THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN ENHANCING MARITIME SECURITY: A STUDY OF NIGERIAN MARITIME ADMINISTRATION AND SAFETY AGENCY'S STRATEGIES (2006–2024)

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Abstract: Maritime security is a vital component of Nigeria's national security and economic development, given the strategic importance of its coastline and position in the Gulf of Guinea. This article examines the role of leadership in enhancing maritime security through the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) between 2006 and 2024. It investigates how successive leadership styles, policies, and strategic initiatives influenced the agency's capacity to address piracy, illegal oil bunkering, smuggling, and other maritime threats. By analyzing NIMASA's evolution, leadership approaches, stakeholder engagement, and international collaborations, the paper shows how effective leadership has been central to driving reforms, institutional strengthening, and regional security cooperation. The research finds that key interventions such as the Deep Blue Project, the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act, and interagency collaborations with the Nigerian Navy and global partners contributed significantly to reducing piracy

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incidents and boosting investor confidence in Nigeria's maritime domain. Despite these achievements, challenges such as policy inconsistency, leadership transitions, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and limited judicial capacity continue to undermine sustainability of reforms. The paper concludes that visionary and reform-oriented leadership is crucial for sustaining maritime security gains. It recommends institutionalizing policy continuity, enhancing multi-stakeholder collaboration, strengthening legal frameworks, investing in technology and human capacity, and aligning maritime security with blue economy strategies. These measures, if implemented, would consolidate Nigeria's position as a maritime power in Africa while safeguarding national security and economic growth.

Keywords: Maritime Security, Nigerian, Maritime Administration, Safety

Introduction

Maritime security has become a critical component of national security in Nigeria, given the country's strategic location along the Gulf of Guinea, its dependence on maritime trade, and the centrality of oil and gas exports to its economy. The Nigerian maritime domain covers over 84,000 square nautical miles, hosting vital shipping lanes that connect Nigeria to global markets. However, this maritime space has been plagued by threats such as piracy, sea robbery, crude oil theft, illegal bunkering, smuggling, and environmental degradation. These challenges not only undermine Nigeria's economic stability but also weaken regional security in West and Central Africa. Against this backdrop, the NIMASA, established in 2006 through the merger of the National Maritime Authority (NMA) and the Joint Maritime Labour Industrial Council (JOMALIC), has played a pivotal role in formulating and implementing strategies aimed at safeguarding Nigeria's maritime interests. Leadership has been a central factor in NIMASA's ability to respond to evolving maritime security threats. From 2006 to 2024, the agency's performance has been shaped by different leadership approaches, ranging from policy-driven reforms to operational strategies such as the Deep Blue Project. Leadership within NIMASA

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has influenced not only the internal organizational culture but also the agency's effectiveness in fostering inter-agency collaboration with the Nigerian Navy, the Marine Police, the Nigerian Ports Authority, and international partners such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO). Effective leadership has also determined the extent of NIMASA's success in strengthening Nigeria's compliance with international maritime standards, reducing piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, and supporting the development of the nation's blue economy.

This paper, therefore, examines the role of leadership in enhancing maritime security, using NIMASA's strategies between 2006 and 2024 as a case study. It seeks to analyze how leadership dynamics shaped the agency's policies, security interventions, and stakeholder collaborations, while also highlighting the challenges encountered. The paper argues that leadership quality and vision are crucial determinants of institutional performance, particularly in the complex and security-sensitive maritime environment. By focusing on NIMASA's leadership trajectory, this study provides insights into the broader question of how leadership can be harnessed to strengthen maritime security governance in Nigeria.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Understanding maritime security in Nigeria requires a clear conceptual and theoretical foundation. This framework combines conceptual clarifications of leadership and maritime security with relevant theories such as transformational leadership theory, stakeholder theory, and systems theory. Together, they provide analytical lenses for evaluating NIMASA's leadership role in enhancing maritime security from 2006 to 2024.

Conceptual Clarifications:

Maritime Security

Maritime security is broadly understood as the protection of maritime domains from threats that compromise safety, economic prosperity, and environmental sustainability. It encompasses safeguarding sea lanes, ports, and offshore resources from piracy, sea robbery, terrorism, illegal oil bunkering, smuggling, marine

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pollution, and other illicit maritime activities. For Nigeria, maritime security is particularly vital given that over 90% of its international trade depends on sea transport and the nation's economy heavily relies on oil and gas exports located offshore. The Gulf of Guinea, which Nigeria dominates, has been historically described as one of the most volatile maritime regions, plagued by piracy and transnational organized crime. Thus, maritime security in Nigeria transcends military defense and law enforcement, involving governance, economic stability, and regional cooperation (Ukeje & Ela, 2013).

Leadership

Leadership is the process of influencing and guiding individuals, groups, or institutions toward the achievement of specific goals. It is a vital determinant of institutional performance and effectiveness. In the case of the NIMASA, leadership is central in setting strategic directions, initiating reforms, allocating resources, and fostering inter-agency collaboration to enhance maritime security. Leadership within NIMASA does not only involve positional authority but also the ability to inspire, motivate, and mobilize stakeholders in addressing maritime threats. Effective leadership ensures that organizational vision aligns with Nigeria's maritime security goals while adapting to evolving global maritime standards (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Stakeholder Collaboration

Stakeholder collaboration refers to the deliberate engagement and cooperation among different actors' governmental agencies, private sector, international partners, and civil society in pursuit of common objectives. Maritime security cannot be achieved in isolation, as threats in the sea are transnational and complex. NIMASA's leadership has had to work closely with the Nigerian Navy, Marine Police, Nigerian Ports Authority, oil companies, shipping corporations, and international organizations like the IMO and regional Gulf of Guinea states. Stakeholder collaboration is crucial in pooling resources, intelligence sharing, harmonizing policies, and creating synergy for sustainable maritime security (Freeman, 1984; Onuoha, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

To examine the role of leadership in enhancing maritime security through NIMASA's strategies, this study applies three theoretical lenses:

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership, developed by Burns (1978) and expanded by Bass (1985), emphasizes leaders' ability to inspire, motivate, and stimulate innovation among followers to achieve collective goals. It is particularly relevant to NIMASA, where leadership has been pivotal in launching projects like the Deep Blue Project aimed at curbing piracy. Transformational leaders in maritime security contexts drive reforms, influence organizational culture, and build trust among stakeholders (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory, as outlined by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), highlights how organizational actions are influenced by political, legal, and normative structures within their environments. NIMASA operates within Nigeria's political framework, international maritime laws, and regional security arrangements. Leadership choices are shaped by the need to conform to global standards such as IMO conventions while adapting strategies to Nigeria's domestic realities. This theory helps explain the institutional pressures and legitimacy challenges that NIMASA's leadership navigates.

Stakeholder Theory

Freeman (1984) proposed stakeholder theory, which argues that organizational success depends on balancing the interests of multiple stakeholders. Maritime security in Nigeria requires active involvement of diverse stakeholders—state actors, private shipping firms, oil companies, international partners, and local communities. Leadership effectiveness within NIMASA is therefore measured by its ability to

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harmonize these diverse interests, foster partnerships, and build trust in a complex maritime security landscape (Ogundele & Adewuyi, 2022).

Evolution of NIMASA

The Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) were formally established in August 2006 through the merger of the National Maritime Authority (NMA), created in 1987, and the JOMALIC. This consolidation was aimed at streamlining regulatory, administrative, and labour functions in Nigeria's maritime sector under one agency (NIMASA, 2010). The NIMASA Act of 2007 further strengthened its mandate, granting the agency responsibility for maritime safety, shipping regulation, pollution prevention, marine labour administration, and maritime security in line with international conventions (Ukeje & Ela, 2013).

Between 2006 and 2010, NIMASA focused largely on institutional consolidation. It sought to harmonize the functions of its predecessor agencies while also building credibility within the international maritime community. Early efforts included aligning national regulations with IMO conventions, capacitybuilding for Nigerian seafarers through the Nigerian Seafarers Development Programme (NSDP), and developing frameworks to tackle piracy and sea robbery, which were already threatening the Gulf of Guinea (Onuoha, 2013). However, challenges of inadequate funding, leadership instability, and corruption slowed down the agency's effectiveness in this period (Akinwale, 2019). From 2010 to 2015, NIMASA transitioned towards a more security-centered institution as piracy and armed robbery at sea escalated. The Gulf of Guinea was described as the world's most dangerous maritime zone, with Nigeria as the epicenter of attacks (Onuoha, 2013). NIMASA responded by expanding its partnership with the Nigerian Navy and Marine Police and advocating for a national maritime security architecture. It also initiated policy frameworks to safeguard offshore oil installations and collaborated with international partners to mitigate risks. Despite progress, leadership turnover and allegations of mismanagement affected policy continuity (Akinwale, 2019).

The period between 2016 and 2020 marked a significant turning point. NIMASA launched and expanded the Integrated National Security and Waterways Protection Infrastructure, popularly known as the Deep Blue Project. This initiative deployed a fleet of special mission vessels, aircraft, drones, armoured vehicles, and command-

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and-control centres to secure Nigeria's maritime domain (NIMASA, 2020). The passage of the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act in 2019 also provided a legal framework for prosecuting piracy, making Nigeria the first West African country to enact such legislation (UNODC, 2019). These innovations demonstrated leadership's renewed commitment to tackling maritime insecurity and restoring international confidence in Nigeria's waters.

From 2021 to 2024, NIMASA's evolution has been characterized by consolidation and expansion into blue economy development. Reports from the International Maritime Bureau (IMB, 2022) indicated a sharp decline in piracy incidents in Nigerian waters, with Nigeria no longer topping global piracy charts. NIMASA's leadership emphasized transparency, digitalization of maritime operations, regional cooperation, and private sector partnerships. In addition, the agency strengthened its focus on developing Nigeria's blue economy by promoting shipping, port efficiency, and marine resource management as strategic tools for economic diversification (Yusuf, 2021).

Leadership Styles and Strategic Approaches in NIMASA

Leadership has been a defining factor in the institutional performance and strategic direction of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) since its establishment in 2006. The agency has witnessed a succession of Directors-General, each bringing unique leadership orientations that have influenced policy formulation, institutional reforms, and maritime security strategies. Leadership styles within NIMASA can be broadly categorized into transactional and transformational tendencies, depending on whether leaders emphasized compliance and control or vision and innovation. In its early years (2006–2010), leadership in NIMASA leaned heavily toward a transactional style, with an emphasis on regulatory enforcement and institutional consolidation. Leaders at this stage focused on harmonizing the roles of the defunct National Maritime Authority (NMA) and the Joint Maritime Labour Industrial Council (JOMALIC). While necessary for laying a foundation, this approach was often bureaucratic and reactive, leaving the agency ill-prepared to deal with the rapid escalation of piracy and oil theft in Nigerian waters (Onuoha, 2013).

Between 2010 and 2015, leadership styles began to shift toward adaptive and reform-oriented strategies. Recognizing the growing threats to Nigeria's maritime domain, NIMASA's leadership emphasized collaboration with the Nigerian Navy and other security agencies. Strategic initiatives such as the Nigerian Seafarers Development Programme (NSDP) were expanded to address manpower shortages, while policies targeting offshore security were introduced (Akinwale, 2019). However, frequent leadership changes during this period created inconsistencies in policy implementation, reflecting the vulnerability of NIMASA to political interference (Ogundele & Adewuyi, 2022).

From 2016 onward, transformational leadership became more pronounced, particularly under leaders who championed the Deep Blue Project. This initiative, also known as the Integrated National Security and Waterways Protection Infrastructure, reflected a visionary approach to maritime security. It integrated air, land, and sea assets including drones, aircraft, special mission vessels, and command-and-control centres to tackle piracy and other maritime crimes (NIMASA, 2020). Transformational leaders within NIMASA not only secured funding and inter-agency cooperation but also inspired confidence among domestic and international stakeholders, leading to Nigeria's removal from the International Maritime Bureau's piracy "hotspot" list by 2022 (IMB, 2022).

In addition to security initiatives, leadership strategies since 2020 have increasingly incorporated innovative governance and digitalization. Leaders emphasized transparency in port operations, digital tracking of shipping activities, and anticorruption reforms aimed at restoring credibility to the agency. Moreover, the shift toward promoting the blue economy demonstrates a strategic reorientation of NIMASA's leadership toward economic diversification. This approach highlights the role of maritime trade, fisheries, and marine resource management as engines of national development (Yusuf, 2021). NIMASA's leadership strategies also prioritized stakeholder engagement, reflecting the principles of stakeholder theory. Strategic partnerships with the Nigerian Navy, Marine Police, International Maritime Organization (IMO), and regional Gulf of Guinea states have been critical in addressing transnational maritime crimes. Public–private partnerships with shipping companies and oil corporations further expanded the agency's operational reach and resource mobilization capacity (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela, 2013).

The leadership styles in NIMASA evolved from transactional, compliance-driven orientations in its formative years to transformational, innovative, and collaborative approaches in later years. This evolution underscores the importance of visionary leadership in driving institutional reforms, tackling maritime insecurity, and positioning Nigeria as a credible maritime nation. However, persistent challenges such as leadership instability, corruption, and political interference demonstrate that sustaining strategic gains requires consistency and institutional autonomy.

NIMASA's Leadership in Maritime Security Enhancement

Since its establishment in 2006, the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) have positioned itself as a central institution in Nigeria's maritime security architecture. Its leadership has played a pivotal role in shaping strategic responses to piracy, illegal oil bunkering, sea robbery, and other transnational crimes in the Gulf of Guinea. NIMASA's interventions demonstrate how visionary leadership, backed by policy reforms and inter-agency collaboration, can strengthen maritime security in a volatile environment.

One of the most significant leadership contributions of NIMASA has been its policy and legal innovations. Recognizing the limitations of fragmented laws in addressing maritime crimes, NIMASA leadership collaborated with the Nigerian government to secure the passage of the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act in 2019. This legislation made Nigeria the first West African country to criminalize piracy in line with international conventions, thereby providing a robust legal basis for prosecuting offenders (UNODC, 2019). The Act has since enabled the conviction of several piracy suspects, signaling Nigeria's determination to confront maritime insecurity (Akinwale, 2019).

Another major leadership initiative has been the Deep Blue Project, formally known as the Integrated National Security and Waterways Protection Infrastructure. Launched in 2017 and expanded in 2020, the project represents NIMASA's boldest step in combating piracy and armed robbery at sea. Under strong leadership, the agency deployed a fleet of special mission vessels, aircraft, drones, armoured vehicles, and command-and control centres to secure Nigeria's maritime domain (NIMASA, 2020). This project has been described as a transformational milestone in

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Nigeria's maritime security, helping to drastically reduce piracy incidents by 2021–2022 (IMB, 2022).

NIMASA's leadership has also emphasized inter-agency and international collaboration. Recognizing that maritime insecurity transcends national boundaries, the agency worked closely with the Nigerian Navy, Marine Police, Nigerian Ports Authority, and regional bodies under the Yaoundé Code of Conduct. Partnerships with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and shipping stakeholders enhanced intelligence sharing, training, and operational coordination (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela, 2013). Such collaborative leadership approaches have strengthened Nigeria's standing in global maritime governance while building regional capacity in the Gulf of Guinea.

Beyond security operations, NIMASA leadership pursued capacity-building and manpower development as long-term strategies for maritime safety. The Nigerian Seafarers Development Programme (NSDP) was expanded to train thousands of Nigerian youths in seafaring skills abroad, enhancing national capacity to meet international shipping standards (NIMASA, 2018). Similarly, investments in safety awareness campaigns, marine pollution control, and digitalization of maritime services reflected a strategic leadership vision that linked security with overall maritime governance.

The impact of these leadership initiatives is evident in Nigeria's improved global maritime reputation. By 2022, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) reported that piracy incidents in Nigerian waters had fallen to their lowest in decades, with Nigeria no longer ranking as the world's piracy hotspot (IMB, 2022). Furthermore, the emphasis on blue economy development under recent leadership highlighted a shift from reactive security measures to proactive economic and governance strategies (Yusuf, 2021).

However, challenges remain. Leadership instability, frequent changes in agency leadership and persistent allegations of corruption have at times undermined the continuity of security programs (Onuoha, 2013). Political interference has also limited NIMASA's autonomy in sustaining reforms. Yet, despite these constraints, NIMASA's leadership between 2006 and 2024 has significantly advanced maritime security in Nigeria, transforming the agency into a key player in regional security and global shipping governance.

Stakeholder Engagement and International Collaboration

Maritime security in Nigeria requires a multidimensional approach that extends beyond the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA). The complexity of threats such as piracy, oil theft, illegal fishing, and trafficking necessitates engagement with diverse stakeholders including government agencies, private sector operators, regional organizations, and international partners. NIMASA's leadership between 2006 and 2024 demonstrated an increasing awareness of the need for cooperative frameworks to secure Nigeria's maritime domain and the wider Gulf of Guinea.

One of the foremost areas of stakeholder engagement has been NIMASA's partnership with domestic security institutions. The agency has worked closely with the Nigerian Navy through the Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Security, facilitating joint patrols and intelligence sharing. This collaboration has been particularly critical under the Deep Blue Project, where assets deployed by NIMASA were operated in conjunction with naval and air force personnel (NIMASA, 2020). Similarly, coordination with the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) and Nigerian Customs Service has enhanced port security and reduced smuggling activities. This inter-agency synergy reflects an integrated maritime governance model where NIMASA provides leadership while harnessing the capabilities of complementary institutions (Onuoha, 2013).

NIMASA has also advanced stakeholder engagement through collaboration with private and industry actors. Engagement with the shipping industry, oil companies, and fishing communities has been vital in gathering intelligence, promoting compliance with safety regulations, and fostering confidence in Nigerian waters. Initiatives such as the establishment of the Maritime Industry Tripartite Committee provided a platform for dialogue between NIMASA, shipping companies, and labor unions, thereby reducing industrial disputes and enhancing operational efficiency (NIMASA, 2018). By institutionalizing such platforms, NIMASA positioned itself as central coordinator balancing security imperatives with commercial interests.

At the regional and international level, NIMASA played a critical leadership role in promoting cooperation within the Gulf of Guinea. It actively contributed to the operationalization of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct (2013), a regional framework designed to enhance information-sharing and joint operations among West and

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Central African states (Ukeje & Ela, 2013). Through its Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) infrastructure, NIMASA shared intelligence with neighbouring countries, thereby strengthening collective maritime security. International partnerships with the International Maritime

Organization (IMO), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the European Union's Gulf of Guinea Interregional Network (GoGIN) project provided Nigeria with technical support, training, and legal assistance to combat maritime crimes (UNODC, 2019).

Furthermore, NIMASA engaged in bilateral and multilateral collaborations with foreign navies and international shipping associations. Joint exercises such as Obangame Express, coordinated by the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), enhanced the operational readiness of NIMASA and its partners in addressing piracy and maritime terrorism (IMB, 2022). These collaborations not only improved Nigeria's operational capacity but also boosted its credibility as a regional leader in maritime security governance.

Challenges of Leadership in Strengthening Maritime Security

While the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) have made notable strides in enhancing maritime security between 2006 and 2024, its leadership has encountered persistent challenges that have limited the full realization of its mandate. These challenges stem from institutional weaknesses, operational constraints, inter-agency rivalries, and systemic governance issues. Understanding these challenges is vital in assessing both the achievements and limitations of NIMASA's leadership in the Nigerian maritime sector.

One of the primary challenges is institutional inefficiency and leadership instability. Frequent changes in NIMASA's leadership have often disrupted policy continuity and long-term strategic planning. For instance, the agency witnessed multiple Director Generals between 2009 and 2022, each introducing new policies and priorities, sometimes at the expense of ongoing projects (Yusuf, 2021). This instability fostered inconsistency in maritime security programs and delayed the implementation of critical initiatives such as the Deep Blue Project. Furthermore, bureaucratic red tape and inadequate transparency in decision-making weakened public trust and hindered effective leadership execution (Akinwale, 2019).

Another major challenge relates to funding gaps and resource mismanagement. Although NIMASA generates significant revenue from levies on shipping and maritime operations, allegations of corruption, financial mismanagement, and diversion of funds have undermined its capacity to invest adequately in security infrastructure (Onuoha, 2013). The acquisition and maintenance of modern surveillance equipment, patrol vessels, and aircraft have been hampered by these financial irregularities. Moreover, the inability to sustain a consistent budgetary framework has slowed down the pace of capacity-building initiatives, including training of personnel and deployment of technology for maritime domain awareness (UNODC, 2019).

Inter-agency rivalry and weak coordination also remain a critical challenge. Despite frameworks for collaboration with the Nigerian Navy, Customs, and Port Authority, turf wars and overlapping mandates have sometimes led to duplication of efforts and inefficiency (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela, 2013). Leadership struggles over jurisdiction in anti-piracy operations have hindered timely responses to maritime threats. Additionally, private sector stakeholders have occasionally expressed dissatisfaction with NIMASA's regulatory approach, citing heavy levies and insufficient engagement in policy processes (NIMASA, 2018). These tensions erode confidence and cooperation, which are crucial for integrated maritime security architecture.

Furthermore, legal and enforcement limitations constrained NIMASA's effectiveness until recent years. Prior to the enactment of the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act in 2019, Nigeria lacked a comprehensive legal framework to prosecute piracy and maritime crimes (UNODC, 2019). This legal vacuum allowed criminal elements to operate with impunity, undermining NIMASA's deterrent capacity. Although the SPOMO Act has since empowered the agency and the judiciary to prosecute maritime crimes, challenges of enforcement, judicial delays, and corruption still persist (IMB, 2022).

Lastly, regional and global pressures compound NIMASA's leadership challenges. The Gulf of Guinea is an international maritime hotspot, and Nigeria has often been criticized by global shipping associations for being slow in addressing piracy (IMB, 2022). These criticisms place pressure on NIMASA's leadership to deliver results while balancing domestic institutional weaknesses. Moreover, leadership has to navigate the competing demands of securing maritime borders, promoting the blue

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economy, and maintaining Nigeria's international maritime reputation (Yusuf, 2021).

Impacts and Achievements of NIMASA Leadership (2006– 2024)

Between 2006 and 2024, the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) demonstrated a series of achievements under different leaderships that shaped maritime governance, security, and economic contributions to Nigeria. Despite leadership challenges, the agency's initiatives contributed significantly to reducing piracy, enhancing maritime domain awareness, and promoting Nigeria's blue economy agenda.

One of the most notable impacts of NIMASA's leadership has been the reduction of piracy and maritime crimes in Nigerian waters. Historically, Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea accounted for the highest piracy incidents globally (Onuoha, 2013). However, by 2021–2022, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) reported a significant decline in piracy incidents attributed to NIMASA's leadership initiatives, particularly the implementation of the Deep Blue Project and enhanced cooperation with the Nigerian Navy (IMB, 2022). The deployment of special mission vessels, aircraft, and coastal surveillance systems under this project strengthened Nigeria's capacity to monitor and respond to maritime threats in real-time (NIMASA, 2020).

NIMASA also made strides in policy development and regulatory enforcement. Leadership reforms led to the domestication of international maritime conventions such as the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code and the ratification of anti-piracy laws, culminating in the passage of the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act in 2019 (UNODC, 2019). This act positioned Nigeria as the first West African nation with a standalone antipiracy legislation, thereby strengthening its legal framework for prosecuting maritime crimes. This legislative milestone was widely recognized internationally and boosted Nigeria's maritime reputation (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela, 2013).

In terms of economic contributions, NIMASA leadership played a role in promoting Nigeria's blue economy strategy. Through regulatory reforms, the agency supported the development of indigenous shipping capacity under the Cabotage Act, encouraged local participation in maritime trade, and enhanced revenue generation from maritime levies (Yusuf, 2021). These efforts contributed to diversifying

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Nigeria's economy beyond oil exports and strengthened its maritime industry as a critical driver of growth.

Also, NIMASA leadership championed capacity building and safety initiatives. Training programs for seafarers, maritime security personnel, and port facility staff improved Nigeria's compliance with international safety standards (Akinwale, 2019). Initiatives such as the Nigerian Seafarers Development Programme (NSDP) provided opportunities for young Nigerians to acquire professional qualifications and compete globally in the shipping industry (NIMASA, 2018). This not only improved manpower development but also enhanced Nigeria's human capital base in maritime operations.

On the global stage, NIMASA leadership fostered international recognition and collaboration. Nigeria, through NIMASA, has been an active participant in international forums such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and regional platforms on Gulf of Guinea security. These engagements positioned Nigeria as a leading voice in maritime governance in West and Central Africa, while also strengthening strategic partnerships with the United States, European Union, and private shipping stakeholders (Ukeje & Ela, 2013).

Strategic Lessons for Maritime Security Governance

The evolution of NIMASA's leadership between 2006 and 2024 provides important lessons on maritime security governance and offers significant policy implications for Nigeria and the wider Gulf of Guinea. First, one key lesson is that strong leadership combined with stakeholder collaboration yields measurable results in maritime security. The drastic reduction in piracy incidents between 2020 and 2022 underscores the effectiveness of coordinated leadership through initiatives such as the Deep Blue Project and the enforcement of the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act (IMB, 2022; UNODC, 2019). This highlights that policy implementation in maritime security must be leadership-driven, well-coordinated, and supported by legal frameworks to be effective.

Second, the NIMASA experience demonstrates the importance of institutional continuity and policy consistency. Leadership transitions in the agency often resulted in shifting priorities, which at times slowed down reform momentum (Akinwale, 2019). However, successful policies, such as seafarers' capacity

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development through the Nigerian Seafarers Development Programme (NSDP), show that when leadership sustains longterm vision, it contributes to institutional growth and sectoral development (NIMASA, 2018). The policy implication is that Nigeria should strengthen institutional frameworks to ensure continuity of maritime security policies regardless of leadership changes.

Third, the lessons from NIMASA's leadership stress the need for multilateral collaboration in maritime security. The agency's partnerships with the Nigerian Navy, regional states, and international partners such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the European Union were pivotal in improving maritime surveillance and law enforcement (Ukeje & Ela, 2013). The implication for policy is that Nigeria must deepen regional cooperation under frameworks like the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and leverage international technical and financial support to sustain maritime safety.

Another lesson learned is the critical role of legal and institutional reforms in shaping effective maritime governance. The enactment of the SPOMO Act (2019) addressed a longstanding legal gap that previously allowed piracy suspects to evade prosecution (UNODC, 2019). This demonstrates that legal clarity enhances enforcement capacity and boosts international confidence in Nigeria's maritime domain. Thus, future policy efforts should focus on continuous review of maritime laws, harmonization with international conventions, and strengthening judicial processes for maritime crimes.

Finally, NIMASA's leadership highlighted the economic potential of the blue economy when maritime security is prioritized. By reducing insecurity in Nigerian waters, NIMASA encouraged greater shipping traffic, safer offshore operations, and improved investor confidence in maritime trade (Yusuf, 2021). The implication is that Nigeria's maritime policy should not only focus on security but also integrate security strategies with economic development goals, thereby maximizing the blue economy's potential in national development.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

i. Institutionalize Policy Continuity: To avoid setbacks caused by leadership changes, Nigeria should adopt mechanisms that safeguard maritime security

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policies and projects across political and administrative transitions. Strengthening the institutional autonomy of NIMASA would ensure that reforms such as the SPOMO Act implementation and capacity-building programs are not disrupted.

ii. Enhance Stakeholder Collaboration: Maritime security cannot be achieved by NIMASA alone. Greater collaboration with the Nigerian Navy, regional navies, port authorities, and international partners under frameworks like the Yaoundé Code of Conduct should be prioritized. Joint patrols, intelligence sharing, and coordinated responses will enhance maritime domain awareness. iii. Strengthen Legal and Judicial Frameworks: While the SPOMO Act has filled a critical legal gap, more needs to be done to build the capacity of the judiciary and prosecutors to handle maritime crime cases. Nigeria should also harmonize its laws with international conventions under the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to ensure global compliance and credibility.

iv. Invest in Technology and Human Capital: Sustaining the gains of projects like Deep Blue requires continuous investment in modern surveillance systems, satellite technology, and training of maritime security personnel.

NIMASA should expand seafarer development programs, ensuring that Nigeria builds a skilled maritime workforce capable of responding to evolving security threats.

v. Integrate Maritime Security with Blue Economy Strategies: Maritime security should be aligned with Nigeria's economic diversification goals. A secure maritime environment fosters shipping, fisheries, offshore exploration, and tourism, contributing to the blue economy. Thus, maritime policies should be integrated with broader national development plans to maximize economic benefits.

Conclusion

The conclusion drawn from NIMASA's trajectory is that effective leadership is both a driver and a stabilizer of maritime security. Leadership that is proactive, collaborative and reform-oriented creates enabling conditions for institutional growth and regional cooperation. However, challenges such as policy inconsistency,

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funding gaps, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and leadership transitions highlight the fragility of progress when reforms are not institutionalized. Therefore, maritime security in Nigeria is not merely a product of operational strategies but depends heavily on the quality, stability, and vision of leadership guiding NIMASA and its stakeholders.

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