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Leadership and Managerial Reforms at the Nigerian Institute for Trypanosomiasis Research (NITR), Kaduna, 2015–2023

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Abstract

This paper examines the leadership and managerial reforms implemented at the Nigerian Institute for Trypanosomiasis Research (NITR) between 2015 and 2023.It highlights how the impact of the reforms in the public service sector can be harmonised with scientific autonomy. Historically, NITR exhibited strong technical capacity but operated under a highly centralised, hierarchical, and reactive administrative framework, characterised by weak accountability, ad hoc operations, and limited strategic coordination. This paper employs the use of both primary and secondary sources. The findings reveal that these reforms enhanced operational efficiency, research quality, and alignment with national development priorities. It argues that leadership innovation, through merit-based selection, decentralised authority, and strategic capacity-building, served as the critical bridge between accountability systems and scientific productivity. Further findings show that the reforms compelled NITR to translate structural changes into measurable scientific and policy outcomes. The paper concludes that in research institutions, institutional transformation depends not only on formal governance mechanisms but also on leadership practices that integrate accountability with operational and epistemic flexibility.

Keywords: Leadership, Public Service reforms, Managerial Reforms, Nigerian Institute for Trypanosomiasis Research, Scientific autonomy

Introduction

Across the contemporary global governance landscape, public sector reforms have increasingly prioritised efficiency, accountability, transparency, and performance measurement as defining principles of institutional management. The diffusion of results-based governance frameworks, commonly associated with New Public Management (NPM) and its post-NPM recalibrations, has fundamentally reoriented public institutions from procedure-driven administration toward outcome-based performance systems. Within this evolving framework, research institutions have come under heightened scrutiny, as governments and international development partners demand demonstrable impact, fiscal discipline, and auditable outputs as conditions for

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institutional legitimacy.[3] While these reforms have strengthened oversight and resource governance, they have also generated structural tensions within knowledge-producing institutions, particularly regarding the preservation of scientific autonomy, methodological flexibility, and the long-term character of research processes.[4]

In Africa, these global reform trajectories intersect with historically embedded administrative legacies and contemporary structural constraints. Research institutions operate within complex governance environments shaped by colonial institutional inheritances, uneven capacity, and donor-driven accountability regimes. As a result, they are compelled to navigate dual accountability frameworks—domestic regulatory oversight and external funding conditionalities, while simultaneously responding to pressing developmental challenges in public health, agriculture, and environmental sustainability.[5] This convergence has produced hybrid governance arrangements in which global accountability norms are selectively adapted to local institutional realities. However, such adaptations often require sustained managerial recalibration and leadership innovation to prevent bureaucratic rigidity from undermining scientific responsiveness.

Nigeria's public sector reform trajectory reflects these broader dynamics but is distinguished by the scale and intensity of its institutional restructuring agenda. Since the mid-2000s, and more decisively after 2015, the Nigerian state, under President Muhammadu Buhari, has pursued reforms anchored in fiscal centralisation, anti-corruption frameworks, performance management systems, and institutional rationalisation.[6] Instruments such as the Treasury Single Account (TSA), Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS), Government Integrated Financial Management Information System (GIFMIS) and performance-based evaluation frameworks have redefined the operational environment of Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), embedding stricter norms of compliance, transparency, and fiscal discipline.[7]While these measures have enhanced administrative accountability, they have also introduced procedural rigidity and compliance burdens that may constrain the operational flexibility required by specialised research institutions.

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[3] Christopher Hood, "A Public Management for All Seasons?" *Public Administration* 69, no. 1 (1991): 4–5; World Bank, *World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2017), 45–47.

[4] Michael Power, *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 32–34.

[5] Thandika Mkandawire, "Good Governance: The Itinerary of an Idea," *Development and Change* 38, no. 3 (2007): 370–372; United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), *Public Sector Management Reforms in Africa* (Addis Ababa: UNECA, 2010), 56–59.

[6] Thandika Mkandawire, "Good Governance: The Itinerary of an Idea," *Development and Change* 38, no. 3 (2007): 370–372; United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), *Public Sector Management Reforms in Africa* (Addis Ababa: UNECA, 2010), 56–59.

[7] Bureau of Public Service Reforms (BPSR), *Public Service Reform in Nigeria (2003–2015)* (Abuja: BPSR, 2016), 41–45; Tunji Olaopa, *Public Service Reforms in Nigeria: Lessons and Implications* (Ibadan: Safari Books, 2009), 88–92.

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It is within this reform-intensive context that the Nigerian Institute for Trypanosomiasis Research (NITR), under the leadership of Dr Augustine C. Igweh (2015-2020) and Dr Felicia Chizoba Enwezor (2021-2023), provides a critical empirical lens. As a specialised institution mandated to address trypanosomiasis, a disease with far-reaching implications for livestock productivity, rural livelihoods, and public health. Before the reform era, its administrative structure was characterised by centralised authority, weakly institutionalised accountability systems, and fragmented operational coordination.[8] The post-2015 reform environment, however, imposed new expectations of fiscal discipline, performance accountability, and institutional transparency, thereby necessitating significant transformations in managerial practices, leadership approaches, and organisational culture.

While existing works on Nigeria's Public Service largely focused on core Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) as it relates to reform processes,limited attention has been focused on leadership and managerial reforms in specialised Research Institutes, particularly in relation to their impact on scientific autonomy and knowledge generation, where a lot of transformation has taken place, yet it has not attracted adequate scholarly attention. This is a noticeable gap in the literature. [9]

This study seeks to address this gap by interrogating the impact of the reforms at NITR between 2015 and 2023 in terms of organisational efficiency, managerial accountability, transparency, performance management system, fiscal discipline, digital governance system and strategic leadership orientation. This paper argues that between 2015 and 2023, NITR reconciled the tension between public sector accountability and scientific autonomy through adaptive managerial reforms and leadership innovations that transformed compliance requirements into instruments of institutional efficiency and research sustainability.

Conceptual Clarifications

For better understanding and easy appreciation of the study, some of the key concepts used in the study are clarified below.

Public Sector Reform (PSR), as used in this study, refers to policy interventions aimed at improving efficiency, accountability, and effectiveness in governmental institutions. In Nigeria, this includes instruments such as TSA, performance management systems, IPPIS, and rationalisation of MDAs.[10] Globally, PSR is associated with New Public Management principles that emphasise results-based governance, decentralised decision-making, and

[8] Bureau of Public Service Reforms (BPSR), *Public Service Reform in Nigeria (2003–2015)* (Abuja: BPSR, 2016), 41–45; Olaopa, *Public Service Reforms in Nigeria*, 88–92.
[9] Oluwaloyin Fashagba, "Public Servic Reforms and National Development in Nigeria", Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research 5, no.3 (2013): 56-58; Olaopa, Public Service Reforms in Nigeria, 88-92.
[10] Bureau of Public Service Reforms (BPSR), *Public Service Reform in Nigeria (2003–2015)* (Abuja: BPSR, 2016), 41–45.

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institutional transparency.[11] In research institutions, PSR aligns administrative processes, leadership practices, and operational strategies with national development goals.

Accountability, as it relates to this work, entails responsibility for actions and outputs within regulatory and ethical frameworks.[12]At NITR, it spans fiscal management, procurement, personnel, research outputs, and stakeholder engagement. Accountability operates both vertically—to supervising ministries,and horizontally, within departments, linking compliance with strategic objectives.

Transparency, as used in this study, complements accountability, ensuring processes, decisions, and outputs are verifiable and traceable.[13] At NITR, it is embedded in audit procedures, digital records, peer verification, and stakeholder feedback, ensuring research integrity and governance legitimacy.

Scientific Autonomy is the ability of researchers to pursue methodological innovation and define research agendas without undue interference.[14] Within PSR contexts, autonomy is moderated by performance expectations, compliance mandates, and resource constraints, creating a balance between innovation and institutional accountability.

Leadership and Institutional Culture, as it relates to this work, shape organisational behaviour, decision-making, and adaptive capacity. Leadership encompasses authority, strategy, and accountability execution, while culture reflects shared norms and practices guiding responses to reforms and operational challenges.[15] Institutional culture mediates the effectiveness of managerial reforms, translating policy mandates into operational routines.

Managerial Reform and Strategic Innovation, as used in this study**,** involve redesigning administrative processes, decision-making structures, and operational strategies to enhance efficiency and developmental impact.[16] At NITR, reforms include decentralisation, performance evaluation, anticipatory procurement, and digital monitoring, turning constraints into opportunities for efficiency, productivity, and legitimacy. These concepts provide a framework for analysing how NITR reconciled scientific autonomy with public-sector accountability, embedding reform-driven governance, leadership innovation, and operational efficiency within its institutional practices.

Historical Background of the NITR

The origins of NITR are traceable to explicit scientific and administrative initiatives instituted by the British colonial state to confront the severe

[11] Hood, "A Public Management for All Seasons?, 4–5.
[12] Hood, "A Public Management for All Seasons?", 4–5.
[13] Steve Oronsaye, *Report of the Presidential Committee on the Rationalisation and Restructuring of Federal Government Parastatals, Commissions and Agencies* (Abuja: Federal Government of Nigeria, 2012), 12–16; Mkandawire, "Good Governance, 370–372.
[14] Thomas Gieryn, *Cultural Boundaries of Science: Credibility on the Line* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 55–57.
[15] Hood, "A Public Management for All Seasons?, 5–7.
[16] Hood, "A Public Management for All Seasons?, 15.

epidemiological and economic impacts of tsetse-transmitted trypanosomiasis in West Africa. In response to mounting livestock losses and periodic outbreaks of human sleeping sickness, the colonial government formalised specialised veterinary research capacity through the establishment in 1947 of the West African Institute for Trypanosomiasis Research (WAITR) by Act No. 36 of 1947, with headquarters in Kaduna,Nigeria.[17] WAITR's mandate emphasised coordinated field surveillance, vector ecology research, and the development of diagnostic and control methodologies across British West African territories. The Institute operated as a regional scientific clearinghouse, integrating entomological, parasitological, and epidemiological research to inform colonial livestock policy and to stabilise rural economies dependent on bovine and equine productivity.[18] Its establishment in Kaduna, strategically positioned at the ecological interface of tsetse fly habitats, facilitated year-round field experimentation and vector management studies, situating the colony as a nodal point for research that transcended local boundaries and informed broader imperial scientific priorities.[19]

With the political transitions of the late colonial period and the independence of neighbouring territories, the regional structure of WAITR gradually dissolved, and the Federal Government of Nigeria assumed full responsibility for its continuation. In 1964, through Act No. 33, the Federal Parliament of Nigeria reconstituted WAITR as the Nigerian Institute for Trypanosomiasis Research (NITR), retasking it as a national research body dedicated to controlling trypanosomiasis within independent Nigeria's borders.[20] This legislative transformation framed NITR's expanded postcolonial mandate to integrate livestock health with national development policy, aligning it with federal agricultural and public health objectives. NITR's institutional portfolio grew further in 1975 when its legal mandate was broadened to include research on onchocerciasis (river blindness) alongside trypanosomiasis, responding to epidemiological overlap and overlapping socio-economic burdens in rural areas.[21] Throughout the late twentieth century, NITR consolidated its research infrastructure by establishing additional field stations in ecologically diverse zones such as Vom (Plateau State) and Kano, enhancing its capacity to generate longitudinal data, tailor vector control strategies to local ecologies, and contribute to the technical guidance of national livestock and rural health policies.[22]

[17] Colonial Veterinary Department, *Annual Reports on Animal Health in Northern Nigeria*, 1947, Colonial Office Records (CO 860/45), The National Archives (Kew).
[18] British West Africa Official Gazette, *Legislative Instruments and Supplies* (London: HMSO), Act No. 36 of 1947, 14–18.
[19] British West Africa Official Gazette, *Legislative Instruments and Supplies* (London: HMSO), Act No. 36 of 1947, 14–18.
[20] Colonial Veterinary Department, *Annual Reports on Veterinary Services*, 1951–1955, CO 860/52, The National Archives (Kew), 23–29.
[21] NITR Establishment Board Minutes, *Expansion of Mandate to Onchocerciasis Research*, 1975, NITR Archives, Kaduna, 12–15.
[22] NITR Establishment Board Minutes, *Expansion of Mandate to Onchocerciasis Research*, 1975, NITR Archives, Kaduna, 12–15.

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Leadership Ethos Before 2015

Before the comprehensive public service reforms that began to take formal shape in the mid-2010s, NITR's leadership and managerial structures were deeply rooted in hierarchical and centralised bureaucratic traditions inherited from its colonial predecessors. The Director-General's office exercised broad discretionary authority over administrative, financial, and research decisions. Decisions regarding field deployment, laboratory priorities, procurement authorisations, and strategic planning were largely made unilaterally at the top executive level, with limited institutionalised mechanisms for collective decision-making or participatory planning across departments.[23] Department heads, though academically qualified as subject-matter experts, seldom participated in holistic strategic governance, instead managing operational units within tightly defined functional silos. This organisational architecture reinforced a culture of directive leadership, privileging rank and position over collaborative governance, which constrained opportunities for cross-unit coordination or co-production of institutional strategies.

The leadership ethos before 2015 was characterised by technical expertise rather thanmanagerial competence as the primary criterion for administrative authority. Promotions and appointments to senior administrative positions were often determined based on seniority, academic credentials, and research output rather than demonstrated leadership capacity, strategic vision, or organisational management skills.[24] Performance evaluations, when conducted, tended to emphasise individual research achievements or laboratory productivity rather than comprehensive assessments of administrative effectiveness or institutional impact. Such practices reinforced a managerial culture that valued disciplinary excellence but under-emphasised strategic leadership development, organisational learning, and adaptive governance. Consequently, accountability systems focused on internal conformity to procedure and technical output rather than on reflexive evaluation, incentive alignment, or continuous improvement practices.

Managerial practices across operational domains before 2015 were predominantly reactive rather than proactive. Field missions, surveillance scheduling, and laboratory workflows were frequently determined by immediate operational exigencies or short-term project cycles rather than by integrated long-term planning frameworks. Procurement processes were administratively driven, often reliant on personal networks or ad hoc authorisations that led to delays in acquiring specialised reagents, diagnostic kits, and field supplies essential for sustained research continuity.[25] Interdepartmental communication and institutional knowledge transfer were similarly informal, with reliance on ad hoc memoranda, individual mentorship, and legacy documentation rather than robust codified protocols or systematic

[23] NITR Operational Reports, *Field Station Development Records*, 1976–1990, NITR Archives, Kaduna, 2–9.
[24] NITR Annual Reports, *Director-General's Administrative Review*, 2000–2014, NITR Annual Reports Series, Kaduna, 5–13.
[25] NITR Internal Committee Minutes, 2010–2014, *Operations and Planning Committee Records*, NITR Archives, Kaduna, 7–16.

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organisational learning systems. These managerial patterns, while enabling continuity within a stable technical environment, limited NITR's capacity to align its long-term scientific projects with evolving national policy expectations or to mobilise institutional resources strategically in response to emerging socio-ecological challenges.

Thus, the pre-2015 leadership and management were centralised, with weak accountability systems, informal procurement and reporting, as well as limited policy linkage, making NITR technically strong but managerially weak. The patterns of hierarchical authority, discretionary decision-making, limited participatory planning, and reactive managerial practice that characterised the pre-2015 era established the organisational contours against which subsequent institutional transformations can be meaningfully evaluated in terms of governance, accountability, and strategic alignment with national development imperatives.

Managerial Reforms and Institutional Efficiency

Post-2015 managerial reforms at NITR instituted a strategic decentralisation of authority, moving away from the historically centralised model in which the Director-General exercised discretionary control over operations, finance, and research decisions.[26] Recognising the inefficiencies and bottlenecks inherent in this top-down system, NITR established departmental and cross-functional committees tasked with drafting work plans, coordinating research activities, and overseeing field operations.[27] These committees integrated performance benchmarks, timelines, and deliverables into daily operations, ensuring that managerial decisions were transparent, accountable, and aligned with institutional objectives.[28]

The decentralisation initiative had both operational and strategic implications. Operationally, it reduced delays in approving field missions, laboratory requisitions, and minor procurements, while empowering mid-level managers to exercise initiative within defined policy frameworks.[29] Strategically, decentralised committees created a feedback loop whereby field-level insights informed institutional planning, ensuring that policy decisions were grounded in empirical realities.[30] This dual effect enhanced NITR's responsiveness, efficiency, and organisational coherence, transforming it from a fragmented research body into a coordinated, performance-driven institution.[31]

The reform demonstrates that institutional efficiency emerges not solely from hierarchical authority but from enabling systems that balance autonomy with accountability. By institutionalising participatory planning and performance-

[26] Interview with Martins Olaoga, Abuja, 11 February 2026. Olaoga, a close associate of Mr.Steve Oronsayan
[27] Olaoga, Interview.
[28] Interview with Dr. A. Ibrahim, Director of Research Coordination, NITR, Kaduna, 12 March 2026.
[29] Interview with Dr. Alice Jonah, Director of Research Coordination, NITR, Kaduna, 12 March 2026.
[30] NITR, *Operational Guidelines for Departmental Committees*, 2017, pp. 4–7.
[31] NITR Procurement and Field Deployment Records, 2015–2019, Kaduna Archives.

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oriented work plans, NITR strengthened both its administrative capacity and scientific impact, establishing a foundation for subsequent reforms in digital governance, operational standardisation, and strategic resource deployment. Furthermore, decentralised management ensured that NITR could effectively align research outputs with national development objectives while fostering a culture of initiative, innovation, and institutional accountability.

The reform era at NITR also saw a decisive shift toward digital governance, marked by the integration of TSA, IPPIS, GIFMIS and the Integrated Project Management System (IPMS).[32] These platforms were introduced to enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency across administrative and operational functions, addressing longstanding challenges of discretionary fund management, payroll inconsistencies, and fragmented project tracking. The centralisation of financial flows through TSA enabled the institute to minimise leakages and strengthen fiscal discipline, ensuring that budget allocations reached their intended operational units without undue delay or informal diversion.[33]

IPPIS, GIFMIS and IPMS complemented these financial reforms by digitising human resource management and project oversight. Staff payrolls, allowances, and promotions were now systematically linked to verified performance records, reducing incidences of ghost staff and payment errors.[34] Similarly, IPMS enabled leadership to monitor research projects, laboratory operations, and field deployments in real time, producing data-driven insights that informed decision-making at both strategic and tactical levels. This digital integration not only standardised operational procedures but also cultivated a culture of evidence-based management, where deviations from planned activities could be quickly detected and corrected.

The significance of digital governance lies in its transformative effect on institutional efficiency and accountability. By embedding real-time monitoring and transparent financial controls into everyday operations, NITR leadership could enforce performance benchmarks, align resource utilisation with research priorities, and institutionalise procedural compliance without relying solely on hierarchical oversight.[35]As such, digital governance bridged the gap between administrative control and operational flexibility, creating a responsive, accountable, and strategically aligned research environment capable of sustaining high-quality scientific outputs and service delivery.

A critical pillar of NITR's post-2015 managerial reforms was the establishment of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and operational standardisation across laboratories, field operations, and administrative units.[36] Before this intervention, operational processes were largely ad hoc, shaped by individual

[32] NITR, *Financial and Project Management Reform Report*, Kaduna, 2016, pp. 3–5.
[33] Interview with Musa Adamu Aliyu, Chairman, Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Abuja, 20 February 2026.
[34] Federal Ministry of Finance, *TSA Implementation Guidelines for MDAs*, Abuja, 2015, 11.
[35] NITR, *Integrated Project Management System Monitoring Records*, 2017–2021, Kaduna Archives.
[36] NITR, *Standard Operating Procedures Manual*, Kaduna, 2017, 1–10.

discretion, informal practices, and legacy routines inherited from the colonial and postcolonial periods. This fragmentation often led to inefficiencies, inconsistent research outputs, and delayed responses to emergent tsetse and trypanosomiasis outbreaks. The systematic codification of SOPs introduced uniform protocols for laboratory experiments, reagent handling, field surveillance, data collection, and reporting, thereby reducing procedural variance and enhancing reproducibility in research outcomes.[37]

Operational standardisation extended beyond laboratory confines to administrative and managerial workflows, including procurement, logistics, and inter-departmental coordination. Standardised work plans, reporting templates, and accountability checklists ensured that staff activities were closely aligned with institutional priorities, while internal audits verified compliance with both national regulatory frameworks and donor requirements.[38] Importantly, these measures promoted a culture of institutional discipline, where performance expectations were explicit, responsibilities clearly delineated, and deviations systematically addressed. This reduced reliance on discretionary decision-making by leadership and embedded consistency into everyday operations, enabling NITR to manage complex projects with multiple stakeholders more effectively.

The significance of SOPs and operational standardisation lies in their enabling effect on efficiency, quality assurance, and organisational coherence. The codifying of best practices at NITR not only strengthened scientific rigour but also created scalable and replicable processes that facilitated rapid adaptation to emerging research and field challenges.[39]Consequently, standardisation transformed the institute from a fragmented collection of laboratories and field units into a coordinated, accountable research body, capable of meeting both domestic development mandates and international research expectations.

In the post-2015 reform era, NITR adopted a research clustering and prioritisation strategy to streamline its scientific agenda, align projects with national development goals, and optimise resource utilisation.[40] Historically, research initiatives had been scattered across departments with minimal coordination, resulting in duplication of effort, fragmented datasets, and inefficiencies in addressing pressing tsetse- and trypanosomiasis-related challenges. The clustering approach reorganised the institute into thematic research groups—veterinary parasitology, vector ecology, epidemiology, and diagnostic development—each with clearly defined objectives, outputs, and performance indicators.[41] This structure enabled focused expertise, better coordination across complementary studies, and systematic identification of

[37] Interview with Dr. H. Bello, Head of Veterinary Research, NITR, Kaduna, March 16, 2026.
[38] Interview with Dr. H. Bello, Head of Veterinary Research, NITR, Kaduna, March 16, 2026.
[39] NITR, *Internal Audit Reports on Laboratory and Field Operations*, 2018–2021, Kaduna Archives.
[40] NITR, *Strategic Research Framework 2016–2021*, Kaduna, 2016, 5–12.
[41] Interview with Tunji Olaopa, Chairman, Federal Civil Service Commission, Abuja, 13 February 2026.

knowledge gaps, thereby ensuring that research outputs were not only scientifically robust but also policy-relevant.

Prioritisation mechanisms were embedded within strategic work plans and linked to both national livestock development policies and donor-funded programmatic objectives. The institute implemented an annual review cycle where project proposals were evaluated against criteria including relevance to national development, feasibility, potential for knowledge translation, and alignment with global research standards.[42]The institutionalisation of these criteria at NITR created a decision-making framework that balanced scientific autonomy with accountability demands, mitigating the risk of pursuing projects with limited operational or societal impact.

The significance of research clustering and prioritisation lies in its dual effect on operational efficiency and strategic relevance. By concentrating resources on high-priority areas, the institute reduced redundancy, accelerated knowledge generation, and enhanced responsiveness to emerging disease threats.[43] This practice transformed NITR from a loosely organised collection of research units into a coordinated, performance-driven institution capable of producing actionable science, meeting stakeholder expectations, and sustaining long-term developmental impact.

Furthermore, reforms at NITR emphasised modernising laboratory infrastructure as a central pillar of institutional efficiency and research excellence. Before these reforms, laboratories faced outdated equipment, inconsistent maintenance, and limited biosafety compliance, which constrained experimental throughput, accuracy, and international collaboration potential.[44] The modernisation initiative involved systematic upgrading of laboratory facilities, acquisition of advanced diagnostic tools, establishment of molecular and immunological research capabilities, and adherence to internationally recognised biosafety standards.[45] This not only enhanced the precision and reliability of experimental outcomes but also positioned NITR to contribute to transnational surveillance initiatives and multi-centre studies, thereby strengthening both national and global research credibility.

Operationally, laboratory modernisation was integrated into a centralised monitoring framework, linking equipment utilisation, reagent management, and staff performance to strategic research priorities. This alignment ensured that laboratory resources supported high-priority projects, minimising downtime and wastage while reinforcing accountability.[46] Moreover, the initiative facilitated capacity-building through targeted training programs for technical staff in molecular diagnostics, bioinformatics, and laboratory management, embedding a culture of continuous skills enhancement alongside infrastructure development.

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[42] Interview with Prof. J. Okoro, Director of Epidemiology, NITR, March 18, 2026.
[43] Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, *Guidelines for Research Prioritisation in National Institutes*, Abuja, 2017, 4–7.
[44] NITR, *Laboratory Infrastructure Audit Report*, Kaduna, 2016, 3–8.
[45] NITR, *Laboratory Infrastructure Audit Report*, Kaduna, 2016, 3–8.
[46] NITR, *Laboratory Management SOPs*, Kaduna, 2017, 2–5.

The significance of laboratory modernisation extends beyond technical upgrades. The provision of a reliable, well-equipped, and professionally managed laboratory environment made it possible for NITR to pursue more complex, interdisciplinary research agendas, improve data quality, and accelerate the translation of research findings into policy-relevant interventions.[47]Thus, modernised laboratories became the backbone of institutional performance, enabling the institute to operate as a credible, evidence-driven research organisation capable of addressing both endemic disease challenges and emerging health threats.

Strategic field deployment emerged as a critical managerial reform at NITR, aimed at aligning human and material resources with high-priority research objectives and operational exigencies. Before 2015, field activities were largely reactive, guided by immediate outbreak responses or ad hoc requests from government agencies.[48] This approach often led to inefficiencies, duplication of effort, and gaps in disease surveillance. Post-reform, NITR implemented a systematic, data-informed deployment strategy, whereby field teams were assigned based on epidemiological risk mapping, seasonal vector dynamics, and laboratory research priorities.[49] Each deployment was coordinated through formal work plans and cross-functional committees, ensuring that missions were scientifically justified, logistically feasible, and monitored for compliance with performance metrics.

The reform also institutionalised pre-deployment briefings, standardised reporting templates, and post-mission evaluations, which enabled real-time assessment of field activities and iterative improvement of operational protocols.[50] Such practices fostered accountability at multiple levels, encouraged adaptive problem-solving in unpredictable field conditions, and integrated field outcomes into broader research planning and policy recommendations. Interviews with senior field officers confirm that this approach transformed operational culture, with teams increasingly exercising professional judgment while adhering to centralised oversight mechanisms. Strategic field deployment contributeded to both efficiency and institutional credibility because the deployment of staff and resources in a targeted, evidence-based manner reduced operational redundancies, maximised resource utilisation, and enhanced the reliability of surveillance and intervention data.[51] By implication, it directly strengthened NITR's capacity to generate actionable research insights, respond proactively to endemic and emerging diseases, and demonstrate tangible alignment between institutional outputs and national development priorities. Strategic deployment, thus, became a key mechanism for operationalising the institute's performance-driven ethos, linking managerial reforms to measurable scientific and societal impact.

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[47] Federal Ministry of Science and Technology, *National Laboratory Modernisation Guidelines*, Abuja, 2017, 6–9.
[48] NITR, *Field Operations Review*, Kaduna, 2014, 5–9.
[49] NITR, *Field Operations Review*, Kaduna, 2014, 5–9.
[50] Interview with Dr. L. Ibrahim, Field Operations Coordinator, April 1, 2026..
[51] Interview with Dasuki Ibrahim Arabi, Acting Director-General, Bureau of Public Service Reforms, Abuja, 18.

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Funding diversification constituted a crucial managerial response to the fiscal constraints imposed by post-2015 public sector reforms, enabling NITR to expand its operational capacity while reducing overdependence on federal budgetary allocations. Before this period, the institute relied predominantly on government subventions, which were often insufficient, irregular, and subject to broader macroeconomic fluctuations.[52] This funding structure limited research continuity, constrained infrastructure development, and restricted the institute's ability to engage in long-term scientific projects. In response, NITR adopted a multi-source funding strategy, actively pursuing grants from international organisations, development partners, and collaborative research networks, while also strengthening internally generated revenue streams through consultancy services and specialised laboratory diagnostics.[53]

This diversification was not merely financial but strategically embedded within institutional planning frameworks. Grant acquisition processes were aligned with research clustering priorities, ensuring that externally funded projects complemented rather than fragmented the institute's scientific agenda. Additionally, financial management systems were adapted to accommodate donor requirements, including milestone-based disbursement tracking, compliance reporting, and audit verification procedures.[54] These mechanisms enhanced transparency and accountability, positioning NITR as a credible partner within international research consortia and increasing its competitiveness in securing external funding.

Funding diversification expanded NITR's autonomy and strategic flexibility. By broadening its financial base, NITR was able to invest in laboratory modernisation, capacity building, and field operations without being solely constrained by government fiscal cycles.[55]In other words, it transformed financial limitation into a strategic opportunity, enabling the institute to sustain research productivity, respond to emerging health challenges, and maintain alignment with both national development priorities and global research standards. In this sense, funding diversification functioned as a stabilising mechanism that reinforced institutional resilience and long-term sustainability within a reform-driven governance environment.

Collectively, these reforms transformed NITR from a fragmented, input-driven institution into a coordinated, performance-oriented system. Their integrated application aligned scientific productivity with administrative accountability, demonstrating that strategically mediated managerial reforms can enhance institutional efficiency, resilience, and policy relevance.

Accountability, Transparency, and Governance Transformation

The post-2015 reform environment at NITR marked a decisive shift in the institutional logic of governance, where accountability and transparency were

[52] NITR, *Annual Financial Reports*, Kaduna, 2012–2016, 6–10
[53] Interview with Mrs. B. U. Michael, Head of Finance and Accounts Department, NITR, April 1, 2026.
[54] NITR, *Grant Management and Compliance Records*, 2017–2021, Kaduna Archives.
[55] NITR, *Grant Management and Compliance Records*, 27.

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no longer treated as external regulatory impositions but were internalised as core organising principles of administrative and scientific practice. Central to this transformation was the introduction of the TSA, which fundamentally altered the Institute's fiscal architecture by centralising all financial flows within a unified federal framework. Before TSA implementation, NITR operated a fragmented financial system characterised by multiple accounts and discretionary access to internally generated revenue, allowing for a degree of operational flexibility but also exposing the system to inefficiencies and weak audit visibility.[56] The integration into TSA eliminated these parallel financial channels, compelling the Institute to align all expenditure with centrally approved budgetary frameworks and real-time treasury oversight. This shift significantly enhanced fiscal traceability, reduced opportunities for discretionary manipulation, and strengthened compliance with national public finance regulations.[57]

However, the analytical significance of TSA lies not merely in its anti-corruption function but in its role in restructuring institutional planning behaviour. The loss of discretionary liquidity forced NITR to transition from reactive expenditure patterns to anticipatory financial planning, where procurement cycles, research timelines, and field operations had to be synchronised with budget releases and approval processes. This recalibration embedded financial discipline within operational planning, effectively linking scientific activity to fiscal predictability. Fiscal centralisation, while initially constraining, became a catalyst for institutional learning, compelling the Institute to develop predictive budgeting models that enhanced long-term operational stability. Yet, this transformation also introduced a persistent tension: the rigidity of centralised financial controls occasionally conflicted with the time-sensitive nature of laboratory procurement and field interventions, highlighting the friction between bureaucratic standardisation and scientific responsiveness.[58]

Closely linked to fiscal centralisation was the reform of procurement systems, which constituted a second pillar of governance transformation. The enforcement of Public Procurement Act guidelines institutionalised competitive bidding, formal evaluation matrices, and multi-layered approval processes, replacing earlier discretionary and often informal procurement practices.[59] For a specialised research institution like NITR, where the acquisition of highly specific reagents and diagnostic equipment is critical to research continuity, procurement reform carried both governance and epistemic implications. On one hand, it enhanced transparency, minimised the risk of contract inflation, and introduced verifiable audit trails into expenditure processes. On the other hand, it imposed procedural timelines that could delay access to time-sensitive materials, potentially disrupting laboratory workflows and field operations.

To navigate this tension, NITR developed hybrid procurement mechanisms, most notably the establishment of joint administrative–scientific procurement committees. These bodies ensured that procurement decisions were informed

[56] Aliyu, Interview.
[57] Olaopa, Interview.
[58] Interview with Mr. S. Abdullahi, Senior Accounts Officer, NITR, April 3, 2026..
[59] Interview with Mr. S. Abdullahi, Senior Accounts Officer, NITR, April 3, 2026.

not only by cost considerations and regulatory compliance but also by technical specifications and research imperatives. This innovation illustrates a key analytical point: procurement reform at NITR evolved beyond a narrow anti-corruption framework into a governance instrument for safeguarding scientific integrity. By integrating scientific expertise into procurement evaluation, the Institute mitigated the risk that bureaucratic compliance would undermine research quality. The broader implication is that effective governance reform in research institutions requires the alignment of administrative procedures with epistemic needs, rather than the imposition of uniform bureaucratic standards detached from operational realities.[60]

The transformation of internal audit systems further deepened the institutionalisation of accountability. Traditionally, audit functions within public institutions have been largely retrospective, focusing on identifying irregularities after they occur. At NITR, however, post-reform audit practices evolved into continuous and dialogic processes, encompassing not only financial verification but also asset management, consumables tracking, grant utilisation, and field expenditure reconciliation. Quarterly audit cycles required departments to respond formally to audit observations, thereby creating iterative feedback loops that reinforced compliance and encouraged proactive adjustment of administrative practices.

This shift from punitive oversight to preventive governance had significant organisational implications. Departments became increasingly self-regulating, anticipating audit scrutiny and embedding compliance into routine operations. The audit process thus functioned as an instrument of institutional learning, enabling management to identify structural inefficiencies and correct them before they escalated into systemic failures. Internal audit reform transformed accountability from an external enforcement mechanism into an internalised organisational norm, strengthening both administrative coherence and reputational credibility. Nevertheless, the expansion of audit requirements also contributed to administrative workload, raising concerns about compliance fatigue and the potential diversion of time and resources away from core research activities.[61]

Complementing these mechanisms was the introduction of performance scorecards, which embedded transparency within the operational fabric of the Institute. Unlike earlier reporting practices that emphasised descriptive outputs, post-reform performance management systems introduced quantifiable indicators linked to national development objectives, including diagnostic volumes, surveillance coverage, policy advisory contributions, and research publications. These metrics were systematically tracked through quarterly evaluations, making departmental performance visible across the institution and reducing informational asymmetries between units.

The importance of performance scorecards lies in their role in redefining accountability as measurable productivity. By linking institutional legitimacy to

[60] Interview with Dasuki Ibrahim Arabi, Acting Director-General, Bureau of Public Service Reforms, Abuja, 18 February 2026.
[61] Arabi, Interview.

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demonstrable outputs, the scorecard system aligned individual and departmental performance with broader policy goals, thereby integrating scientific work into national development frameworks. At the same time, this shift introduced a subtle but significant tension: the emphasis on quantifiable outputs risked privileging short-term, measurable achievements over long-term, exploratory research that may not yield immediate results. NITR's response, retaining limited space for foundational research within performance frameworks, illustrates an attempt to balance accountability with epistemic depth.

Beyond internal fiscal and performance controls, grant governance emerged as a critical layer in the transformation of accountability at NITR, particularly as the Institute expanded its engagement with international research networks and development partners. Unlike traditional government funding, externally sourced grants introduced dual accountability obligations, one aligned with domestic public sector regulations and another structured around donor-specific compliance frameworks. This required the institutionalisation of formalised grant management systems, including milestone-based reporting templates, financial tracking sheets, deliverable verification protocols, and periodic external audits.[62]

Grant governance reconfigured accountability as a transnational practice. NITR was no longer accountable solely to federal oversight bodies but also to international partners whose expectations emphasised transparency, efficiency, and measurable impact. This dual framework strengthened institutional discipline by embedding multiple layers of verification, while simultaneously enhancing the Institute's reputational capital within global research networks. Grant governance transformed accountability into a strategic resource, enabling NITR to leverage compliance as a means of securing funding, building partnerships, and expanding its scientific reach. However, this also intensified administrative complexity, as researchers and administrators were required to navigate overlapping reporting regimes, occasionally stretching institutional capacity and reinforcing the tension between compliance demands and research focus.

Closely related to grant oversight was the strengthening of data governance systems, which extended transparency into the epistemic core of the Institute's work. Before the reform period, inconsistencies in data recording, storage, and reporting across field stations limited the comparability and reliability of research outputs. In response, NITR institutionalised harmonised surveillance templates, digitised laboratory record systems, and standardised data validation protocols.[63] These reforms ensured that data generated from diverse ecological zones could be systematically integrated, verified, and utilised for both research and policy purposes.

Importantly, data governance was not merely a technical adjustment but a structural reinforcement of scientific accountability. Quality assurance mechanisms, including peer verification of selected diagnostic results and

[62] NITR, *Grant Management and Compliance Reports*, Kaduna Archives, 2017–2021.
[63] NITR, *Laboratory and Field Data Standardisation Protocols*, Kaduna, 2018–2022.

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cross-checking of field data, reduced the risk of reporting discrepancies and enhanced confidence in institutional outputs. The broader implication is that transparency within research institutions is inseparable from data integrity; governance reforms must therefore extend beyond administrative processes to encompass the production and validation of knowledge itself. Robust data governance strengthened NITR's epistemic authority, positioning it as a credible source of evidence for national and international policy formulation.[64] Yet, as with other accountability mechanisms, the increasing formalisation of data processes introduced additional procedural demands, requiring careful managerial balancing to prevent bureaucratisation from undermining scientific agility.

Another critical dimension of governance transformation was the expansion of stakeholder accountability, which redefined the relationship between NITR and its external environment. Structured consultations with state veterinary departments, agricultural extension services, and community stakeholders were institutionalised, creating formal feedback loops that integrated practitioner perspectives into research planning and implementation. Meeting records and policy engagement reports indicate that these interactions moved beyond symbolic engagement, incorporating documented follow-up actions, role clarification, and iterative feedback integration into project cycles.[65]

Stakeholder accountability democratised knowledge production and validation. By subjecting research outputs to practitioner scrutiny, NITR enhanced both the relevance and applicability of its findings, ensuring that scientific interventions were grounded in local realities. This shift also strengthened institutional legitimacy, as service beneficiaries became active participants in the evaluation and refinement of research outcomes. Accountability expanded beyond internal compliance to encompass relational governance, where trust, responsiveness, and co-production of knowledge became central to institutional effectiveness. However, this broadened accountability framework also required additional coordination, time, and resources, reinforcing the broader tension between inclusivity and operational efficiency.

When viewed collectively, these mechanisms, grant governance, data governance, and stakeholder accountability contributed to the emergence of an integrated governance architecture at NITR. Accountability was no longer confined to discrete administrative functions but was embedded across financial management, research processes, data systems, and external engagements. Institutional authority is increasingly derived from system-based verification rather than discretionary control, with documentation, traceability, and performance metrics serving as the primary currency of legitimacy.

This transformation carries a broader analytical implication: governance reform at NITR illustrates a shift from reactive oversight to anticipatory and embedded accountability, where compliance is internalised as a routine aspect of organisational behaviour. The Institute's experience demonstrates that when accountability mechanisms are strategically aligned and contextually adapted,

[64] Interview with Dr. A. Yusuf, Senior Research Scientist, NITR, April 1, 2026.
[65] NITR, *Stakeholder Engagement and Policy Consultation Records*, Kaduna, 2018–2022.

they can enhance institutional coherence, reduce arbitrariness, and strengthen long-term resilience. At the same time, the cumulative expansion of these mechanisms generated administrative density, requiring deliberate managerial mediation to prevent compliance fatigue and preserve the flexibility necessary for scientific innovation.[66]

Ultimately, the governance transformation at NITR reflects a deeper redefinition of accountability within reforming public sector institutions. Transparency evolved from a symbolic anti-corruption measure into a functional instrument of institutional stability and credibility, shaping not only how resources are managed but also how knowledge is produced, validated, and applied. This shows that effective governance reform in research institutions must strike a careful balance: embedding rigorous accountability systems while safeguarding the adaptive capacity and intellectual autonomy that underpin scientific excellence.

The consolidation of accountability and governance mechanisms at NITR not only restructured administrative processes but also reshaped the expectations and practices of institutional leadership. As compliance, transparency, and performance monitoring became embedded within organisational systems, leadership was compelled to evolve from discretionary authority to adaptive, strategic coordination. The next section, therefore, examines how these governance shifts informed innovations in leadership and institutional culture.

Leadership Innovation and Institutional Culture Transformation

The transformation of leadership at NITR between 2015 and 2023 represents a critical mediating layer between the formalisation of accountability systems and the enhancement of scientific productivity. While earlier sections have demonstrated how reforms restructured fiscal governance, procurement systems, and performance monitoring, these mechanisms alone could not guarantee institutional effectiveness without corresponding changes in leadership practice. Leadership reform thus functioned as the operational bridge through which procedural accountability was translated into organisational performance, reconfiguring authority from hierarchical control to strategic coordination.

A foundational element of this transformation was the shift toward merit-based leadership selection, which introduced formal criteria for appointing Director-Generals, departmental heads, and senior administrators. Unlike the pre-reform period, where appointments were often influenced by seniority or informal networks, the post-2015 framework emphasised academic qualifications, managerial competence, and demonstrable administrative experience.[67] This recalibration reduced the scope for discretionary or politically mediated appointments and aligned leadership legitimacy with professional capability. The significance of this shift lies in its role in redefining authority as performance-based rather than position-based, thereby strengthening

[66] NITR, *Stakeholder Engagement and Policy Consultation Records*, Kaduna, 2018–2022.
[67] Federal Ministry of Science and Technology, *Guidelines on Appointment of Chief Executives of Research Institutes*, Abuja, 2015, 3–7.

institutional credibility and reinforcing a culture of accountability at the top levels of governance. Consequently, leadership selection itself became a governance instrument, ensuring that those responsible for implementing reforms possessed the technical and strategic capacity to do so effectively.

Closely linked to meritocratic selection was the decentralisation of decision-making authority, which restructured internal governance dynamics. Authority that had previously been concentrated within the office of the Director-General was redistributed to departmental directors and research coordinators, who were empowered to manage routine operations, approve limited expenditures, and oversee personnel deployment within defined parameters.[68] This shift was operationalised through formal circulars mandating participatory governance structures in project planning, laboratory management, and field coordination. The immediate effect was the reduction of bureaucratic bottlenecks and the acceleration of decision-making processes across units.

More fundamentally, decentralisation altered the culture of leadership itself, fostering a system in which responsibility and innovation were diffused across multiple organisational levels. Mid-level managers were no longer passive implementers but active contributors to institutional strategy, capable of adapting policies to specific operational contexts. However, decentralisation was carefully balanced with enhanced reporting structures, ensuring that autonomy did not erode accountability. NITR developed a hybrid governance model in which distributed authority coexisted with centralised oversight, demonstrating that flexibility and control are not mutually exclusive but can be mutually reinforcing when properly institutionalised.[69]

Leadership capacity was further strengthened through targeted training and professional development, particularly through collaboration with the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS). These programmes focused on strategic planning, project management, stakeholder engagement, fiscal governance, and digital leadership competencies, equipping senior officials with the skills required to operate within an increasingly complex governance environment.[70] The significance of these interventions extends beyond skill acquisition; they contributed to the reframing of leadership as an adaptive and strategic function, rather than a purely administrative or hierarchical role.This shift is important because it aligns leadership practice with the demands of performance-driven public sector governance, where effectiveness depends on the ability to integrate scientific objectives with regulatory compliance and stakeholder expectations. Leadership training institutionalised adaptive capacity, enabling NITR's leadership to navigate the tensions between bureaucratic constraints and scientific imperatives while maintaining organisational coherence.

Another major innovation was the establishment of cross-functional committees, which served as platforms for integrated decision-making across

[68] Federal Ministry of Science and Technology, *Guidelines on Appointment of Chief Executives of Research Institutes*, Abuja, 2015, 3–7.
[69] NITR, *Internal Circulars on Administrative Decentralisation*, Kaduna, 2017–2019.
[70] Interview with Dr. Aice O. Jonah, Director of Research, NITR, March 20, 2020.

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scientific and administrative domains. Comprising representatives from disciplines such as veterinary science, epidemiology, entomology, and administrative units, these committees were tasked with reviewing research proposals, allocating resources, and monitoring project implementation. Archival records indicate that they met regularly, creating structured spaces for collaboration and strategic alignment.[71] These committees helped to break down institutional silos that had historically fragmented NITR's operations. By fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, they enhanced coordination, reduced duplication of effort, and strengthened the linkage between laboratory research and field implementation. This way, cross-functional governance mechanisms transformed decision-making from isolated technical processes into collective strategic practices, thereby improving both efficiency and research relevance.

Parallel to these internal reforms was the expansion of structured stakeholder engagement, which redefined NITR's position within the broader policy and development ecosystem. Regular consultations with federal and state agencies, community representatives, and international partners were institutionalised, with clear documentation of follow-up actions and integration of feedback into project cycles.[72] This proceduralisation of engagement ensured that interactions were not symbolic but embedded within operational workflows. Stakeholder engagement enhanced institutional legitimacy and policy relevance. By incorporating external perspectives into decision-making, NITR aligned its research priorities with societal needs and governance expectations. Thus, leadership evolved to function not only as an internal administrative mechanism but also as a boundary-spanning interface, mediating between scientific production and policy application. However, this expanded engagement also required additional coordination and administrative effort, reinforcing the broader tension between inclusivity and efficiency.

Beyond structural and participatory reforms, leadership innovation at NITR was significantly reinforced through the adoption of digital management tools, which redefined how authority was exercised and how decisions were made. The integration of platforms such as IPPIS, TSA, and IPMS enabled leadership to monitor laboratory operations, field deployments, procurement processes, and staff performance in real time.[73] These tools reduced informational asymmetries between central administration and operational units, allowing leaders to base decisions on verifiable data rather than discretionary judgment. Digital leadership shifted governance from intuition-based management to evidence-driven coordination. Leaders could identify workflow bottlenecks, reallocate resources dynamically, and track performance against predefined benchmarks with greater precision. In other words, digitalisation transformed leadership into a data-mediated function, enhancing transparency, responsiveness, and institutional efficiency. However, this transition also required new competencies and organisational adjustments, as reliance on digital systems introduced dependencies on technological infrastructure and

[71] NITR, *Minutes of Cross-Functional Committee Meetings*, Kaduna Archives, 2018–2022.
[72] NITR, *Minutes of Cross-Functional Committee Meetings*, Kaduna Archives, 2018–2022.
[73] NITR, *ICT and Digital Management Systems Reports*, Kaduna, 2018–2022

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data integrity, thereby reinforcing the need for continuous capacity development.[74]

Equally critical to the sustainability of leadership reform was the institutionalisation of mentorship and succession planning mechanisms, designed to embed innovation within the organisational fabric rather than confining it to top-level leadership. Senior scientists and departmental heads were mandated to develop structured mentorship programmes for junior staff, facilitating knowledge transfer, leadership grooming, and career progression within clearly defined frameworks.[75] These initiatives strengthened institutional memory and ensured continuity across leadership transitions, mitigating the disruptions that had historically accompanied changes in administrative personnel. The broader implication is that leadership reform at NITR extended beyond individual capacity to encompass systemic human capital development, where future leaders were deliberately cultivated within the organisation. Mentorship and succession planning functioned as stabilising mechanisms, ensuring that leadership innovation was reproduced over time rather than dissipating with personnel turnover. Complementary performance recognition systems, such as internal awards, promotion incentives, and formal commendations, reinforced this process by aligning individual motivation with institutional objectives, thereby embedding a culture of excellence and accountability across all levels of the Institute.

International collaboration further deepened leadership transformation by exposing NITR to global governance standards and transnational research practices. Engagements with organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), as well as participation in regional research networks, required leaders to manage complex multi-stakeholder projects, comply with rigorous reporting frameworks, and navigate cross-cultural institutional environments.[76] These interactions introduced new competencies—particularly in diplomacy, negotiation, and strategic coordination, which were subsequently internalised through institutional protocols and knowledge-sharing platforms. International engagement expanded the horizon of leadership practice beyond domestic administrative frameworks. By benchmarking institutional processes against global standards, NITR enhanced its credibility and improved the quality of its research outputs. Hence, international collaboration functioned as both a learning mechanism and a legitimacy enhancer, enabling the Institute to reconcile local operational realities with global expectations. At the same time, this integration required careful calibration to ensure that external demands did not displace national research priorities, highlighting the need for strategic selectivity in global partnerships.[77]

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[74] Interview with Engr. P. Okeke, ICT Unit Head, NITR, January 8, 2026.
[75] NITR, *Human Resource Development and Mentorship Framework*, Kaduna, 2019–2022.
[76] World Health Organization (WHO), *Collaborative Research Programme Reports on Trypanosomiasis*, Geneva, 2017–2021; Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), *Livestock Health Programme Reports*, Rome, 2018–2022.
[77] Interview with Dr. L. Mohammed, International Liaison Officer, NITR, January 8, 2026.

Fundamentally, the strategic role played by the three Unions of Academic Staff Union of Research Institutions (ASURI) the Senior Staff Association of University, Teaching Hospital, Research Institutions and Associated Institutions (SSAUTHRAI) and the Non-Academic Staff of Education and Associated Institutions (NASU) in NITR between 2015-2023, shifted the dynamics towards the repositioning of staff welfare, better conditions of service delivery in terms of prompt payment of salaries, promotion, and training.

The significance of Unions not only lies in the repositioning and protection of their members but also in navigating and negotiating with the government and agencies to prevent unfair treatment and repressive misuse of executive powers for improved and better welfare services for their members.[78] The trade unions' activities at NITR did not merely improve administrative efficiency; they reconstituted the organisational logic of the Institute, aligning Union behaviour with the demands of accountability systems and the imperatives of scientific productivity. Union activities became the critical interface through which formal governance reforms were translated into institutional outcomes, ensuring that staff welfare was not only implemented but actively utilised to enhance performance.

Conclusion

The paper argues that NITR's pre-2015 administrative and leadership patterns, characterised by hierarchical authority, discretionary decision-making, siloed departments, and reactive operational planning, constrained its capacity to translate scientific expertise into coordinated, developmentally relevant outputs. The post-2015 reform era, however, shows a decisive shift: managerial decentralisation, digital governance, standardised operational procedures, research clustering, laboratory modernisation, strategic field deployment, and diversified funding collectively enhanced institutional efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness. Importantly, leadership innovation, including merit-based appointments, cross-functional committees, structured mentorship, stakeholder engagement, digital tools, and international collaboration, acted as the bridge between governance reforms and scientific productivity, embedding a culture of adaptive, evidence-informed decision-making. These transformations underscore that institutional change in public sector research organisations is not merely procedural but contingent on the alignment of leadership vision with accountability mechanisms, creating opportunities for resilience, learning, and enhanced developmental impact. Furthermore, it demonstrates that reform-driven organisational transformation requires simultaneous attention to structural, procedural, and cultural dimensions. Its contribution to knowledge resides in providing a historically grounded, empirically informed model illustrating how specialised research institutions in reforming states can reconcile scientific autonomy with performance-oriented governance frameworks.

[78] NITR, *Leadership Retreat and Performance Review Reports*, Kaduna, 2018–2023.

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