



Evaluating Nigeria's National Development Plans: Addressing Contemporary Challenges and Seizing Strategic Opportunities

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Abstract

This study assesses Nigeria's National Development Plans (NDPs), identifying contemporary challenges and exploring strategic opportunities to enhance their effectiveness in promoting inclusive and sustainable development. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study employs document analysis guided by a thematic content framework to examine selected NDPs, implementation reports, and peer-reviewed literature. Documents were purposively selected based on relevance to planning outcomes, governance transitions, and alignment with national development goals. The analysis reveals that while longstanding issues, such as policy discontinuity, the politicization of planning, weak accountability mechanisms, and fragmented stakeholder coordination, have persisted, recent developments, including increased digital capacity, youth engagement, and subnational planning innovations, present underutilized opportunities for reform. Unlike prior studies focusing solely on implementation failures, this research offers an integrative diagnosis linking institutional inertia to design-process disconnects in Nigeria's planning culture. The findings suggest that sustainable outcomes require technical reforms and a recalibration of political commitment and citizen ownership. Consequently, the study proposes the institutionalization of an independent national planning commission, legislative backing for plan continuity across different political regimes, and a participatory monitoring framework led by civil society. By bridging the gap between planning theory and practical governance, this study contributes to development literature and informs policymakers seeking to reposition Nigeria's national planning architecture for long-term impact.

Keywords: Corruption; Development Planning; Inclusivity; Institutional Capacity; National Development Plans; Nigeria; Political Instability; Private Sector Participation; Sustainable Development

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INTRODUCTION

Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has consistently pursued economic transformation and improved living standards by adopting National Development Plans (NDPs). These plans have historically outlined strategic priorities and policy frameworks to guide investments in critical socio-economic sectors, including agriculture, infrastructure, education, healthcare, and industrialization (Ayuba, 2023). From the First National Development Plan (1962–1968) to the current National Development Plan (2021–2025), successive Nigerian governments have demonstrated a commitment to structured development planning as a tool for national progress.

Each iteration of the NDP has responded to prevailing economic and political realities. The Second (1970–1974) and Third (1975–1980) Plans emphasized post-war reconstruction and industrial growth, while the Fourth Plan (1981–1985) aimed to consolidate past achievements despite being constrained by global economic downturns and internal fiscal mismanagement (Atuonwu & Unya, 2021). The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the mid-1980s and 1990s, implemented under the auspices of the IMF and World Bank, marked a shift toward market liberalization but also resulted in increased poverty and inequality (Todaro & Smith, 2009). Recent efforts, such as Vision 20:2020 and the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP, 2017–2020), sought to diversify the economy and achieve inclusive growth, though implementation challenges have persisted.

Despite over six decades of development planning, Nigeria continues to face persistent structural challenges, including widespread poverty, high unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, institutional fragility, and pervasive corruption (Adah & Abasilim, 2015; Deinne & Ajayi, 2021). Corruption, in particular, has distorted public investment priorities

and undermined accountability mechanisms, while political instability and poor stakeholder engagement have led to policy discontinuities (Agu, Nkwo & Eneiga, 2024). These enduring problems raise concerns about Nigeria's overall effectiveness and sustainability of its planning regimes.

Furthermore, the literature on Nigeria's NDPs often examines individual plans or focuses narrowly on specific sectors, offering limited insights into systemic issues or cross-cutting themes such as governance, inclusion, and institutional coherence. There is also a noticeable gap in examining how stakeholder participation, especially that of the private sector and civil society, affects plan formulation and execution (Ayuba, 2023).

This study addresses these gaps by providing a comprehensive historical and contemporary evaluation of Nigeria's national development plans. It critically examines how recurring institutional, political, and socio-economic challenges have limited the impact of these plans while identifying strategic opportunities for reform and innovation. The paper is motivated by the need to understand why Nigeria's development plans have underperformed and what can be done to enhance their effectiveness in light of evolving national and global contexts.

Accordingly, the guiding research question is:

To what extent have Nigeria's National Development Plans effectively addressed the country's socio-economic challenges, and what strategic opportunities can be harnessed to improve future planning outcomes?

By answering this question, the study aims to contribute actionable insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and scholars working to shape Nigeria's future of development planning.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative historical research design guided by a narrative literature review and analyzed using thematic analysis. The research methodology is suitable for exploring the evolution, passage, and impact of Nigeria's National Development Plans (NDPs) from 1960 to 2025 within their evolving political, economic, and institutional contexts. The qualitative historical design enables an analysis of continuity and disruption patterns among various planning regimes. In parallel, the narrative review forms a structured synthesis of existing knowledge and opinions from diverse sources.

Data used in the research were drawn exclusively from secondary sources. These are original government documents, including the First to Fourth National Development Plans, Vision 20:2020, the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (2017–2020), and the current National Development Plan (2021–2025). Additional data were collected from policy implementation reviews, budget speeches, parliamentary debates, white papers, and monitoring and evaluation reports. To enrich the analysis, peer-reviewed journals, research monographs, and policy reports from international development agencies, such as the World Bank, UNDP, and IMF, were included to provide comparative and global context.

A purposive sampling strategy guided the selection of documents. The inclusion standards focused on the document's relevance to the study purposes, whether the source could provide information on the development of plans, formulation, implementation, and impacts, and the source's reliability. The documents analyzed were limited to those that specifically dealt with national planning frameworks or compared the implementation and success of NDPs.

The research method employed was thematic coding, which enabled the identification and categorization of

underlying patterns and themes across various documents. Five broad themes emerged through close reading and coding: institutional capacity, governance and corruption, political stability, stakeholder participation, and inclusiveness. These themes served as lenses through which drivers of NDP success and failure in the long term were examined.

It facilitated contextual and interpretive analysis of how long-term structural issues and cyclical policy episodes have conditioned Nigeria's planning history at the national level. The thematic coding enabled text-based evidence to be organized into sensible thematic bins, outlining past and current constraints and presenting pragmatic entry points for reform. By linking historical evidence to ongoing controversies and debates, the study offers policy-relevant lessons to guide the formulation and implementation of more inclusive, adaptive, and effective national development strategies.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN NIGERIA, 1960–2025

The trajectory of national development planning in Nigeria reflects the nation's complex political economy, marked by cycles of optimism, reform, crisis, and rebalancing. Since becoming independent in 1960, Nigeria has undertaken successive development planning cycles, ranging from long-term multi-year plans to medium-term frameworks, each set in the context of the contemporary socio-economic and political landscape (Aliyu, Msugther & Nneka, 2023). While some plans were punctuated by landmark successes, most were marred by gaps in implementation, economic shocks, and institutional weaknesses.

Early Post-Independence Period (1960–1975)

Nigeria's official development planning experience began with the First

National Development Plan (1962–1968). Targeting the construction of a post-colonial economic structure, the plan attempted to diversify the economy away from agriculture, industrialize, and improve infrastructure, education, and social services (Ibietan & Ekhosuehi, 2013). Transport and communications were allocated a significant portion of their funding for national integration and economic modernization (Umoh & Effiong, 2024). The plan was a collaborative effort among regional and federal governments, as well as the private sector. The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) put in its way, deflecting state attention and capital from development goals (Nwosu, 2024).

The Second National Development Plan (1970–1974) was formulated after the war, with its agenda centered on national reconstruction, economic recovery, and social integration. It drew on oil revenues to double living standards by 1985, ensure rural-urban balance, and promote balanced development across regions (Ayida, 2023). The plan also centered on indigenization policies to support petroleum-led growth and Nigerian participation in key economic areas (Lewis, 2019)

Despite this, fiscal mismanagement and inadequate institutional frameworks led to budget overspending and a failure to meet key objectives.

The Oil Boom and Structural Planning (1975–1985)

The Third National Development Plan (1975–1980) coincided with unparalleled oil wealth, resulting in massive public investment in infrastructure, education, health, and industry. The plan focused on economic diversification and self-reliance, with a strong emphasis on expanding the agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism sectors (Oyigbo, Ngwu, & Nwachukwu, 2021). The plan also invested heavily in developing human capital. Despite the documented GDP growth, most projects programmed during the plan were plagued by incompleteness due to poor resource

targeting and fiscal non-responsiveness (Ogunjobi, 2022).

The Fourth National Development Plan (1981–1985) was formulated in the context of declining oil prices, rising import costs, and a global economic recession. It included elements of macroeconomic adjustment with a focus on fiscal discipline, privatization, and public sector reform. While these were its aims, the plan was characterized by a rising external debt burden, falling foreign exchange reserves, and low implementation capacity (Okeke, Nwakoby & Okeke, 2022).

SAP Era and Medium-Term Rolling Plans (1986–1999)

The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), launched in 1986, was a turning point in Nigeria's planning policy. Five-year development plans were suspended in favour of rolling three-year plans, intended to be more sensitive and flexible in their response to changing macroeconomic conditions (Nathan & Uche, 2023). SAP focused on trade liberalization, deregulation, and reductions in public spending. However, the reforms led to massive social deprivation, cutbacks in public expenditure, and degradation of state capacity, particularly in the social sector.

Democratic Era and Vision Planning (1999–2015)

The return to democratic governance in 1999 reactivated efforts at institutionalizing long-term strategic planning. The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) 2004–2007 represented a significant shift toward reform-centered planning, focusing on areas such as privatization, anti-corruption measures, civil service reform, and poverty alleviation (NPC, 2004). NEEDS was complemented by subnational plans such as SEEDS (State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy).

This was followed by the Vision 20:2020 (2009–2020) plan, which outlined

Nigeria's aspiration to become one of the world's top 20 economies by 2020. It was based on economic growth, infrastructure expansion, and the development of human capital. Compromised inter-government collaboration, weak execution, and political will constraints derailed its attainment (Fajemisin, 2023).

Modern Planning Frameworks (2015–2025)

Against the backdrop of an economic recession, the Buhari administration launched the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) 2017–2020, whose key priorities included macroeconomic stabilization, economic diversification, and improved governance (Ata-Agboni & Nwanisobi, 2019). It was somewhat successful in agriculture and infrastructure, but was hampered by low private investment inflows and institutional bottlenecks.

The current National Development Plan (2021–2025) aims to build upon past efforts by focusing on job creation, poverty reduction, and human capacity development. It emphasizes increased private sector participation, infrastructure investment, and digitalization (Anam, Ijim, Ironbar, Otu, Duke, & Eba, 2024). However, innovation from the past state-led approaches, finance issues, inter-agency collaboration, and political ownership remain (Olayiwola & Adeleye, 2021).

Between 1960 and 2025, Nigerian development planning underwent significant changes, transitioning from centralized state models to more liberalized and participatory methods. Each planning period has attempted to deal with the country's economic situation and modes of governance. Despite considerable progress, policy inconsistencies, political instability, inefficiencies in implementation, and over-reliance on hydrocarbon resources have hindered the transformative impact of development plans. An effective planning culture rooted in institutional accountability, stakeholder

engagement, and consistency in policy is imperative for Nigeria to optimize its developmental ambitions (Chukwu, 2023).

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO NIGERIA'S NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Despite being the focal point of Nigeria's development trajectory, National Development Plans (NDPs) continue to face longstanding and resilient challenges. The issues, ranging from inadequate institutional frameworks to budgetary imbalances and corruption, have been extensively documented in empirical research and policy analyses. Failure to address the challenges has resulted in long-term underdevelopment, cycles of poverty, and limited structural economic change.

One of the longest-standing challenges is the gap between grand policy intentions and reality on the ground, commonly referred to as the implementation gap. For example, the Vision 20:2020 plan projected that by 2020, Nigeria would be ranked among the world's top 20 economies. In 2020, Nigeria ranked 27th globally in terms of GDP and had the highest number of people living in extreme poverty, surpassing India (World Bank, 2020). Failure was attributed to poor policy implementation, misaligned sectoral strategies, and a lack of monitoring frameworks (Anam et al., 2024). The same failures occurred during the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) era, where austerity reforms led to wholesale retrenchments, industrial stagnation, and a weakening of the social sector despite the plan targeting the diversification of the economy (Nathan & Uche, 2023).

Political discontinuity is another core challenge. As reported in a 2019 Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) report, over 70% of development initiatives that a government sets in motion are abandoned or reversed by the succeeding government (NESG, 2019). The fate of the Seven-Point Agenda under President Umaru Yar'Adua,

which was not implemented after he died in 2010, speaks volumes about how regime changes can render long-term planning ineffective, leading to waste and inefficiency. The absence of parliamentary endorsement of the majority of national plans renders political will the sole guarantee of continuity, with national policy subject to the whimsical aspects of party politics (Onyeajuwa, 2020).

Corruption and inefficiency in resource management persistently hinder the effectiveness of national planning efforts. Audit findings revealed financial infractions, including disbursements without supporting documentation, excess budgetary expenditures, inflated mobilization fees, and non-compliant contract awards. Notably, ₦1.08 billion was disbursed from the GIFMIS account without payment vouchers, in violation of Paragraph 601 of the Financial Regulations (2009), while ₦546 million was transferred to project accounts without budgetary approval (Tunji, 2024).

This is in line with past findings by the National Integrated Infrastructure Master Plan (NIIMP), where it was held that as much as 30% of capital expenditure projects were tainted with misappropriation or failure to implement due to corruption in procurement and contract award (Ebekozen, Samsurijan, Aigbavboa, Awe, Amadi, & Emuchay, 2023).

In addition, more federal-level central planning also misaligns with local needs. Although Nigeria is a federal state, its development planning process tends to be federal-centric and top-down, with states and local governments playing a relatively minor role in the process. According to a survey conducted by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), only 28% of local government administrators have ever participated in the national planning process (Aihie & Okojie, 2023). This exclusionary approach generates a policy priority-local reality misalignment, especially in fields like education, health,

and agriculture, which are better addressed at lower levels of governance.

The fiscal imbalance issue also defies effective planning. Nigeria's Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), which informs annual budgeting, is scarcely aligned with long-term development objectives. For instance, during the ERGP (2017–2020) implementation, specific strategic projects were underfunded or omitted from the budget proposal despite being part of the plan (Oweibia, Elemuwa, Akpan, Daniel, Oruikor, Tarimobowei, Okoho, Elemuwa, Raimi, & Babatunde, 2024). This misalignment leads to heterogeneous expenditure, ineffective resource allocation, and a limited impact.

Dependence on oil revenue worsens Nigeria's vulnerability to external shocks. Between 2015 and 2020, Nigeria experienced three significant economic recessions, mainly due to fluctuations in the global oil price (NBS, 2020). The 2020 recession, in particular, saw GDP decline by -6.1% in Q2 due to the COVID-19-induced crash of oil demand (NBS, 2020). Such shocks set back the implementation of development plans and exposed the nation's failure to develop a diversified economy that is resilient to shocks despite the ongoing policy emphasis on diversification (NBS, 2020).

Finally, limits in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacities constrain adaptive learning and accountability. Although most recent plans incorporate M&E components, they are poorly funded and understaffed. For instance, only 0.03% of the budget was allocated to the National Bureau of Statistics in 2022. However, it must be at the core of tracking development indicators (Budget Office of the Federation, 2022). This results in substandard data quality, limited feedback, and a lack of timely evidence to inform remedies.

These issues suggest that Nigerian development planning is hindered not by the absence of vision but by weak structures, political sabotage, and

institutional weaknesses. Thus, solving these issues requires better plan design and reform in the governance system to facilitate policy implementation, fiscal prudence, subnational involvement, and public accountability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Summary of Key Findings

A historical analysis of Nigeria's National Development Plans (NDPs) from 1960 to 2025 reveals a recurring pattern of mega-policy plans being derailed by ineffective implementation, structural bottlenecks, and adverse political and economic conditions. Each development planning phase — industrialization, financial liberalization, poverty reduction, or digitalization — has been confronted with problems that significantly dampened its impact. While occasional success has been achieved, particularly in infrastructure development and targeted sector interventions, most NDPs have fallen short of their proposed outcomes.

The paper outlines several outstanding trends:

1. Recurrent implementation failures, particularly of high-profile projects such as the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and Vision 20:2020, have not realized macroeconomic stability and poverty reduction objectives.
2. Political discontinuity, as viewed through the lens of successive governments cancelling or re-prioritizing plans of earlier governments, undermines continuity and confidence in the government among the masses.
3. As federal leadership in planning exercises, limited inclusiveness and over-centralization tend to exclude subnational stakeholders, disarticulating policy priorities and local realities.
4. Institutional weaknesses, specifically in monitoring and evaluation (M&E), fiscal

accountability, and inter-agency coordination, also hinder implementation fidelity.

5. Over-reliance on oil revenue exposes plans to international market shocks and limits fiscal space.
6. There are incremental enhancements in new plans (e.g., ERGP and NDP 2021–2025), such as a greater emphasis on digitalization, job creation, and private-sector involvement, without eliminating the underlying governance constraints.

Analytical Insights

The deductions highlight a structural irony in Nigeria's development planning: high-quality policy frameworks are often confronted by inadequate implementation settings. The ensuing insights shed more light on system issues:

Institutional Weakness and Implementation Gap: Despite well-articulated policy goals, Nigeria's NDPs have consistently been characterized by poor implementation. Vision 20:2020, for example, failed to place Nigeria among the top 20 global economies despite a sophisticated planning process, primarily due to sectoral strategies that were not well-coordinated and inadequate monitoring systems (Anam et al., 2024). This is a continuation of the SAP-era performance, where anticipated structural changes entrenched joblessness and further diminished social services (Nathan et al., 2023).

Politicization and Plan Discontinuity: Planning cycles are often truncated by transition phases in office. As the case of the Seven-Point Agenda under the Presidency of President Yar'Adua illustrates, programs were left to flounder with his untimely death, filling policy voids and stunting resources (NESG, 2019; Onyeajuwa, 2020). The reality that most NDPs have no statutory backing adds to this challenge.

Corruption and Resource Mismanagement: The 2025 federal budget

has once again revealed the deep-rooted inefficiencies that continue to afflict governance in Nigeria. According to BudgIT, a civic technology organization promoting budget accountability, the National Assembly added more than 11,000 projects totalling ₦6.93 trillion. This alarming revelation highlights entrenched corruption and inadequate resource allocation within the budgeting process. It reflects a system plagued by a lack of transparency, fiscal indiscipline, and a disregard for genuine national development goals. These persistent irregularities have steadily diminished public trust and weakened the legitimacy of government institutions (Punch Editorial, May 2025).

Disconnection at the Local Level and Top-Down Planning: Centre for Democracy and Development survey statistics reveal weak involvement of local governments in planning (a paltry 28% in participation), leading to a disconnect between national plans and regional realities, especially in critical sectors like agriculture and education (CDD, 2016).

Fiscal Misalignment and Incoherence: Nigeria's budget formulation under the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) often fails to align with the NDPs' strategic priorities. In ERGP implementation, key programs were either omitted or underfunded, demonstrating a lack of coherence in fiscal planning and development priorities (Oweibia et al., 2024).

Economic Susceptibility to Volatility of Oil Prices: Nigeria's inability to diversify its economy, despite serial policy pronouncements, exposed its development path to exogenous shocks. The COVID-19-induced 2020 recession, when GDP fell by -6.1%, illustrated the susceptibility of oil-based fiscal frameworks (NBS, 2020).

Inadequate Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Capacity: Whilst recent NDPs include M&E frameworks, their

operationalization continues to be constrained by funding shortages and human capacity limitations. The 2022 budgetary allocation of just 0.03% to the National Bureau of Statistics highlights the abandonment of data-informed policy (Budget Office, 2022).

Policy Recommendations

Based on the critical analysis and historical assessment of Nigeria's National Development Plans (NDPs), the following policy suggestions are offered to improve future planning results, institutional strength, and implementation effectiveness:

Enactment of Development Planning Legislation: To ensure the protection of continuity and safeguard planning processes against political change, there is a need for a statutory requirement to adopt and use NDPs. Incorporating national plans into law, such as South Africa's National Development Plan or Rwanda's Vision 2050, will promote inter-administrative consistency, boost public trust, and decrease the rate at which plans are abandoned following a change in leadership.

Institutional Strengthening and Capacity Building: Systemic implementation failure is corrected through robust institutional reform. The core agencies of the Ministry of Budget and National Planning, including the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the Office of the Auditor-General, must be equipped with the necessary technical capacity, adequate financing, and operational autonomy. The focus must reinforce Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) capacity at both national and sub-national levels, enabling data-driven decision-making and real-time project tracking.

Establishing Subnational Ownership and Involvement: Planning processes should shift from top-down to bottom-up, participatory modes. This requires institutionally enshrining the

participation of states and local governments in planning, resource allocation, and implementation monitoring. Forums such as intergovernmental planning councils and multi-level stakeholder forums should be utilized to connect national objectives with subnational development priorities.

Improving Fiscal-Plan Credibility through Alignment with MTEF: Budgetary prudence and strategic coherence can be achieved by aligning the MTEF with NDP priorities. National budgets must be legislatively required to align with the objectives of the development plan. This entails periodic joint reviews between fiscal institutions and planning agencies to prevent mismatches between underfunding and policy abandonment.

Combating Corruption through Open Planning and Procurement: Corruption is an essential barrier to effective planning. Strengthening procurement systems through digitalization, open contracting data standards (OCDS), and rigorous project auditing will deter the diversion of funds and misallocation. The public release of planning documents and project dashboards can enhance transparency and civic scrutiny.

Diversifying Revenue Sources and Reducing Oil Dependence: Fiscal vulnerability to oil price shocks demands bold diversification of the economy. Investment in agriculture, solid minerals, manufacturing, and services in the non-oil sectors, primarily through sectoral industrial policies, will stabilise public finance and provide a firmer base for development planning.

Improving Data Infrastructure and Evidence-Based Policy Design: Reliable information is central to effective planning. Increasing budgetary allocation to statistical agencies, such as the NBS, and enhancing state and local government regionalized data collection systems will

improve policy responsiveness. Additionally, moving towards real-time data analysis in M&E systems will activate early warning for plan derailment and improve adaptive management.

Enabling Private Sector and Civil Society Engagement: The emphasis in recent proposals on private sector involvement should be heightened through institutionalized Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), sectoral advisory boards, and development compacts. Civil society organizations need to be involved in the design and assessment process to ensure social accountability, transparency, and acceptance among the people.

Institutionalising Adaptive Planning Mechanisms: Nigeria's planning process must remain agile in response to the dynamic nature of development challenges. Including scenario planning, periodic planning reviews, and contingency mechanisms in NDPs will facilitate quick action against pandemics, economic crises, or climate-related shocks.

Incorporating Development Planning into National Values and Civic Education: Development master plans must be rooted in national values and popularised in civic education curricula for long-term sustainable buy-in. This enhances citizen awareness and accountability standards, fostering a culture of long-term thinking rather than short-term political expediency.

CONCLUSION

The National Development Plans, from the First Plan of the 1960s to the current 2021–2025 plan, were critically examined in this study to assess their performance in addressing the country's development issues and identify strategic areas for reform. The assessment revealed a perennial pattern of spectacular, well-articulated plans based on fragile institutional capacity, politicization, policy discontinuity, corruption, and limited inclusivity.

While some plans registered improvement in infrastructure development and sectoral interventions, consistent implementation gaps, exacerbated by over-centralization, fiscal misalignment, and oil dependence, have stunted sustained national transformation. Later frameworks, such as the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) and the NDP 2021–2025, mark some progress through a greater emphasis on digitalization, employment creation, and private-sector involvement. However, the initiatives still struggle with systemic governance deficiencies, dormant monitoring systems, and weak political buy-in.

A multi-faceted approach is required to overcome these institutional hindrances. Supporting development plans with the law is essential to ensure policy consistency and reinforce institutions, particularly in monitoring and evaluation, coordinating the fiscal framework with development priorities, and facilitating direct engagement of subnational levels, the private sector, and civil society at the planning level. These reforms are, therefore, imperative in bridging the continued gap between planning and execution and ensuring national development efforts are inclusive, resilient, and responsive to new prevailing challenges.

Limitations of the Study

This analysis primarily relies on qualitative secondary data analysis, including policy briefs, available research, and institutional documents. Thus, it may not capture the ground realities of plan implementation, particularly at the subnational level. Moreover, it does not quantify the quantifiable contribution of every plan, which limits its richness in data. The federal tilt in the analysis may also overlook new practices or success stories at the state and local levels.

Implications for Future Research and Policymaking

There remains vast potential for future empirical research to quantify the developmental impact of national plans by sector and region. Comparative research, which measures planning performance at the sub-national level or examines the contributions of non-state actors and intergovernmental coordination, can provide further insights. The report provides pragmatic recommendations for policymakers to rethink development planning as a process of technique and politically informed, participatory, and adaptive governance rather than an abstract intellectual exercise. Ultimately, inclusive and sustainable development in Nigeria hinges on closing the gap between planning and implementation and reviving public confidence in national planning as a realistic path to national transformation.

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