectations for themselves and their teams, ensuring that actions are consistent with organizational values and public accountability.

Conclusion

Leadership is central to Nigeria's growth and development, it enhances good

governance, economic stability, social cohesion, and institutional integrity. The persistent leadership crisis bothered on corruption, lack of ideology, and weak institutions, has hindered Nigeria's progress despite its vast potential. As Achebe noted in his book, titled "the Trouble with Nigeria." "Chinua Achebe said "the problem with Nigeria is squarely a failure of leadership". According to him, Nigeria's issues do not stem from a lack of resources or potential, but from the inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, and to the demand of sound and visionary governance. He argued that until the country gets its leadership right leaders who are honest, selfless, competent, and committed Nigeria will continue to struggle with underdevelopment, corruption, and social disintegration."

Policy Recommendations

A leader must be innovative, as creativity significantly influences the quality of decision-making. The capacity to develop original solutions is crucial in identifying new opportunities and diagnosing problems. Leaders should inspire their

followers to express their individual strengths and innovative ideas, promoting effective problem-solving without requiring constant direction;

Additionally, leaders must uphold strong moral values and ethical standards to effectively respond to the needs, concerns, and issues faced by citizens."

Revamping Anti-Corruption Agencies, should be enhanced, agencies like the EFCC and ICPC must be granted full autonomy and adequately funded to investigate and prosecute corruption cases without political interference by the political office holders;

Mandatory Asset Declaration be enhanced, Introduction of technology-based verification systems to monitor declared assets of public officials, with legal consequences for false declarations or unexplained wealth;

Nigeria needs a transformational leader who are ethical, inclusive, and visionary grounded in values such as respect, service, justice, honesty, and a strong sense of community engagements. The nation needs leaders who prioritize fairness in their decisions balancing the needs of individuals with the collective good;

Also, Nigeria's leaders require a well-educated, sincere and honest individuals in both administrative and leadership roles. Given Nigeria's current leadership challenges, there is a pressing need for selfless and charismatic figures who can correct past missteps in the country;

Strengthening the Auditor-General's office, the auditor general should be truly made independent and should be empowered to audit all government expenditures with transparent public reporting mechanisms;

The anti-corruption institutions, promoting merit-based leadership selection, and investing in leadership education rooted in Nigeria's cultural values by adopting these measures, Nigeria can overcome its development paradox and achieve sustainable progress, with the aspirations of its founding fathers and the expectations of her citizenry;

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