

Effect of Strategic Leadership Practices on Organizational Performance of Non-Governmental Organizations in Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract: *We set out to examine how strategic leadership practices bear on the organisational performance of Non-Governmental Organisations in Abuja, Nigeria. In this research, we took programme effectiveness as our gauge for organisational performance and focused our attention on four particular areas: the setting of strategic direction, ethical governance, stakeholder engagement and strategic control. Our approach was a descriptive cross-sectional survey of the NGO population in Abuja, which covers a wide range of thematic work from education, health and humanitarian aid to poverty reduction, peacebuilding, women empowerment and environmental sustainability, among others. We put questionnaires in front of qualified respondents from these organisations. Of the 360 we handed out, 332 were fit for analysis, which is a solid 92.2% response rate. To make sense of the data we ran a battery of tests including descriptive statistics, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, multiple regression (at the 0.05 significance level) and a Cronbach's Alpha for reliability. The latter confirmed that all our constructs were internally consistent. As for the correlation, it was clear that each of the four leadership practices had a positive and statistically meaningful link to programme effectiveness. The multiple regression painted a more detailed picture. Taken together, the leadership practices accounted for 33.3 per cent of the variance in programme effectiveness ($R^2 = 0.333$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.325$; $F(4, 327) = 40.864$, $p < 0.001$). But when you look at them in isolation with the other predictors controlled for, only strategic control and stakeholder engagement showed an important positive effect; the same could not be said for strategic direction setting or ethical governance. It would seem that in this context some practices are more directly consequential than others. Our conclusion is that strategic leadership does have a significant impact on how NGOs in Abuja perform, driven largely by those two factors. What this means for the NGOs is that they ought to put more muscle into their monitoring and evaluation, foster better feedback and learning, and get deeper into stakeholder participation. They should also keep up good ethical governance and make sure their strategic plans are executed with discipline. Done right, it is the way to convert sound strategy into results you can measure.*

Keywords: strategic leadership practices, strategic direction setting, ethical governance, strategic control, stakeholder engagement, organizational performance, programme effectiveness, financial sustainability, education-focused NGOs

INTRODUCTION

One might call Non-Governmental Organisations the driving force behind social development in this day and age. Whether it is humanitarian work, advocacy or plain community service, you will find an NGO involved in it somewhere in the world. In the developing world their role is all the more important; they are there to do what a government on its own cannot, stepping in to satisfy social needs that would otherwise go unmet. But they are not simply service providers. They put programmes in place to effect change, they stand up for the vulnerable and they get communities moving. Take Nigeria for instance: here they are busy with health and education, poverty and gender issues, child protection and the environment. They are constantly on the go, liaising with the authorities, donors and other partners. That is what makes them indispensable for any social intervention, but it can be a strain too. Given the resources at their disposal, they have to show results and be accountable to the regulators and the people they are serving as well as to their funders.

We measure organisational performance in this study by looking at programme effectiveness. The reasoning is simple: an NGO is driven by its mission so its worth is in the utility of its actions. We are talking about the quality and timeliness of planned interventions, how responsive the body is and if it delivers on the outputs it has promised (Wang & Hamilton, 2024). Our research is set in the Federal Capital Territory. Abuja is where you find the federal ministries, embassies and international development partners side by side with civil society. Yet there are peri-urban and rural parts of the city where social protection, healthcare and education are in short order. This gives NGOs a chance to interface with major institutions but also the onus to produce something concrete.

Our notion of strategic leadership is about the systems and conduct an organisation puts in place to do what it needs to, marshal its resources and have a firm grip on its people. You can view it through four lenses: the establishment of a strategic course, ethical governance, how one engages with stakeholders and the exercise of strategic control. For a mission-oriented group these are the means by which it must rally support and make its mark (A.-N. M. Abdi et al., 2024; Fernandes et al., 2022; Imam et al., 2025; Mwajuma & Kihara, 2025).

Statement of the Problem

It is no easy matter to navigate the development landscape as an NGO in Abuja. There are demands to be met on all sides. Your programmes have to be inclusive, transparent and relevant, and you must be able to point to measurable outcomes. It is not sufficient to run activities for the sake of it; you have to show credibility and make good use of your resources. There are concerns over how effective some of these programmes really are. All too often you see weak accountability or poor coordination get in the way. An NGO might file the reports but still struggle to offer hard proof that it has been of any real use to its beneficiaries or furthered its mission. Then there is the

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question of direction. Some organisations are without a clear strategy and end up with reactive programming and scattered efforts. Ethical governance can be lacking, with financial opacity or board oversight issues eroding trust (Abdi et al., 2024). Strategic control is wanting in some places, leaving them unable to put a finger on implementation problems (Wang & Hamilton, 2024).

Engagement with stakeholders is another sticking point. If you plan or roll out a programme without the buy-in of the community, the government or your donors, you will find communication breaking down and supporters disengaging (Nginya & Mutuku, 2024). While one can see these problems in the NGO sector in Abuja, there is not much in the way of evidence to show how all these elements – the ethics, the control, the engagement – come together to affect the bottom line of programme effectiveness. Broadly speaking, this study is set out to look at the effect of strategic leadership practices on organisational performance of Non-Governmental Organisations in Abuja, Nigeria. In the context of this work, organisational performance is gauged by programme effectiveness. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. examine the effect of strategic direction setting on programme effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisations in Abuja, Nigeria;
2. examine the effect of ethical governance on programme effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisations in Abuja, Nigeria;
3. examine the effect of strategic control on programme effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisations in Abuja, Nigeria; and
4. examine the effect of stakeholder engagement on programme effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisations in Abuja, Nigeria.

The following null hypotheses were raised for the study:

H01: Strategic direction setting has no effect on programme effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisations in Abuja, Nigeria.

H02: Ethical governance has no effect on programme effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisations in Abuja, Nigeria.

H03: Strategic control has no effect on programme effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisations in Abuja, Nigeria.

H04: Stakeholder engagement has no effect on programme effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisations in Abuja, Nigeria.

This study matters to founders, executive directors, board members, programme managers, project officers, monitoring and evaluation staff and other leaders working with NGOs in Abuja. By looking into how strategic leadership practices affect organisational performance, it sheds light on how leadership actions shape programme effectiveness. Donors and development partners will also find the study useful because many of them are interested in supporting NGOs that offer programmes that are credible and accountable. The findings may guide capacity-building programmes, grant assessment methods, partnership systems and performance support models.

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Government agencies, regulatory bodies, civil society networks and coalitions can use the study to strengthen governance, accountability and performance standards among NGOs. Communities and beneficiaries may also benefit indirectly when NGOs improve their strategic leadership practices and deliver programmes that are more relevant, inclusive, timely and accountable. Academically, the study adds to literature on strategic leadership and organisational performance in the nonprofit sector. It provides specific evidence from Abuja and helps explain how organisational performance can be measured through programme effectiveness within NGO settings (Fernandes et al., 2022; Imam et al., 2025; Wang & Hamilton, 2024).

This study is set within the bounds of Non-Governmental Organisations working in Abuja, Nigeria. The main focus is on strategic leadership practices, namely strategic direction setting, ethical governance, strategic control and stakeholder engagement. These are the independent variables. Organisational performance is the dependent variable and is measured by programme effectiveness.

Geographically, the study is concerned with NGOs found in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The study covers eligible NGOs active in Abuja across themes such as education, health, governance, youth development, women empowerment, poverty reduction, humanitarian support, disability inclusion, peacebuilding, civic engagement, environmental sustainability and community development. CSACEFA-linked NGOs in the FCT also form part of the group being studied because of their advocacy, accountability, mobilisation and programme roles (Civil Society Action Coalition on Education for All, 2025; MacArthur Foundation, 2024). The study does not go into every possible thing that shapes NGO performance, such as funding volume, staff competence, technology use, political climate, donor policies, regulatory pressure or the larger economy. The focus remains on strategic leadership practices and their effect on organisational performance as shown by programme effectiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews literature on strategic leadership practices and organisational performance of Non-Governmental Organisations in Abuja, Nigeria. The review is organised under conceptual clarification, theoretical review, empirical review and literature gap. Strategic leadership practices constitute the independent variable and are operationalised through strategic direction setting, ethical governance, strategic control and stakeholder engagement. Organisational performance constitutes the dependent variable and is measured through programme effectiveness.

Strategic Leadership Practices

Strategic leadership practices refer to the decisions and behaviours leaders employ to put their organisation on a course, allocate resources and people, and hold everyone to account so they are all pulling in the right direction. It is concerned with the long-term trajectory of the organisation

and whether leaders are making sound calls that will see it through change (Fernandes et al., 2022; Imam et al., 2025).

Strategic Direction Setting

Strategic direction setting is the way in which leadership steers an organisation to put its mission, vision and priorities into words and to chart a course for it to follow. For an NGO, it helps to prevent mission drift and makes programmes more consistent with the organisation's purpose (Mwajuma & Kihara, 2025).

Ethical Governance

Ethical governance is the set of leadership and governance habits that ensure integrity, fairness, transparency and accountability. In the case of NGOs, this is central because donors, beneficiaries, communities, staff, volunteers and regulators all need to trust the organisation (A.-N. M. Abdi et al., 2024).

Strategic Control

Strategic control is the means by which leaders put in place routines and systems to verify that plans are being implemented. It involves monitoring, evaluation, performance review, feedback and corrective action. For NGOs, it moves the organisation beyond activity reporting to better outcomes (Iradukunda & Irechukwu, 2023; Madsen, 2025; Wang & Hamilton, 2024).

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is the planned manner in which an organisation brings on board the various people and groups that have a say in its work or are impacted by it. For NGOs, these stakeholders include donors, beneficiaries, community leaders, staff, volunteers, boards, government regulators, civil society and development partners (Nginya & Mutuku, 2024).

Organisational Performance and Programme Effectiveness

Organisational performance measures how well an entity is hitting the results it has set for itself. In the nonprofit sector, performance is better understood through mission achievement, accountability, programme quality and stakeholder value. Programme effectiveness is therefore used in this study as the practical measure of organisational performance (Nordin et al., 2024; Wang & Hamilton, 2024).

Conceptual Framework

Let us look at the conceptual structure for this study. The focus here is to see how strategic leadership practices connect with organisational performance among Non-Governmental Organisations in Abuja, Nigeria. So, the strategic leadership practices serve as our independent variable, and we are considering them through four main angles: strategic direction setting, ethical governance, strategic control, and stakeholder engagement. Then, on the other side, we have organisational performance as our dependent variable, which we are measuring by programme

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effectiveness. There is a straightforward logic to the way we have put this structure in place: it is thought that strategic leadership has a bearing on how effective a programme can be. If leaders are intent on setting the right strategic direction, they will put things in order for the organisation, making plain its mission and priorities as well as how resources are to be applied. You would expect that sort of clarity to do nothing but enhance effectiveness.

Then you have ethical governance. The point is to have greater transparency and accountability; in an NGO that breeds trust on both sides and means decisions are made with more responsibility. It all paves the way for programmes to hit their marks. We also need to factor in strategic control. This is what underpins the monitoring and evaluation side of things – to see if something is working or not, take stock of any feedback and learn from it, whether it is a success or an error, and adjust course as you go. In the long run it keeps the programmes relevant. And you can't overlook stakeholder engagement. An NGO that goes about involving its stakeholders, be they government officials, community members or donors, in the right way will find those people feel some ownership of the work. That translates into better collaboration and participation, and gives the organisation and its programmes a good deal more legitimacy.

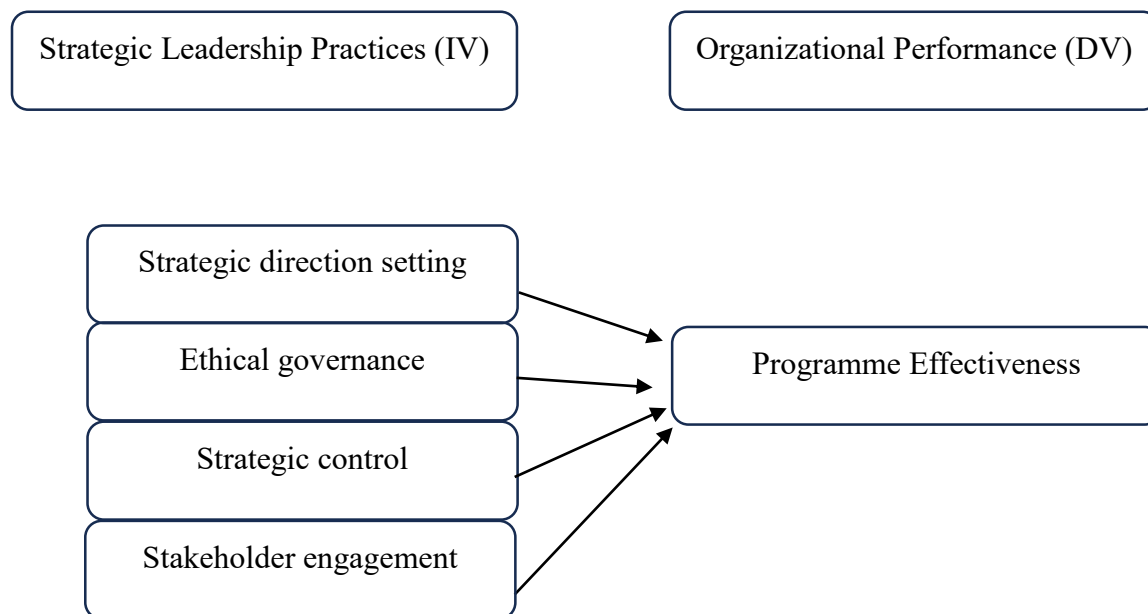


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework of the Study
 Source: *Researcher's conceptualisation (2026).*

Theoretical Review

Strategic Leadership Theory

Strategic Leadership Theory provides the principal foundation for this study. The theory explains how leaders shape an organisation's long-term direction and performance by establishing strategic intent, aligning resources, adapting to environmental demands and building systems that translate plans into action. It supports the expectation that strategic direction, ethical governance, strategic control and stakeholder engagement will influence programme effectiveness (Fernandes et al., 2022; Imam et al., 2025).

Upper-Echelons Theory

Upper-Echelons Theory argues that organisational outcomes reflect the values, experiences, judgments and cognitive orientations of top leaders. This is relevant because NGOs operating in the same Abuja environment may still perform differently depending on what their leaders prioritise, how they govern, how they control implementation and how they relate with stakeholders (Cannella et al., 2025).

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory holds that organisations operate within networks of actors whose interests and expectations affect organisational survival and performance. It is relevant to NGOs because programme effectiveness is tied to the participation and confidence of donors, beneficiaries, communities, regulators, civil society coalitions, staff and volunteers (Nginya & Mutuku, 2024; Wang & Hamilton, 2024).

Balanced Scorecard Perspective

The Balanced Scorecard perspective is useful because it encourages a broader view of performance beyond financial figures. In nonprofit settings, this helps to connect mission delivery, stakeholder value, internal processes and learning with actual programme outcomes (Kumar et al., 2023; Madsen, 2025).

Empirical Review

Recent studies have continued to show the relevance of strategic leadership to organisational performance. Fernandes et al. (2022) developed a holistic model of strategic leadership and emphasised that strategic leadership should be treated as an organisational capability rather than a personal trait. Imam et al. (2025) also found that leadership, learning and empowerment influence public sector performance, which supports the broader assumption that leadership systems shape institutional outcomes. Within nonprofit contexts, Mwajuma and Kihara (2025) found that strategic leadership influences the performance of not-for-profit organisations in Kenya. M. B. Abdi, Nzili and Kiama (2024) also examined strategic leadership and organisational performance in charitable NGOs in Nairobi County, showing that leadership practices remain important for

NGO effectiveness. Studies on ethical governance and leadership also support the relevance of accountability and trust in performance. A.-N. M. Abdi, Hashi and Latif (2024) linked ethical leadership with public sector performance through corporate social responsibility, organisational politics and social capital. Bano et al. (2024) also showed that ethical leadership relates to psychological safety, conflict management, job performance and sustainable work outcomes.

Strategic control has also been linked to performance. Iradukunda and Irechukwu (2023) found that strategic controls support organisational performance in Rwanda, while Madsen (2025) explains that performance systems are useful when they make strategy measurable and actionable. In the nonprofit space, Wang and Hamilton (2024) further linked nonprofit capacities with organisational effectiveness, supporting the idea that systems and evidence matter. Stakeholder engagement has similar empirical support. Nginya and Mutuku (2024) found that stakeholder management influences the performance of NGO-supported healthcare projects in Nairobi County. Wang and Hamilton (2024) also emphasise stakeholder value and accountability as important components of nonprofit effectiveness. These studies help situate stakeholder engagement as both a relational and performance-driven leadership practice.

Literature Gap

Although the literature supports the link between strategic leadership and performance, much of the available evidence is drawn from large corporations, public institutions, schools, banks or NGOs outside Nigeria. Many studies also treat organisational performance in broad terms without clearly adapting the measurement to the nonprofit sector. For NGOs, performance cannot be judged in the same way as commercial firms. The real question is whether programmes are relevant, timely, inclusive, well monitored, responsive to stakeholders and able to achieve intended results. There is also limited evidence on how strategic direction setting, ethical governance, strategic control and stakeholder engagement jointly affect programme effectiveness among NGOs in Abuja. This study responds to that gap by focusing on Abuja-based NGOs and using programme effectiveness as the measure of organisational performance.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. This design was considered suitable because the research collected data at one point in time from respondents in NGOs operating in Abuja. The population comprised Non-Governmental Organisations in the Federal Capital Territory working across thematic areas such as education, health, governance, youth development, women empowerment, poverty reduction, humanitarian support, disability inclusion, peacebuilding, civic engagement, environmental sustainability and community development. The study administered 360 questionnaires to qualified respondents. After data cleaning, 332 valid responses were used for analysis, representing a 92.2% valid response rate. Respondents were selected because they had knowledge of leadership matters, governance issues, programme management, monitoring and evaluation or the general running of their NGOs. Data were collected

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through a structured questionnaire built around five-point Likert scale items. Strategic leadership practices were measured through strategic direction setting, ethical governance, strategic control and stakeholder engagement. Organisational performance was measured through programme effectiveness. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and multiple regression at the 0.05 level of significance. Reliability was tested with Cronbach's Alpha, using 0.70 as the minimum acceptable threshold. Diagnostic checks were also carried out to support the interpretation of the regression results (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Ranganathan et al., 2024; Saunders et al., 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 360 questionnaires administered, 332 were valid for analysis, while 28 were unreturned or invalid. This produced a valid response rate of 92.2%. The dataset was checked for completeness, duplicates, missing values and relevance before composite scores were calculated for the study variables.

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Questionnaires administered	360	100.0
Valid responses used for analysis	332	92.2
Unreturned/invalid responses	28	7.8

Reliability analysis showed that all constructs were internally consistent. Strategic direction setting had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.881, ethical governance 0.877, strategic control 0.861, stakeholder engagement 0.867, programme effectiveness 0.800 and the overall scale 0.937. All values exceeded the 0.70 benchmark.

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Decision
Strategic Direction Setting	6	0.881	Reliable
Ethical Governance	6	0.877	Reliable
Strategic Control	6	0.861	Reliable
Stakeholder Engagement	6	0.867	Reliable
Programme Effectiveness	8	0.800	Reliable
Overall scale	32	0.937	Reliable

Descriptive statistics showed that all constructs recorded high mean scores. Strategic direction setting had the highest mean score ($M = 4.197$), followed by stakeholder engagement ($M = 4.165$), programme effectiveness ($M = 4.091$), strategic control ($M = 3.975$), and ethical governance ($M = 3.943$). This suggests that respondents generally agreed that the participating NGOs demonstrate the leadership practices under study.

Construct	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Strategic Direction Setting	332	4.197	0.740	High
Ethical Governance	332	3.943	0.811	High
Strategic Control	332	3.975	0.753	High
Stakeholder Engagement	332	4.165	0.678	High
Programme Effectiveness	332	4.091	0.650	High

Correlation analysis showed that every one of the strategic leadership practices was positively related to programme effectiveness. The most pronounced correlation was with stakeholder engagement ($r = 0.554$, $p < 0.001$), followed by strategic control ($r = 0.545$, $p < 0.001$), strategic direction setting ($r = 0.441$, $p < 0.001$), and ethical governance ($r = 0.406$, $p < 0.001$).

Relationship with Programme Effectiveness	r	p-value	Interpretation
Strategic Direction Setting	0.441	<0.001	Positive relationship significant
Ethical Governance	0.406	<0.001	Positive relationship significant
Strategic Control	0.545	<0.001	Positive relationship significant
Stakeholder Engagement	0.554	<0.001	Positive relationship significant

The regression model produced $R = 0.577$, $R^2 = 0.333$ and adjusted $R^2 = 0.325$. This means that 33.3% of the variance in programme effectiveness was accounted for by strategic direction setting, ethical governance, strategic control and stakeholder engagement taken together. The model was statistically significant, $F(4, 327) = 40.864$, $p < 0.001$.

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig.
0.577	0.333	0.325	40.864	<0.001

At the individual predictor level, strategic control and stakeholder engagement were positive and significant predictors of programme effectiveness. Strategic control recorded $B = 0.241$, $\beta = 0.279$, $t = 2.960$, $p = 0.003$, while stakeholder engagement recorded $B = 0.316$, $\beta = 0.329$, $t = 4.152$, $p < 0.001$. Strategic direction setting and ethical governance were not significant when the other predictors were controlled for.

Predictor	B	Beta	t	Sig.	Decision
Strategic Direction Setting	0.019	0.022	0.293	0.770	Not significant
Ethical Governance	-0.021	-0.027	-0.383	0.702	Not significant
Strategic Control	0.241	0.279	2.960	0.003	Significant
Stakeholder Engagement	0.316	0.329	4.152	<0.001	Significant

The findings suggest that while all strategic leadership practices are related to programme effectiveness, not all have the same direct effect when considered together. In the Abuja NGO setting, strategic control and stakeholder engagement appear to be the more immediate drivers of

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programme effectiveness. This means that monitoring, evaluation, feedback, correction, participation and stakeholder ownership are particularly important for converting strategy into measurable results.

Hypothesis	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
H01	0.770	Not rejected	No significant independent effect
H02	0.702	Not rejected	No significant independent effect
H03	0.003	Rejected	Significant positive effect
H04	<0.001	Rejected	Significant positive effect

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that strategic leadership practices have a significant effect on the organisational performance of Non-Governmental Organisations in Abuja, Nigeria, when organisational performance is measured through programme effectiveness. Taken together, strategic direction setting, ethical governance, strategic control and stakeholder engagement explain a meaningful share of programme effectiveness among the NGOs studied.

However, the findings also show that strategic control and stakeholder engagement are the most direct predictors of programme effectiveness in this context. Strategic direction setting and ethical governance remain important foundational practices, but their direct statistical effects were not significant when strategic control and stakeholder engagement were considered in the same model. Based on the findings, NGOs in Abuja should strengthen strategic control systems by improving monitoring and evaluation, routine programme review, feedback loops, budget tracking and corrective action. They should not treat reporting as a donor formality but as a leadership tool for learning and improvement. NGOs should also deepen stakeholder engagement by involving beneficiaries, community leaders, donors, government bodies, staff, volunteers and partners in programme planning, implementation, feedback and evaluation. Stakeholder input should be used to improve programme design and strengthen ownership. Furthermore, NGOs should maintain clear strategic direction and ethical governance. Leaders should keep mission, vision and priorities visible, align programmes with strategy, ensure transparent reporting, strengthen board oversight and uphold accountability in resource use. Donors and development partners should support leadership capacity-building that focuses especially on monitoring systems and stakeholder participation.

Suggestions for Further Studies

1. Researchers should examine the impact of strategic leadership on the performance of Non-Governmental Organisations in other states or geopolitical zones in Nigeria so that the findings from Abuja can be compared with other development settings.

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2. Future studies should widen the measurement of organisational performance to include operational efficiency, resource mobilisation, financial sustainability, institutional growth and reputation.
3. Further studies should combine questionnaires with interviews, document analysis and focus groups to provide deeper insight into how leaders actually set strategy, exercise control and manage stakeholders.
4. Future research should investigate whether staff capacity, funding availability or donor support mediates or moderates the relationship between strategic leadership practices and programme effectiveness.
5. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to show how changes in strategic leadership practices affect programme results over time.

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