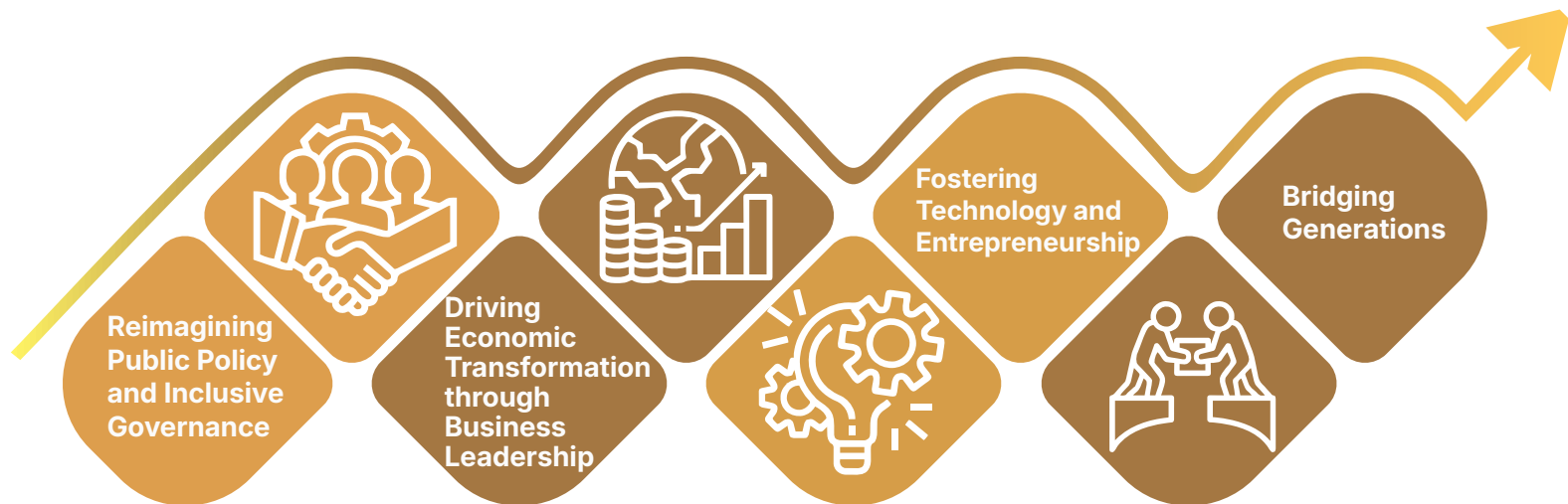




Briefing Material

Oxford Global Think Tank Leadership Conference

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Foreword

Nigeria is endowed with enormous human and natural resources – one in five Africans, about 200 million people, abundant oil and gas reserves, vast arable land and various solid minerals deposits. The country can unleash this immense potential by leveraging its greatest asset, its people, and the abundance of natural resources to flourish and enable shared prosperity for all its people.

Leadership has remained central to debates on transforming societies because history is replete with evidence demonstrating a strong linkage between leadership and national development. To truly transform the nation and build a better Nigeria, leaders must embody four core principles: **character, courage, compassion, and competence**. However, it is important to note that while leaders set the tone, these values deliver the greatest impact when they extend beyond leaders to the citizens. Simply put, the journey to transforming Nigeria's leadership landscape and unlocking its vast potential requires **“all hands on deck”** in a way that acknowledges and demands a collective responsibility from leaders and the people to build a better Nigeria.

The OGTT Leadership Conference presents a unique opportunity to emphasise the role of leadership in national development through the keynote panels, presentation of the book – All Hands on Deck: Unleash Prosperity through World-Class Capital Markets, unveiling of the African Minerals Report – RAMP Africa: Reforming African Minerals to Prosper Africa and formal launch of the Oxford Global Think Tank, established as an independent, non-partisan, and non-governmental organisation to foster open and continuous research and dialogue. Oxford Global Think Tank also supports public and private sector leaders with ensuring world class policies, and institutions.

Introduction

Nigeria stands at a pivotal moment in its history. Sixty-five years after gaining independence, it remains Africa's largest democracy and boasts a population of over 220 million people. By 2050, Nigeria is projected to become the world's third most populous nation. This rapid growth poses challenges for jobs, infrastructure, and public services, but it also offers opportunities for economic development, innovation, and global influence—provided it is managed with vision and effective leadership.

Over recent decades, Nigeria has achieved progress in various areas. Enrolment in primary schools has increased, mobile technology has improved access to information, and democratic transitions have become more routine—even if not flawless. Still, leaders face significant issues: poverty rates are high, many homes and businesses lack reliable electricity, and inequality persists in healthcare, housing, and education. These concerns are pressing but also open avenues for reform and renewal.

By strengthening institutions, improving accountability, and supporting new leaders, Nigeria can pursue a more inclusive and stable future

Signs of positive change are appearing beyond government involvement. The private sector, particularly technology and agribusiness, shows resilience and innovation even under challenging conditions. Nigerian fintech startups have attracted international investment, expanded financial services, and created jobs for young people. Reforms in taxation and revenue collection at local levels are gradually boosting fiscal sustainability, illustrating the impact of targeted governance changes. These successes highlight that leadership encompasses vision, accountability, and problem-solving across different sectors, and the challenge is to create a unified national strategy that amplifies these efforts. Inter-generational transition is another key issue.

With a median age below 20, Nigeria's destiny hinges on how well it prepares its youth for leadership roles. More young Nigerians are becoming politically engaged, voting, and joining advocacy campaigns. Universities, professional bodies, and civil organizations are expanding programs to cultivate leadership skills and foster accountability.

The Oxford Global Think Tank Leadership Conference 2025 will spotlight Nigeria's leadership questions, bringing together stakeholders from all sectors to discuss the preparation of younger generations, necessary reforms, and lessons from successful institutions. The event aims to clarify what effective leadership truly means, identify the supporting systems and culture, and outline practical steps toward building competent, ethical, and responsible leadership. For Nigeria, the priority is turning discussion into action, and the conference seeks to be a catalyst for that change.

Reimagining Public Policy and Inclusive Governance

Good governance is intrinsically linked to a government's perceived legitimacy, commitment to delivering and improving public value, responsiveness to its citizens' needs, enforcement of the rule of law, among others. Essentially, governments are deemed effective when they demonstrate the capacity to effectively formulate and implement sound policies. Unsurprisingly, evidence has repeatedly shown that the success of any government is directly linked to the quality of its leadership.

Despite being Africa's largest economy and most populous nation, Nigeria is yet to attain its full potential at independence in the country's developmental outcomes. As Chinua Achebe puts it in his book, "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership". While some progress has been made since 1960, Nigeria has significantly struggled with consistently facilitating, engendering and sustaining good governance. Isolated instances of exemplary governance exist across different administrations but have been insufficient to produce coordinated and lasting change. Nigeria's governance challenges often manifest in inconsistent policy frameworks, weak institutions, corruption, resource mismanagement, and a declining capacity to manage internal socio-political issues.

In recent years, Nigeria's current democratic culture - one that seems to overlook competence in political leadership, especially at the local levels - further exacerbates these challenges.² Consequently, public trust continues to erode, leading to a growing cynicism between citizens and political leaders at different levels of government. This cynicism often translates into an increasing

disrespect of citizens for the institutions that should manage socioeconomic interactions between them and the government. For the average Nigerian, good governance is akin to an atmosphere of hope, which appears to be diminishing more rapidly in recent times.

While context and methodology may vary, Nigeria has consistently ranked poorly across several governance indices, including government effectiveness (20.3/100), rule of law (20.3/100), voice and accountability (32.4/100), political stability and absence of violence/terrorism (7.6/100), and control of corruption (17/100), based on the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI). Similarly, the country ranked 116 out of 120 Countries in the 2025 Chandler Good Governance Index, with lower scores in the 'leadership & foresight' and 'financial stewardship' categories.³ Bringing it closer to home, the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, which defines governance as "*the provision of political, social, economic and environmental public goods and services that every citizen has the right to expect from their government, and that a government has the responsibility to deliver to its citizens*", scored Nigeria 45.7 of 100 in 2023, placing the country as 33rd out of 54 in Africa.⁴ Although the country's corruption perception ranking improved slightly, moving from 24 in 2022 to 26 in 2024,⁵ this ranking still places Nigeria in a worrisome position.

Countries with sound governing capacity are forward-thinking; their political leaders tend to recognise and anticipate systemic challenges, establishing the necessary structures to overcome them, which typically translates

institutional arrangements that would promote good governance. Indonesia, a natural comparator country, provides compelling insights for Nigeria. As a giant in its region, just like Nigeria, Indonesia shares similarities with Nigeria regarding natural endowments, demography, economic structure, and political history, with both countries transitioning to democracy in 1999. While the road to governance reform has not always been smooth, Indonesia's transformation from a highly militarised and authoritarian state into a relatively open, stable and democratic nation demonstrates that institutional arrangements can propel states to make policy decisions that benefit the general populace.⁶

In contrast to Nigeria, Indonesia has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for effective governance to promote inclusive development.⁷ Although Nigeria was way ahead of Indonesia in the 70s and early 80s, and the living standards in both countries were comparable on most measures at independence, Indonesia has since overtaken Nigeria on many fronts.⁸ As of 2020, Indonesia's poverty rate was about 9.8% while Nigeria's was 40%. Indonesia's democracy has gradually matured, evidenced by high voter participation (often above 80%), absence of conflict, and high replacement rates of local politicians (about 40%).

Indonesia's governance reforms have also improved civic participation and relatively curbed corruption. Despite ethnic and socioeconomic differences, many citizens have become well-informed about and engaged in politics. Consequently, they are significantly equipped to vote out poorly performing leaders, leading to more responsive leadership.

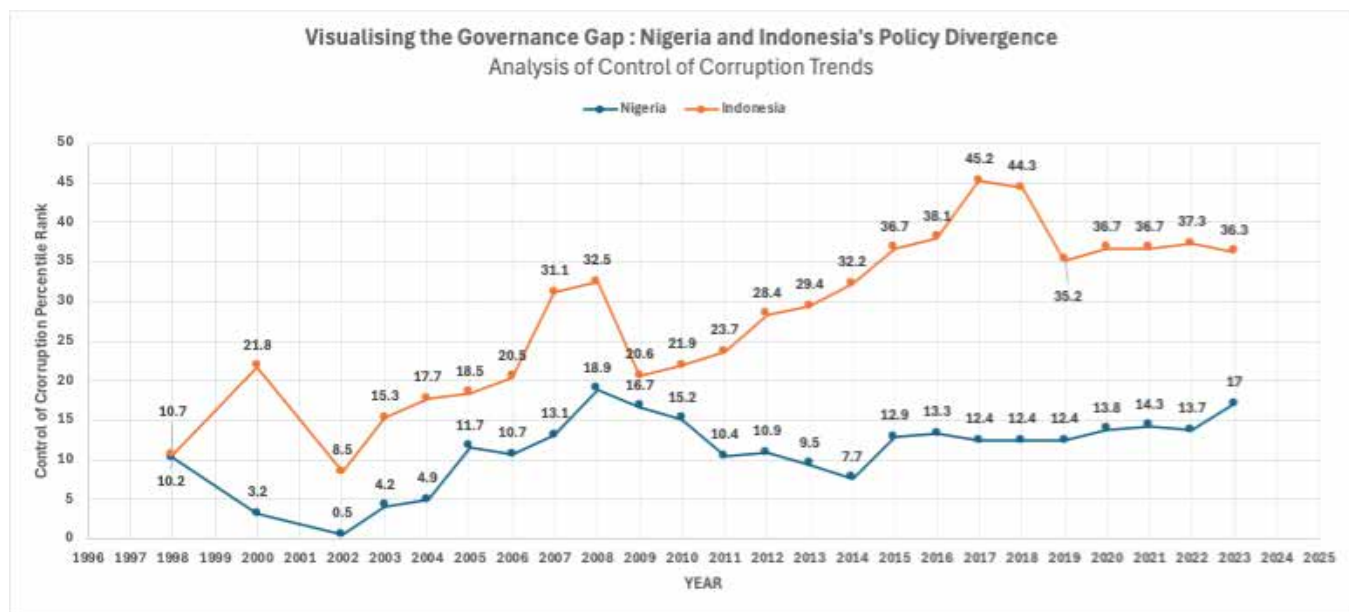


Figure 1: Nigeria and Indonesia CC (Control of Corruption) Percentile Rank, WDI Indicators

Interestingly, although Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim nation (about 87%), most voters tend to support non-religious or multi-faith agendas.⁹ Indonesia's strategic decentralisation has also promoted local innovation, bringing decision-making processes closer to the people, which has grown CSO numbers, allowing for increased accountability.¹⁰

Relatedly, stricter controls on public finances and state-owned enterprises, implementing measures to rationalise government spending, a more independent judiciary, and a nationwide anti-corruption campaign were implemented as anti-corruption measures. Indonesia's CPI scores have steadily improved, from 17 in 1999 to 34 in 2014, reaching a record high of 40 in 2019. However, a steady decline since then has questioned the impact of these measures.¹¹

Given the 'decentralisation-focused' nature of Indonesia's governance reforms, they would have failed without strategic collaborations with the private sector. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) began gaining ground in the early 1990s, in the transportation and energy sectors. With PPPs recognised as

a formal way of funding infrastructure projects, institutionalising and promoting PPP arrangements became a no-brainer. So did the need to enhance the PPP regulatory framework. The PPP landscape has continued to evolve, with several regulatory reforms and government interventions to accelerate and improve the PPP process. Some of these include tax incentives, government guarantees, and stronger government support for infrastructure projects through the viability gap fund (CGF) and project development facility (PDF).¹² Clearly, Indonesia's leaders were committed to following through with their long-term vision and showing more capacity for consistent execution.

Another notable display of commitment to private sector-led growth was the enactment of the 2020 Omnibus Law on Job Creation, which addresses businesses' biggest complaints: bureaucratic inefficiency and regulatory bottlenecks. Additionally, Indonesia launched its "Golden Indonesia 2045" vision in 2019, aiming to become a developed, high-income country by 2045 when it celebrates 100 years of independence. Achieving such a vision would rely heavily on private

sector support, so public policy decisions should align accordingly. Little wonder, Bank Indonesia's private sector lending portfolio continues to expand, with investment loans outpacing consumption loans. Also, reducing reserve requirement ratios for specific sectors showed the Central Bank's commitment to support this vision.¹³ These are tangible examples of how public policy promotes private enterprise.

Overall, the Nigeria-Indonesia development divergence is primarily attributed to the policy choices of the governing class in both countries, demonstrating the crucial role of political leadership in determining developmental outcomes. More importantly, Indonesia's case shows that effective governance reforms require a strategy or vision for change, distilling this vision into smaller elements through policies and programmes, and defining from the outset what success would look like.¹⁵ Some of Indonesia's policy choices included a commitment to strengthening electoral processes, strategic decentralisation, public transparency and accountability, foresight in economic planning, and ethical leadership, all of which contribute to effective governance and

impactful public policy.

Many say that a government is as good as its people and that every society gets the kind of leader that it deserves. This may be the case. However, one thing is clear beyond these philosophical contemplations: Nigeria needs a governance model that prioritises leadership and electorate capability to produce effective public policies. Political leadership should be based on expert knowledge; leaders should be politically savvy

enough to develop and implement visionary, economically viable and people-focused policies that sustainably improve citizens' socio-economic outcomes. The electorate, in turn, should be literate and engaged enough to make informed leadership decisions - holding leaders accountable by interrogating their policy and political decisions. Such a model thrives on robust, sustainable institutions and clear governance standards embedded within a strong democratic culture.

Also, there may be different perspectives to the discourse which may imply that even the definition of good governance can be subjective. Nevertheless, we can agree on two things. First, any governance model impeding shared national prosperity should be reformed. Second, based on the first, Nigeria's current governance model must continue to produce sound public policies to truly produce favourable socio-economic outcomes for the people.

Driving Economic Transformation through Business Leadership

Economic transformation is a recurring subject in Nigeria's development discourse. Notable growth was observed in the first decade after independence and at the outset of democracy. However, policy decisions over time have not systematically and sustainably transformed the economy in ways that translate to real, positive impact on people's livelihoods.¹⁶

Aiming for a minimum GDP growth rate of 7% by 2027 and \$1 trillion economy by 2030, the current administration has displayed notable economic leadership by pursuing bold economic reforms. For instance, eliminating fuel subsidies, unifying the exchange rate, increasing electricity tariffs and implementing new tax reforms have yielded some economic gains, including revenue growth and growing investor confidence.¹⁷ But (economic) reforms everywhere are often complex and come at a cost. For the average Nigerian, these reforms have brought more pain than relief as inflation continues to bite hard, with more people being pushed into poverty, although many argue that this is only short-term.¹⁸ The government has rolled out some measures to cushion the harsh effects of these reforms, but their impact remains questionable.

Mixed reactions to the impact of these reforms require us to revisit two key issues. First, many believe that there should be additional policies to cushion the impact on vulnerable Nigerians. Although the reforms are deemed necessary, the accompanying hardships are simply a consequence of decades of poor planning.¹⁹ This is besides debates around the implementation approaches to these reforms. For instance, the government hails the floating naira as a market-driven solution,

but there are still a few incidences of CBN's regular intervention in the FX market.

Relatedly, savings from subsidy removal have yet to deliver the desirable impact, especially in key sectors such as healthcare, education and transportation. Instead, according to various credible sources, public debt continues to rise, although the government they are linked to projects. Second, and closely related to the first, is that the country is also witnessing a significant exodus of multinational corporations. This is not an isolated problem. Rather, it reflects a longstanding issue around public-private sector collaboration for economic growth and development.

Undoubtedly, private businesses are best positioned to lead Nigeria's economic transformation. They can, through industrialisation, drive the structural changes required for economic growth and development.²⁰ Nigeria's highly resilient private sector has consistently displayed remarkable capacity to thrive despite government inefficiencies. Simply put, private sector growth and public policy must go hand in hand. For businesses to thrive and provide the much-needed support for Nigeria's development, they need a predictable policy environment.²¹ Private companies require this level of stability to unlock their full potential for creating jobs, fostering innovation, providing access to capital for smaller businesses, supporting infrastructure development, and promoting overall sustainable development.²² Public policies should be clear, well sequenced, and followed with consistent actions. Maintaining this kind of policy environment requires visionary leaders to adopt a forward-thinking approach to policymaking.

With a steady, resilient growth rate void of prolonged policy discontinuities and reversals, India's success story, beginning in the 80s, and sustained through the 90s, offers valuable lessons for Nigeria.²³ Following its 1991 balance of payment crisis, India was at a tipping point due to years of ballooning fiscal deficits, an overvalued currency, and sluggish growth.²⁴ As renowned Indian economist Montek Singh Ahluwalia puts it, high economic growth was the only way out for a country as poor as India.²⁵ However, achieving this required a twin-strategy of economic liberalisation and pragmatic institutional reforms; India had long operated a closed, over-regulated, state-led economy, with highly restrictive policy and institutional frameworks. For this strategy to succeed, the government needed a significant attitudinal shift in favour of the private sector.²⁶

Notable pro-business policy decisions include dismantling the License Raj, a system of regulations, licenses and bureaucratic bottlenecks that had long impeded entrepreneurship and industry growth. Consequently, the government empowered private businesses to drive India's industrialisation, grow the service sectors, create highly skilled jobs and improve India's overall global competitiveness. Indian companies like Tata, Infosys, and Reliance have driven economic growth through significant investments in technology, innovation and manufacturing. Also, relaxing FDI restrictions promoted FDI inflows, advanced technologies and private portfolio investment growth, supporting India's integration into global financial markets.²⁷ Other significant reforms include deregulating interest rates, reducing statutory

liquidity ratios, and developing India's capital market, making the financial sector more robust and responsive to business needs.

The numbers revealed the success of these reforms. Private sector share in total investment increased from 56% in the first half of 1990 to 71% by the second half. Notably, the private sector thrived in sectors such as financial services, transport, social services and community.²⁸ Between 1990 and 1991, merchandise exports in current dollars stood at \$18.1 billion, and doubled for the first time in 1999-2000. Goods and service exports as a share of GDP rose from 7.2% in 1990-91 to 11.6% in 1999-2000, spiking to 20.5% between 2005 and 2006. Total foreign investment rose from \$6 billion in 2002-2003 to \$20.2 billion in 2005-2006.²⁹

Overall, India's GDP growth rate averaged over 7% per annum in real terms from around 1993 to 2012, and poverty declined from 37% in 2004/2005 to 22% in 2011/2012. India's remarkable performance highlights two factors that better position reforms for success. First, leaders should view policymaking through a lens of economic stewardship, striving to maintain the delicate balance between achieving economic objectives and managing political realities. Achieving this requires careful negotiations and compromises to galvanise political and public support for reform sustainability. Little wonder India did not witness any significant economic policy reversal. Beyond varying ideologies and interests, there was a broad political and

intellectual consensus that India needed rapid economic growth. Second, reform implementation should be gradual and iterative, allowing for proper monitoring, evaluation and necessary adjustments. Additionally, it should integrate short-term priorities into long-term development goals; as Ahluwalia again highlights, India adopted a combination of gradualism and what he calls 'reform by stealth.' This explains why prosperous countries typically adopt a phased approach to economic reforms. Admittedly, some argue that the slow-paced nature of this gradualist approach could ultimately lead to inefficient implementation.³⁰ More importantly, a leader's understanding of how to appropriately time, pace, and sequence reforms in ways that deliver their intended objectives could make all the difference.

Annual GDP Growth Rate: India's Sustained Transformation vs. Nigeria's Volatility (1993–Present)

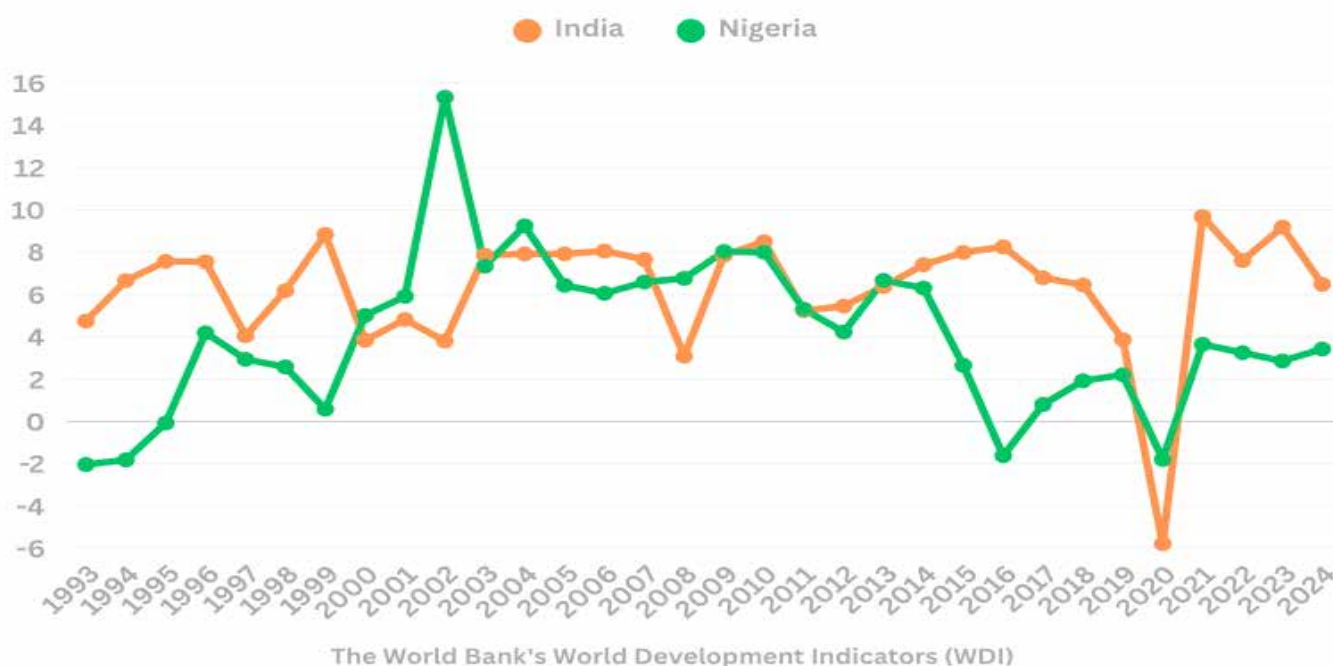


Figure 2: Nigeria and India : Annual GDP Growth Rate , WDI indicators

Fostering Technology and Entrepreneurship

Nigeria’s journey in technology and entrepreneurship reflects decades of evolving leadership priorities and economic experimentation. In the 1970s and 1980s, industrial and innovation policies were largely led by the state, focusing on import substitution and parastatal enterprises. Institutions such as the National Office for Technology Acquisition and Promotion (NOTAP) and later the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) were created to guide technology transfer and innovation policy. The liberalisation of the telecommunications sector in 2001 marked a turning point, expanding access to information and communication infrastructure and enabling a new generation of digital entrepreneurs.

By the 2010s, Nigeria’s technology ecosystem began to take shape around emerging clusters in Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt. The combination of increased mobile penetration, affordable internet, and a youthful population created the foundation for a digital economy. Leadership in both government and the private sector played a decisive role. Initiatives like the Bank of Industry’s SME programmes,

the YouWin entrepreneurship fund, and later the establishment of innovation hubs such as Co-Creation Hub (CcHub) and Ventures Platform reflected a growing recognition that innovation and enterprise were essential to national competitiveness.

Today, Nigeria’s technology sector is one of the country’s most dynamic economic segments. The information and communication technology (ICT) industry contributed an estimated 16% to GDP in Q4 2024, outperforming oil and gas in some quarters. Lagos has emerged as Africa’s leading startup ecosystem, hosting over one-third of the continent’s venture funding and attracting billions of dollars in investment. What makes this growth particularly remarkable is that much of it has occurred organically. Young Nigerian entrepreneurs have driven these startups forward with minimal direct government intervention. The tech ecosystem has flourished thanks to a mix of private ingenuity, community-driven hubs, and investor confidence in Nigeria’s youthful talent. In other words, the country’s innovators have built a thriving sector largely on their own initiative.

Yet this organic success also highlights a missed opportunity. Imagine how much more these startups could achieve with a truly enabling environment. If leadership can align policies to reduce regulatory uncertainty, improve infrastructure, and expand access to funding, these firms could become even stronger national champions. They are already leaders in their fields; with the right support, they can compete even more effectively on the global stage.

Startups in mobility (Moove), agriculture (Thrive Agric), education (uLesson), and logistics (Kobo360) are also creating new employment and solving long-standing market inefficiencies. The leadership driving these ventures reflects a new generation of Nigerians combining technical expertise with social purpose. Yet the ecosystem faces persistent constraints. Access to finance remains limited, with only a small proportion of startups able to secure follow-on funding. Infrastructure gaps, including unreliable power and broadband access, continue to restrict productivity. Regulatory uncertainty, particularly in fintech and cryptocurrency spaces,

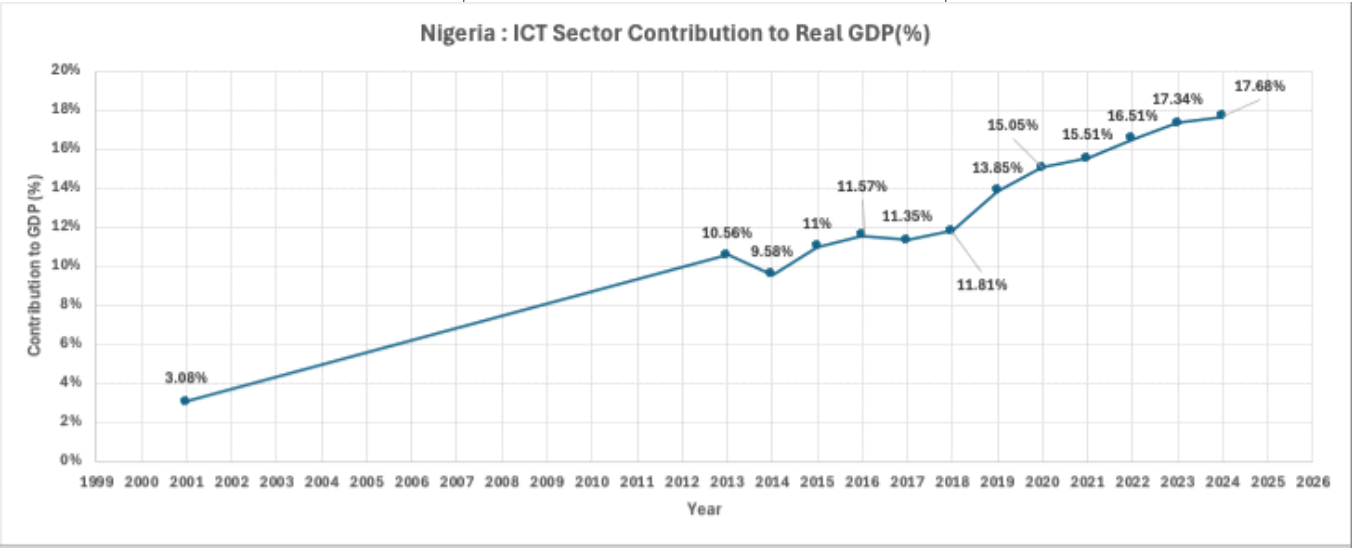


Figure 3: ICT Contribution to Real GDP, NBS

undermines investor confidence. The persistent migration of skilled talent has further exposed the fragility of Nigeria's innovation pipeline.

Despite these challenges, Nigeria retains enormous potential. Its young population, expanding consumer base, and growing digital infrastructure position it as a key player in Africa's technology future. With effective leadership and consistent policy, the country could move from being a hub of startups to a base for global technology solutions.

Globally, technology and entrepreneurship have become central to national competitiveness. Countries that combine coherent policy leadership with private innovation ecosystems are driving the new industrial revolution. India's Digital India initiative has expanded e-governance, digital identity, and payments infrastructure to over a billion citizens, transforming inclusion and public service delivery. Singapore's Smart Nation strategy integrates artificial intelligence, data analytics, and public-private partnerships to sustain productivity growth. In Kenya, early regulatory leadership enabled the rise of M-Pesa, which redefined mobile finance across Africa.

Nigeria stands at the intersection of these trends but requires stronger leadership coordination to convert potential into sustained performance. Global investment is shifting toward green technology, AI, and digital public infrastructure. Countries that establish stable regulatory frameworks and human-capital pipelines are attracting venture capital and technology transfer. Leadership in this context means not only providing policy direction but also ensuring predictability and trust. Nigeria's ability to adapt global best practices to local realities will determine whether it captures emerging opportunities or remains an innovation consumer

rather than a producer.

Nigeria's technology ecosystem has produced several firms whose leadership, innovation, and resilience have redefined Africa's digital economy. Among these, **Flutterwave**, **Paystack**, **Moniepoint**, and **OPay** stand out as examples of how Nigerian entrepreneurs are translating creativity and ambition into globally recognised enterprises.

Flutterwave provides perhaps the clearest example of leadership driving continental expansion. Established in 2016, the company identified a critical market gap: the difficulty of moving money across Africa. Its leadership team combined technical expertise with strategic partnerships, enabling the firm to process millions of transactions daily across more than thirty African countries. By 2025, Flutterwave had become one of Nigeria's most valuable technology companies, serving global clients while maintaining its operational base in Lagos. This success stemmed from a leadership culture that prized innovation, agility, and transparency, proving that African startups can scale sustainably when governance and strategic vision align.

Paystack, founded in 2015 and later acquired by Stripe for over \$200 million, offers another case of strong local leadership earning global recognition. The company built trust in digital payments by simplifying online transactions for small and medium businesses. Its leaders focused on reliability and customer experience, two values often overlooked in emerging markets. Paystack's success did not arise from regulatory privilege or external backing; it came from consistent execution, a deep understanding of Nigerian commerce, and leadership that prioritised credibility. The acquisition by Stripe validated the quality of Nigerian entrepreneurship and marked one of the most visible milestones in Africa's tech history.

Moniepoint and **OPay** have demonstrated that leadership grounded in understanding local realities can achieve scale even in fragmented markets. Both companies expanded rapidly by addressing daily financial needs for ordinary Nigerians, from small traders to transport operators. Moniepoint built a nationwide network of payment agents that now reaches millions of people, while OPay leveraged mobile technology to offer affordable digital services in both urban and rural areas. Their leadership teams succeeded because they recognised that inclusion, not luxury, drives innovation in Nigeria's market. The main lesson for Nigeria's broader leadership is that success in technology and entrepreneurship requires consistency of policy and continuity of support. The country has the market size and talent base to rival global innovation centres, but the absence of stable infrastructure, coherent regulation, and predictable governance continues to constrain progress. Learning from the examples of Senegal and Tunisia, which adopted Startup Acts providing legal recognition, fiscal incentives, and investor protection, Nigeria could formalise a framework that encourages innovation while reducing bureaucratic friction. Such policies would send a clear signal that the state views entrepreneurs as partners in development rather than subjects of regulation.

In all these cases, leadership, whether within companies or within government, determines outcomes. Nigeria's tech champions succeeded because their leaders were forward-thinking, disciplined, and attuned to both local and global realities. If public policy can mirror that same clarity and purpose, the next generation of Nigerian startups could not only dominate African markets but also shape global technological frontiers.

Bridging Generations

Nigeria has one of the largest youth populations in the world, with over 60% of its citizens under the age of 25. Despite this demographic advantage, young people remain significantly under-represented in governance and political leadership. Admittedly, this problem is not unique to Nigeria. A 2023 Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) report reveals that half of the world's population is under 30, and 18% of people are between the ages of 20 and 29. Yet, only 2.8% of parliamentarians worldwide are aged 30 or under. By implication, young people's perspectives and priorities are less likely to be reflected in today's policy decisions, even though they will live the longest with the consequences of those decisions.³¹

It is widely believed that young people possess the creativity, grit and capacity for innovation required to drive lasting change. Even in Nigeria's history, youths have contributed to and even led important changes in political and economic systems.³² Nigeria has also witnessed youthful political leadership at the highest level. General Yakubu Gowon, General Murtala Muhammed, General Ibrahim Babangida, and even Goodluck Jonathan assumed office at ages 32, 37, 44 and 53, respectively.

This is no longer the case. Instead, the country's political landscape is noticeably dominated by political leaders that are above 60 years old. Admittedly, this is a continent-wide challenge; Africa's median age of 19 is not reflected in the continent's political leadership.³³ Africa's apparent departure from electing young people as political leaders raises concerns about a likely mismatch between leaders' decisions and the needs of those they govern.³⁴

The longstanding debate on youth, politics, and governance is two-pronged, with substantial evidence to validate both perspectives. First, some argue that youth underrepresentation is due to deliberate, systemic barriers impeding meaningful engagement and limiting access to opportunities for effective participation. Such barriers include a corrupt and patronage-based political system, cultural biases, illiteracy and poverty, limiting young people's influence on decision-making and their overall contribution to building a better society.

The second and perhaps more contentious debate is around competence. For many, especially older people, youths lack the requisite capacity (including rational judgement and experience) for political leadership, keeping them as spectators rather than active participants in decision-making processes. To inform policy, young people must demonstrate 'readiness'. Unsurprisingly, ageism reinforces this perspective. This debate is not limited to the public sector. A 2022 PwC survey on next-generation members in family businesses revealed that while many older family members acknowledged them as key to business growth and sustainability, they were less keen on 'handing over' to them after COVID-19 than before, given the pandemic's disruptive impact.

Relatedly, even these younger folks admitted that leadership development was a key learning priority for effective succession planning, beyond finance and business innovation skills. More importantly, one key point stood out: the criticality of succession planning.³⁵ Whether the problem is competence, access, or both, it is widely acknowledged that

Nigeria has a 'leadership preparation' gap requiring urgent attention.

From a policy and legal perspective, the #NotTooYoungToRun (NTYTR) Act, which lowered the age requirement for certain elective positions, was a widely applauded intervention. Resting on the notion that young people can solve Africa's governance and development challenges, it was deemed Nigeria's most successful constitutional amendment campaign and largest youth movement at the time.³⁶ Nigeria felt its immediate impact in the 2019 elections; 10 out of the 72 presidential candidates were aged between 35 and 40 years, while 1,515 youth candidates below 35 – representing 23% of all the candidates – contested for seats in the House of Representatives. However, this Act was only a starting point.

Complementary to NTYTR, other programmes targeting public sector leadership have also gained popularity. Notable ones include the School of Politics, Policy & Governance's Public Leadership programme, Lagos State's Lateef Jakande Leadership Academy (LJLA), the Electoral College's Politeracy course, ElectHER Academy's Future Lawmakers Programme, the Bridge Foundation's Emerging Political Leaders Fellowship (EPLF), LEAP Africa's Youth Leadership Development Programme, and Kaduna State's Kashim Ibrahim Fellowship (KIF). Most of these programmes typically focus on capacity building, and some embed advocacy for reforms into their programme components to jointly address the competence and access problem.

While these initiatives have recorded notable success, they v

have limited collective ability to close this gap and create a generational shift in Nigeria's leadership landscape. And rightly so. Without a 'whole-of-nation' approach to leadership development, pockets of interventions can only do so much. For instance, despite Not Too Young To Run, the number of young candidates vying for political positions in the 2023 elections significantly dropped to 28.6%, from 34% in 2019.³⁷ This is because lowering age requirements, though commendable, does not automatically address other challenges. Besides, being young does not equate to capacity for transformative leadership. We saw this with some young leaders in the colonial era.³⁸

Notwithstanding the cynicism and distrust in government, young Nigerians are demonstrating their growing potential (and willingness) to engage in the political arena. If anything, the #ENDSARS movement and the 2023 elections revealed this.³⁹ Young people are increasingly demanding accountability and are refusing to back down. Even with high youth emigration rates, the growing digital economy is contributing to a gradual shift in economic power in favour of young people.⁴⁰

Additionally, many are self-educating on electoral and constitutional processes. Although highly educated people are also becoming less interested in political participation.⁴¹ Nonetheless, youth agency is rising. With the outstanding successes recorded in art, entertainment, sports and technology, young Nigerians can potentially make a phenomenal impact as political leaders, when the environment allows and supports them to.^{42/43}

Beyond providing access to decision-making spaces, leadership development requires time, support and skill development.⁴⁴ Today's leaders must understand this as they strive to deliberately

build environments that foster responsibility and integrity. This is where a national commitment to civic education and mentorship as necessary tools for leadership development comes in.⁴⁵ When leaders ensure that civic education is integrated into the academic curriculum across all schools, with more attention to underfunded public schools, young people can learn about their civic roles and responsibilities.⁴⁶ Additionally, by engaging the support of local NGOs, civic education can be amplified and better customised to meet different cultural needs, thereby promoting inclusion.⁴⁷ Effective mentorship cultivates leaders committed to upholding ethical values and ensuring continuity. These leaders are not only well-trained but also draw upon the wisdom of their predecessors. Leveraging the benefit of hindsight, mentees become significantly more effective and visionary in their administration.⁴⁸ Through mentorship, young leaders can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical governance.⁴⁹

Mentorship should not be confused with 'godfatherism', which is often self-serving, exploitative and unsustainable. Mentorship is built on mutual trust and respect, and involves a two-way value exchange, given that older folks can also learn from youths. Some refer to this as 'reverse mentorship'. With technology, mentorship can be scaled to benefit many more people concurrently.

Globally, the transformative impact of leadership development is evident. Countries like Singapore demonstrate how structured preparation, mentorship, and a clear vision can transform nations. In Singapore, potential leaders are identified and groomed well in advance, while gradually increasing their responsibilities to prepare them for senior leadership roles.⁵⁰ Specifically, initiatives

like the Public Service Leadership Programme (PSLP), a talent development programme for potential senior public sector leaders, stand out. Relatedly, centralised, statutory institutions like the Civil Service College (CSC) also provide leadership development training to develop future-ready public officers and agencies.⁵¹ Both initiatives strategically embed mentorship into their programme delivery in different ways, including '*Leaders Building Leaders*' workshops.⁵²

Regarding civic education, Singapore has an established, centrally controlled national curriculum that predates its independence. It emphasises values such as responsibility, resilience and respect for the nation. The curriculum's current iteration is the *Character and Citizenship Education (CCE)*, which aims to "nurture values and social-emotional competencies such as respect, responsibility, and resilience in Singaporean students, so that they grow up to be morally upright, active and contributing citizens". Children start learning CCE at foundational levels from their first year in primary school, with the curriculum becoming more complex as they grow. This brings to bear another crucial point: timing matters, and civic education should not be an afterthought.

Preparing young people for political leadership is a complex challenge that requires a consistent, nationwide strategy, not just isolated programmes. However, the direct benefit of this effort could bequeath Nigeria with a new generation of ethical, transformative leaders. Through civic education and mentorship, Nigeria stands a better chance of cracking its long-standing leadership puzzle.

Conclusion – Connecting the Dots

To connect the dots in Nigeria’s leadership landscape, we must first understand how these elements influence each other. Governance, economic policy, technology, and generational inclusion are interwoven threads. When governance is weak, economic policies become inconsistent. When economic management falters, innovation suffers. Without youth inclusion, both governance and innovation lose momentum over time. In short, each of these areas affects the others, and aligning them is crucial for a stable, forward-looking national strategy. Real-world examples underscore the urgency of this alignment. For instance, Nigeria’s past struggles with inconsistent power sector policies have hampered industrial growth and discouraged investment. Similarly, the absence of a unified strategy on mineral beneficiation has left Africa exporting raw materials while importing finished products at a premium.

These gaps have real consequences, from missed economic opportunities to a lack of jobs for young people.

The numbers tell the story as well. Nigeria loses billions of dollars each year due to inefficiencies in these sectors, and youth unemployment remains a persistent challenge. These figures highlight the cost of not connecting the dots. The private sector must also play a stronger role in this process. Industry leaders have the capacity to drive innovation, invest in infrastructure, and build partnerships that link enterprise with public policy. Effective leadership requires an enabling environment where businesses can scale, create jobs, and participate in national planning. Collaboration between the state and industry will determine whether growth becomes inclusive and sustainable.

The Better Leadership for a Better Nigeria Conference 2025 will be a forum for stakeholders to address these urgent issues. It is also a space to emphasize that the youth are not just a demographic to be managed, but a powerful asset. The Conference will reaffirm that leadership must connect vision with continuity. It will call attention to the need for governance, economic management, technology, and generational inclusion to intersect and align for Nigeria to achieve long-term growth, development and stability. The Conference will also underline that leadership must connect ideas with systems, and vision with execution. It will focus on **three keystones for a better Nigeria** - frameworks, generations, and leadership - each reinforcing the other. By connecting these dots across governance, economy, and society, the Conference seeks to chart a path toward a leadership culture that is coordinated, accountable, and prepared for the future.

End Notes

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