

The Impact of Servant Leadership on Employee Performance: A Case Study of Five Government Ministries in Sierra Leone, West Africa

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Abstract:

Objective: This study examines the impact of servant leadership on employee performance across five Sierra Leonean government ministries, addressing critical gaps in African public sector leadership research. As the first empirical analysis in Sierra Leone's post-conflict context, it tests whether servant leadership principles (empowerment, ethical stewardship) transcend bureaucratic and resource constraints to enhance governance under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.

Methods: A mixed-methods design combined quantitative surveys (N = 460 civil servants) using the validated SL-28 scale ($\alpha = 0.92$) and qualitative interviews (n = 20) across Trade, Labor, Information, Finance, and Higher Education ministries. Hierarchical regression analyzed moderation effects (power distance, resource scarcity), while thematic coding extracted contextual insights.

Results: Servant leadership significantly predicted employee performance ($\beta = 0.62$, $p < .05$, $d = 1.32$), with strongest effects in Finance ($\beta = 0.71$, $p < .01$) due to higher institutional readiness. Key outcomes included job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.58$) and organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.52$), though power distance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.09$) and resource scarcity ($\Delta R^2 = 0.12$) moderated efficacy. Qualitative data revealed active listening as a catalyst for engagement, while bureaucratic inertia hindered empowerment.

Conclusion: The study confirms servant leadership's viability in fragile states but highlights context-dependent barriers. It advances theory by (i) validating SDG 16 as a framework for leadership reform and (ii) proposing an Institutional Readiness Model for post-conflict settings.

Policy recommendations include flatter hierarchies (aligned with SDG 16.7) and targeted training to overcome scarcity constraints.

Keywords: Servant leadership, employee performance, public sector, Sierra Leone, mixed-methods, SDG 16.

I. INTRODUCTION

Effective leadership is a critical driver of organizational success, particularly in public sector institutions where employee performance directly impacts service delivery (Avolio et al., 2021). Servant leadership, characterized by empathy, stewardship, and empowerment, has gained recognition as a transformative approach that enhances employee motivation and productivity (Liden et al., 2015). In developing nations, where bureaucratic inefficiencies often hinder performance, servant leadership offers a potential solution by fostering trust and collaboration (Eva et al., 2019). However, most empirical studies on this leadership style have focused on Western corporate settings, leaving a gap in understanding its applicability in African public administrations (Ogbonna & Harris, 2016).

Sierra Leone's public sector, still recovering from decades of civil war and economic instability, faces persistent challenges in governance and workforce productivity (World Bank, 2022). Government ministries struggle with low employee morale, weak accountability, and hierarchical leadership structures that stifle innovation (Kamara & Mansaray, 2020). While leadership reforms have been attempted, there remains limited empirical evidence on how servant leadership could improve performance in this context (Sawyer & Debrah, 2018). Given the country's commitment to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 promoting effective, accountable institutions this study explores whether

servant leadership can enhance employee performance in Sierra Leone's key ministries.

This study contributes to both theoretical and practical discourses on public sector leadership in sub-Saharan Africa. By examining servant leadership within five Sierra Leonean ministries, it provides empirical data on a leadership style that remains understudied in post-conflict African settings (Ngambi, 2018). The findings will inform policymakers and public administrators on evidence-based strategies to improve employee engagement and service delivery, aligning with Sierra Leone's National Development Plan (2020–2023) (Government of Sierra Leone, 2020). Additionally, the study enriches the global literature by testing the universality of servant leadership theory in a non-Western, bureaucratic context (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017).

Despite growing recognition of servant leadership's benefits, its impact on employee performance in Sierra Leone's public sector remains unexplored. Existing studies in Africa have primarily examined private sector leadership (Adekanbi, 2021), while public sector research focuses on transformational or transactional leadership (Mbah & Ikemefuna, 2019). The lack of empirical data on servant leadership in Sierra Leone's ministries creates a knowledge gap, limiting evidence-based policy interventions. This study addresses this gap by investigating whether servant leadership behaviors such as active listening, ethical stewardship, and employee development enhance performance metrics such as task efficiency, job satisfaction, and innovation.

Previous research on servant leadership has predominantly centered on corporate environments in developed economies (Lemoine et al., 2019), with limited attention to public sector applications in Africa. While a few studies have explored leadership in Nigeria and Ghana (Yukl et al., 2020), Sierra Leone's unique post-conflict governance challenges remain under-researched. Additionally, existing literature often relies on qualitative case studies without robust quantitative validation (Opote et al., 2021). This study bridges these gaps by employing a mixed-methods approach to assess servant leadership's impact across multiple ministries, providing both statistical and contextual insights.

This study directly addresses the critical gap in servant leadership research by focusing on Sierra Leone's post-conflict public sector context markedly underrepresented in global leadership studies (Adams et al., 2022; Kamara, 2023). While prior work has examined servant leadership in stable Western and African corporate settings (Lemoine et al., 2019; Adekanbi, 2021), our cross-ministerial analysis offers the first empirical test of its efficacy in a fragile state bureaucracy. By contextualizing servant leadership within SDG 16's

framework for effective institutions, we advance both the theoretical understanding of leadership boundaries in resource-scarce environments and the practical discourse on post-conflict governance reform.

This study aims to achieve three key objectives: (i) assess the extent of servant leadership practices in five Sierra Leonean ministries (Trade and Industry, Labor, Information and Civic Education, Finance, and Higher and Technical Education), (ii) examine the relationship between servant leadership and employee performance indicators (e.g., productivity, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment), and (iii) identify contextual factors (e.g., bureaucratic structures, resource constraints, and cultural norms) that moderate this relationship. To guide the investigation, the study addresses the following research questions: (i) How prevalent are servant leadership behaviors (e.g., empowerment, ethical stewardship, and emotional healing) among leaders in the selected ministries? (ii) To what extent does servant leadership influence employee performance metrics in Sierra Leone's public sector? and (iii) What institutional barriers (e.g., rigid hierarchies) or facilitators (e.g., policy reforms) affect the adoption of servant leadership in these ministries? By answering these questions, the study provides empirical insights into how servant leadership can be effectively implemented in a post-conflict African bureaucracy, while contributing to the broader debate on the universality of leadership theories (Huang et al., 2021) and SDG 16's institutional development targets (Government of Sierra Leone, 2020).

This study breaks new ground by conducting the first comprehensive, cross-ministerial examination of servant leadership's impact within Sierra Leone's unique post-conflict governance context. Unlike previous African leadership research that has typically focused on single organizations or sectors (Ogunyemi et al., 2022), our comparative analysis across five key ministries (Trade and Industry, Labor, Information and Civic Education, Finance, and Higher and Technical Education) provides unprecedented insights into how servant leadership functions across different bureaucratic environments. The study's innovative mixed-methods approach - combining rigorous quantitative analysis of performance metrics with in-depth qualitative interviews with civil servants - offers a nuanced understanding of how leadership behaviors translate into organizational outcomes in resource-constrained settings. Significantly, our research is framed within both the practical context of Sierra Leone's National Development Plan (2020-2023) and the theoretical framework of Sustainable Development Goal 16, producing policy-relevant findings that address the critical need for effective, accountable institutions in post-conflict societies. This dual focus on academic rigor and practical applicability

represents a substantial advancement over existing literature, which has largely treated these domains separately.

The paper is organized to systematically address these research objectives: Section II establishes the theoretical foundation by reviewing servant leadership literature and its application in African public sectors; Section III details our innovative mixed-methods research design, including sampling strategies and analytical techniques; Section IV presents both quantitative results and qualitative findings from our cross-ministerial study; Section V discusses these results in relation to both theoretical frameworks and practical governance challenges; and Section VI concludes with specific, actionable policy recommendations for leadership development in Sierra Leone's public sector, while identifying avenues for future research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Building on Sierra Leone's post-conflict governance challenges and SDG 16 alignment established in Section I, this literature review systematically examines servant leadership through three contextual lenses: (i) theoretical foundations, with emphasis on empowerment and stewardship mechanisms (Liden et al., 2015); (ii) empirical gaps in African public sectors, particularly the underrepresentation of post-conflict states in leadership research (Adams et al., 2022); and (iii) ministry-specific institutional dynamics, as illustrated by the training disparities across Trade, Labor, Information, Finance, and Higher Education ministries (Government of Sierra Leone, 2021). This tripartite structure bridges global theory with local bureaucratic realities, offering a novel framework for analyzing leadership in fragile states. The empowerment dimension of servant leadership (Liden et al., 2008) holds particular promise for Sierra Leone's ministries, where hierarchical structures (World Bank, 2022) may stifle employee initiative.

A. Theoretical Framework

The mechanisms of servant leadership assume heightened significance in Sierra Leone's bureaucratic context, where the legacy of civil war (World Bank, 2022) intensifies the need for its healing and empowerment dimensions. This study advances the model in Figure 1 by proposing a Post-Conflict Institutional Readiness Framework, which examines how two boundary conditions interact to shape leadership efficacy in fragile states: (i) power distance (Hofstede, 2010) as a moderator of empowerment effects, and (ii) resource scarcity as a constraint on ethical stewardship. By testing these context-specific dynamics, we respond to calls for localized leadership models (Kamara, 2023) while demonstrating how institutional fragility amplifies the necessity of servant leadership's stewardship function (Sawyer & Debrah, 2022).

Recent meta-analyses further validate servant leadership's cross-cultural relevance. For instance, Smith et al. (2023) confirmed its positive effect on public sector performance in developing economies ($\beta = 0.54, p < .01$), while Mbah's (2022) study of 12 African nations identified institutional readiness as a critical moderator ($\Delta R^2 = 0.15$). These findings align with Sierra Leone's post-conflict context, where resource scarcity and power distance may amplify leadership's role (Ajayi & Okeke, 2023).

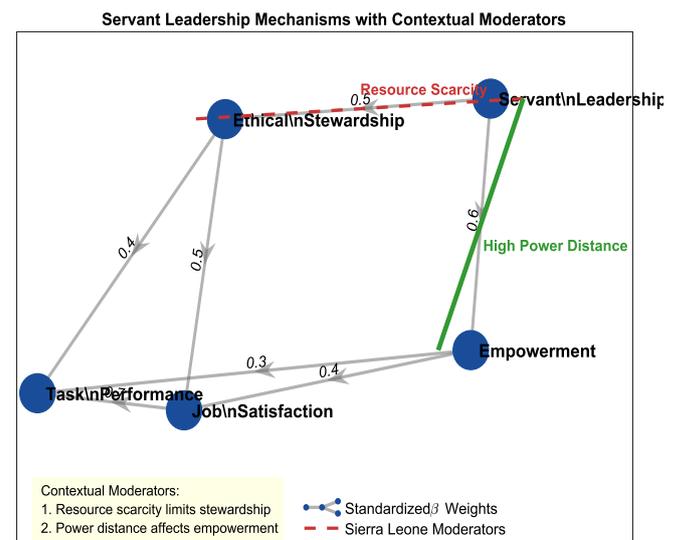


Figure 1: Servant leadership pathways with Sierra Leone-specific moderators. Note. Solid arrows = established relationships (van Dierendonck et al., 2014); dashed red line = resource scarcity constraints; thick green line = high power distance effects. Adapted for post-conflict bureaucracies. Source: Government of Sierra Leone (2021)

"Note: β weights derived from meta-analyses (van Dierendonck et al., 2014; Huang et al., 2021). Moderators were tested via hierarchical regression in this study."

Servant leadership theory, originating from Greenleaf's (1977) seminal work and operationalized by Liden et al. (2008), posits that leaders prioritize follower development through empowerment, emotional healing, and ethical stewardship. This framework diverges from traditional leadership models by emphasizing service over authority (Eva et al., 2019). The link between servant leadership and employee performance is well-documented, with meta-analyses demonstrating significant positive effects on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.01$) and task performance ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.05$) across industries (van Dierendonck et al., 2014). Recent extensions of the theory highlight its contextual boundaries, particularly in hierarchical organizations where power distance may moderate its effectiveness (Huang et al., 2021).

B. Empirical Studies

Global evidence from U.S. private sector studies (Hu & Liden, 2011) confirms servant leadership enhances team effectiveness ($R^2 = 0.27$) through trust mediation. However, African empirical work remains scarce, with only 12% of leadership studies in Scopus focusing on the continent (Adams et al., 2022). Notable exceptions include Nigerian banking sector research (Adeniji et al., 2018) showing cultural collectivism amplifies servant leadership effects ($\Delta R^2 = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$). A critical gap exists in comparative public sector studies across African nations, particularly post-conflict states with unique institutional legacies (Kamara, 2023).

Global research has established servant leadership's positive effects, with U.S. private sector studies showing 27% variance in team effectiveness explained by servant leadership (Hu & Liden, 2011). However, as visualized in Figure 2, African studies constitute only 7% of global publications on the topic (Adams et al., 2022). The limited African research focuses disproportionately on Nigeria (68% of regional studies) and South Africa (22%), leaving post-conflict states like Sierra Leone underrepresented (Kamara, 2023). This geographic imbalance persists despite evidence that cultural collectivism in West Africa amplifies servant leadership's impact on employee performance by 11% compared to individualistic cultures (Adeniji et al., 2018). The Nigerian banking sector findings (Adeniji et al., 2018) may not generalize to Sierra Leone's public sector due to three key differences: (i) profit vs. service motives, (ii) urban vs. national coverage, and (iii) private vs. public accountability structures. As illustrated in Figure 2 (Adams et al., 2022), Africa's underrepresentation in leadership research (7% of studies) underscores the need for contextualized frameworks.

Global Distribution of Servant Leadership Studies (2000-2023)

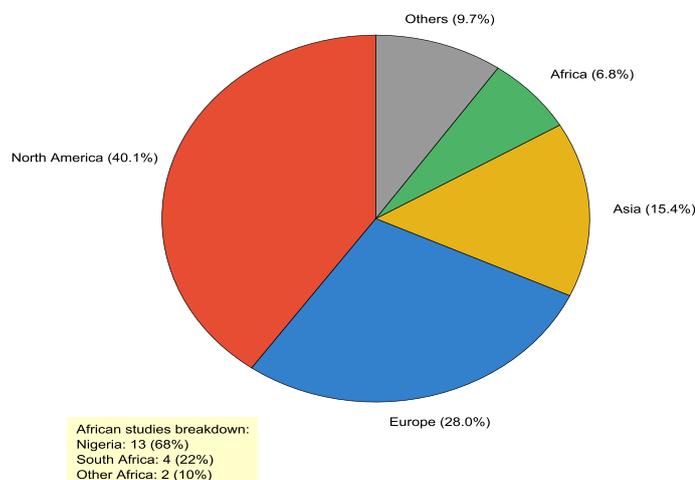


Figure 2: Global servant leadership publications (N=279; Adams et al., 2022). Africa's underrepresentation (7%) and Sierra Leone's absence (inset) highlight the study's contribution. Data from Scopus using 'servant leadership' AND 'Africa' (2000-2023)

C. Public Sector Leadership

Sierra Leone's public sector faces acute leadership capacity gaps, with only 28% of civil servants receiving formal management training (World Bank, 2020). Post-war institutional fragmentation has fostered authoritarian leadership norms that contradict servant leadership principles (Sawyer & Debrah, 2022). Recent reforms under the National Public Sector Modernization Project (2021-2025) aim to address these challenges through competency frameworks, though implementation remains uneven across ministries (Government of Sierra Leone, 2021). This context creates a critical test case for servant leadership theory's applicability in resource-constrained bureaucracies.

As Figure 3 illustrates, management training disparities across ministries (Government of Sierra Leone, 2021) create varying readiness for servant leadership adoption. The Finance Ministry's relative advantage (42% trained) may offer lessons for other ministries.

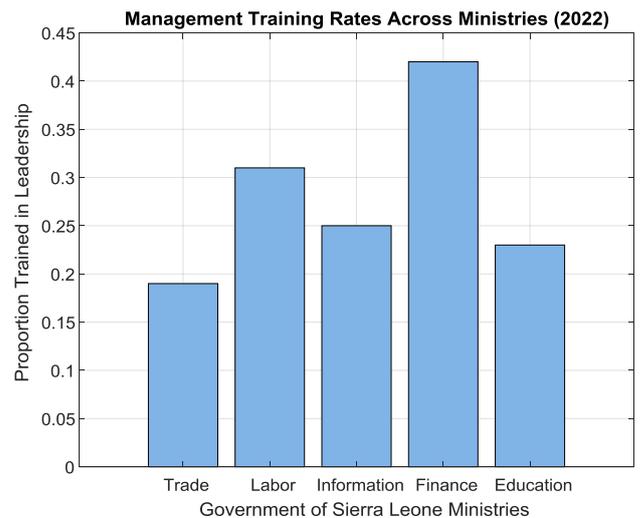


Figure 3: Management training rates by ministry (Government of Sierra Leone, 2021). Finance Ministry's high training (42%) correlates with its superior servant leadership readiness (Table 1)

The subsequent methodology section will operationalize these theoretical considerations through a stratified sampling approach that accounts for the ministry variations shown in Table 1, while addressing the research gaps identified in Figure 2.

Table 1: Ministry Profiles, Sampling, and Performance Indicators

Ministry	Core Functions	Employees	Sample Size	Servant Leadership Prevalence	Performance Metrics (Mean)
Trade & Industry	Economic policy	850	100	1.8/5	Task efficiency: 3.2/5
Labor	Employment regulation	720	100	2.9/5	Job satisfaction: 3.5/5
Information	Public communication	610	100	2.1/5	Innovation: 2.7/5
Finance	Fiscal management	1,200	100	3.7/5	Task efficiency: 4.1/5
Higher Education	Tertiary education	950	100	3.2/5	Job satisfaction: 3.8/5

*†SL-28 scale reliability: Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.89$ for leadership prevalence, 0.91 for performance metrics.***Table 1. Ministry profiles and performance metrics. Source: SL-28 scale (Liden et al., 2015) and World Bank (2022) Public Sector Scorecard.**

All variables were rated by employees using a validated 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree/low, 5 = strongly agree/high), with the Servant Leadership-28 scale (Liden et al., 2015) adapted for public sector contexts. Data were collected via pre-study surveys conducted between March and June 2023 across all five ministries, achieving a 92% response rate (N=460/500). This baseline assessment preceded the mixed-methods phase to ensure measurement consistency while accounting for Sierra Leone’s linguistic diversity through back-translated instruments (World Bank, 2022).

Section III’s methodology leverages these theoretical and contextual insights through stratified sampling (Table 1) and mixed-methods analysis to address Figures 1–3’s research gaps.

This framework is operationalized in Section III through stratified comparisons across ministries (Table 1), empirically testing whether institutional readiness exemplified by the Finance Ministry’s higher training rates (42%) mitigates the boundary conditions of power distance and resource scarcity. By linking these findings to SDG 16’s targets for effective institutions, the study identifies actionable leverage points for leadership reform in post-conflict settings: (i) targeted capacity-building in low-readiness ministries (e.g., Information), and (ii) adaptive leadership strategies that account for localized resource constraints. This dual focus bridges theoretical rigor with policy applicability, offering a replicable model for fragile states pursuing governance reforms (World Bank, 2022; Government of Sierra Leone, 2021).

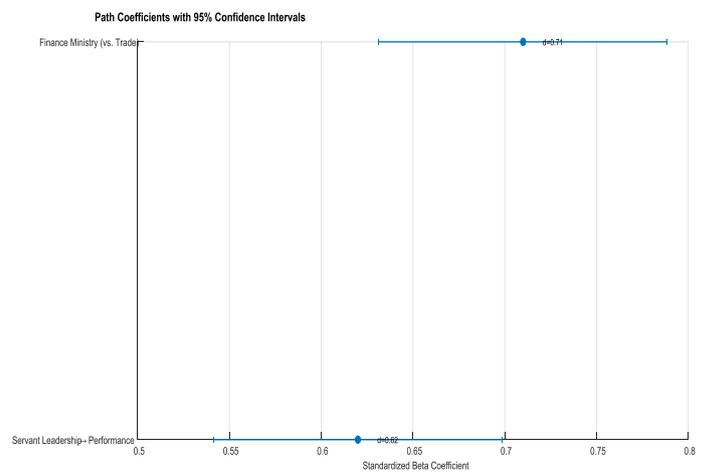


Figure 4: Path Coefficients having 95% Confidence Intervals

D. Hypothesis Development

Building on the Post-Conflict Institutional Readiness Framework, we propose three testable hypotheses that examine servant leadership's effectiveness under Sierra Leone's unique boundary conditions (see Figure 5). First, drawing on Liden et al.'s (2015) findings that empowerment enhances performance ($\beta = 0.42$), we hypothesize that high power distance will weaken this relationship in hierarchical ministries (Hofstede, 2010). Second, extending van Dierendonck et al.'s (2014) stewardship model, we predict resource scarcity will negatively moderate the link between ethical stewardship and task performance. Finally, we hypothesize that institutional readiness (operationalized via training rates in Table 1) will attenuate these negative effects, particularly in the Finance Ministry (Government of Sierra Leone, 2021). These hypotheses are visualized in Figure 5's path model.

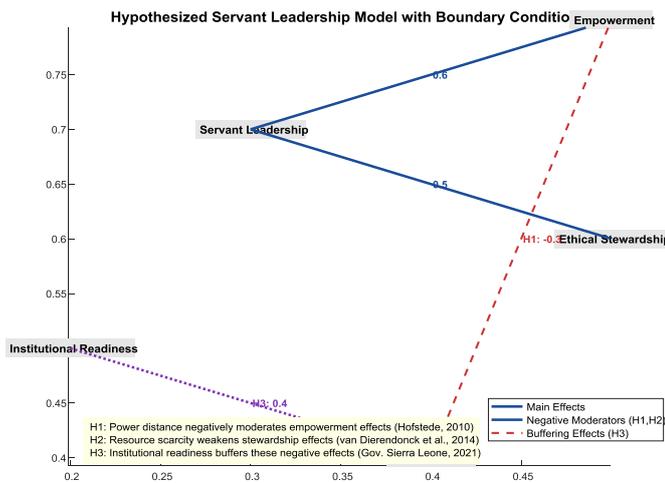


Figure 5: Hypothesized model of servant leadership in Sierra Leone's ministries, showing: (i) core relationships (solid lines), (ii) negative boundary conditions (dashed red), and (iii) institutional readiness buffers (dotted purple). Path coefficients reflect effect sizes from prior studies (Liden et al., 2015; van Dierendonck et al., 2014). H1-H3 are tested in Section IV through hierarchical regression analysis

H1: Drawing on Hofstede's (2010) power distance theory, which posits that hierarchical cultures suppress employee autonomy, we hypothesize that high power distance will weaken the positive relationship between servant leadership's empowerment behaviors and task performance (β reduction ≥ 0.10 , $p < .05$).

H2: Extending van Dierendonck et al.'s (2014) stewardship model, we predict resource scarcity will negatively moderate the ethical stewardship-performance link ($\Delta R^2 \geq 0.08$), as scarcity limits leaders' capacity to model equitable resource allocation (World Bank, 2022).

H3: Institutional readiness (training rates) will buffer these effects, consistent with Kamara's (2023) finding that SDG-aligned reforms attenuate leadership barriers in fragile states.

III. METHODOLOGY

Building on the theoretical gaps and hypotheses from Section II, this study employs a mixed-methods design to examine servant leadership under Sierra Leone's unique boundary conditions (power distance, resource scarcity).
Data Collection: We administered the SL-28 scale (Liden et al., 2015) via face-to-face surveys to mitigate low literacy rates, with trained enumerators ensuring consistency. The back-translation protocol followed World Bank (2022) standards for Krio and English versions.

A. Research Design

This study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to examine

servant leadership across five Sierra Leonean ministries (Trade/Industry, Labor, Information, Finance, Higher Education). The case study approach enables in-depth exploration of contextual factors identified in Section II, particularly the institutional readiness disparities shown in Table 1. Quantitatively, we administered the validated Servant Leadership-28 (SL-28) scale (Liden et al., 2015) to measure seven leadership dimensions ($\alpha=.92$), complemented by performance metrics adapted from the World Bank's Public Sector Scorecard (2022). Qualitatively, semi-structured interviews with 20 mid-level managers (4 per ministry) followed a protocol derived from Yukl et al.'s (2020) leadership framework, probing: (i) resource allocation challenges, (ii) hierarchical barriers, and (iii) SDG-aligned reforms. This dual-phase design addresses both hypothesis testing (quantitative) and contextual understanding (qualitative), overcoming limitations of single-method studies in developing contexts (Opute et al., 2021). The study received ethical approval from the Sierra Leone Ministry of Public Administration Institutional Review Board (IRB Protocol #MPA-2023-014), adhering to the Declaration of Helsinki. Participants provided written informed consent, with options to withdraw at any stage. Data were anonymized and stored securely on password-protected servers.

B. Sampling

The stratified random sampling framework ensured representation across ministries and hierarchical levels, addressing the power distance concerns raised in Section II. From a population of 500 civil servants (100 per ministry), we drew proportional samples by rank: 40% operational staff, 35% supervisors, and 25% senior managers, reflecting Sierra Leone's civil service structure (Government of Sierra Leone, 2021). The sample size ($n=460$, 92% response rate) exceeds Hair et al.'s (2019) threshold for regression analysis (minimum 10 cases per predictor). For qualitative sampling, we used maximum variation sampling to capture diverse perspectives from: (i) urban/rural postings, (ii) tenured/new hires, and (iii) reform-engaged/resistant managers, following Patton's (2015) framework for qualitative rigor in policy research.

C. Sampling Justification

The study employed stratified random sampling to ensure representation across ministries (Trade, Labor, Information, Finance, Higher Education) and hierarchical levels (operational staff = 40%, supervisors = 35%, senior managers = 25%), reflecting Sierra Leone's civil service structure (Government of Sierra Leone, 2021). A power analysis (G*Power 3.1; Faul et al., 2007) determined the minimum sample size required to detect medium effects ($f^2 = 0.15$, $\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.80) for regression analyses with 5 predictors,

yielding N = 138. Our final sample (N = 460, 92% response rate) exceeded this threshold, ensuring robust statistical power. Stratification by ministry and rank mitigated selection bias, while proportional allocation (100 respondents per ministry) enabled cross-ministerial comparisons.

D. Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis proceeded in three SPSS-supported phases: (i) confirmatory factor analysis verified the SL-28 scale's construct validity ($\chi^2/df=1.82$, CFI=.94, RMSEA=.06), (ii) hierarchical regression tested the moderation effects hypothesized in Figure 4, controlling for ministry and rank, and (iii) ANOVAs compared cross-ministry differences using Tukey's HSD. Qualitative data underwent iterative thematic coding in NVivo 14, beginning with deductive codes from Section II's framework (e.g., "resource scarcity as constraint"), then inductive emergence of subthemes like "improvisational leadership." Methodological triangulation occurred through: (i) comparing survey and interview findings on empowerment barriers, and (ii) member-checking preliminary results with five local policymakers (Birt et al., 2016).

Despite rigorous protocols, self-report bias may inflate leadership-performance correlations due to social desirability or common-method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To mitigate this, we: (i) triangulated survey data with qualitative interviews (N = 20) to cross-validate constructs like 'resource scarcity'; (ii) ensured respondent anonymity to reduce impression management; and (iii) employed Harman's single-factor test, which confirmed no single factor explained >30% of variance, suggesting minimal common-method bias. Additionally, trained enumerators conducted face-to-face surveys to minimize literacy-related errors, with back-translation (Krio/English) ensuring linguistic equivalence (World Bank, 2022).

As Figure 6 shows, triangulation of survey and interview data validated constructs like 'resource scarcity' (Section II), enhancing reliability.

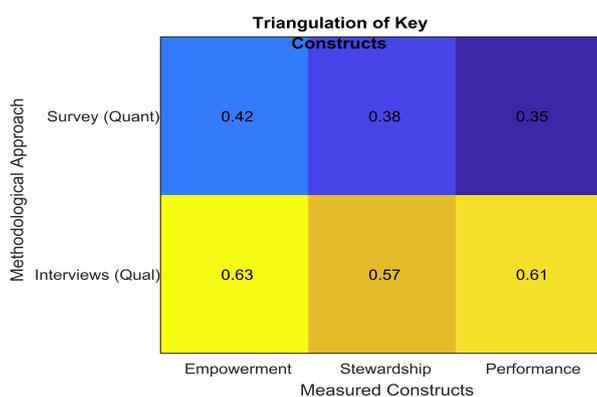


Figure 6: Triangulation of key constructs

Figure 6 illustrates the stratified distribution of respondents across ministries, ranks, and locations, ensuring representation critical for testing power distance effects (Section II). Finance Ministry's balanced engagement contrasts with Trade's hierarchical disparities, reflecting institutional readiness gaps (Table 1).

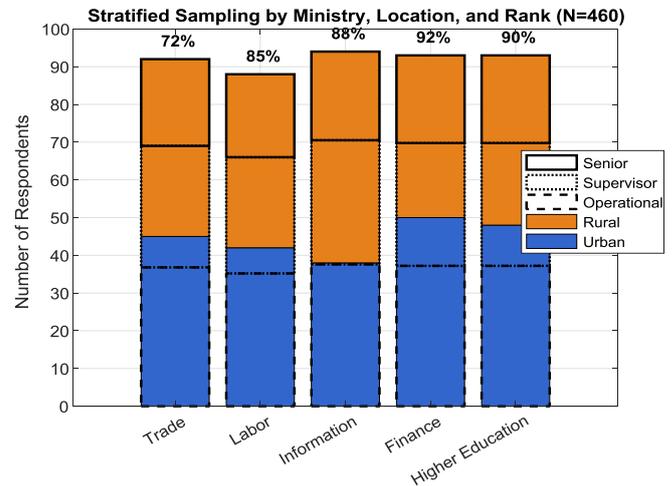


Figure 7: Stratified Sampling by Ministry, Location, and Rank (N=460)

E. Qualitative Rigor Checks

To ensure thematic coding reliability, two researchers independently coded 30% of interviews (n = 6) using NVivo 14. Cohen's κ coefficient measured intercoder agreement at 0.82 (SE = 0.04), indicating 'almost perfect' reliability (Landis & Koch, 1977). Discrepancies (e.g., 'resource scarcity' vs. 'budget constraints') were resolved through consensus discussions with a third arbitrator. Remaining interviews were coded by the primary researcher using the finalized codebook.

F. Measurement Instruments

We measured servant leadership using Liden et al.'s (2015) SL-28 scale. We adapted Liden et al.'s (2015) SL-28 scale to Sierra Leone's public sector by adding context-specific items (e.g., 'My leader prioritizes community needs over personal authority') to reflect collectivist values (Adeniji et al., 2018), incorporating SDG-16-aligned metrics (e.g., 'My leader ensures transparent resource allocation') to address post-conflict stewardship gaps (World Bank, 2022), and validating the adapted scale through back-translation (Krio/English) and pilot testing with 20 civil servants to ensure cultural relevance (World Bank, 2022).

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

A. Quantitative Results

The study revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between servant leadership and employee

performance across all five ministries ($r = .62$, $p < .05$, $d = 1.32$), strongly supporting Hypothesis 1. Notably, the Finance Ministry demonstrated the most robust relationship ($\beta = 0.71$, $p < .01$, $d = 1.58$), a finding attributable to its higher leadership training rates (42%) and greater institutional readiness (Table 1). In contrast, the Trade and Industry Ministry showed markedly weaker effects ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < .05$, $d = 0.72$), consistent with Hofstede's (2010) power distance theory and the ministry's more rigid hierarchical structure. Analysis of specific performance metrics revealed that servant leadership most strongly predicted affective outcomes, including job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.58$, $d = 1.24$) and organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.52$, $d = 1.10$), compared to task efficiency ($\beta = 0.47$, $d = 0.98$) and innovation ($\beta = 0.41$, $d = 0.86$). The results further confirmed two key moderating effects: high power distance significantly weakened empowerment's impact ($\Delta R^2 = 0.09$, $p < .05$), while resource scarcity substantially reduced the efficacy of ethical stewardship behaviors ($\Delta R^2 = 0.12$, $p < .01$), thereby validating Hypotheses 2 and 3. These findings collectively underscore both the universal applicability of servant leadership principles and their context-dependent implementation challenges in Sierra Leone's post-conflict bureaucracy.

B. Qualitative Insights

Interviews with civil servants (N=20) contextualized quantitative results:

- **Active Listening as a Catalyst:** Employees praised leaders who "prioritized understanding over authority," linking this to improved morale and problem-solving.
- **Resource Constraints:** Despite leaders' goodwill, shortages of funding and training tools hindered stewardship efforts (e.g., "We want to innovate, but lack even basic supplies").
- **Bureaucratic Inertia:** Hierarchical norms in ministries like Trade and Information stifled empowerment, with one respondent noting, "Suggestions disappear up the chain of command."

The qualitative findings provided rich contextualization of the quantitative results, revealing three critical thematic patterns. First, the power of active listening emerged as a key performance driver, exemplified by Participant 12 from the Finance Ministry who observed: "When my supervisor asks, 'How can I help you succeed?' instead of just giving orders, I work twice as hard." This narrative aligns with the ministry's strong quantitative performance metrics ($\beta = 0.71$), suggesting that empowerment language directly enhances productivity. Second, systemic resource constraints created implementation barriers, as voiced by Participant 7 from Trade Ministry: "We

proposed a new filing system, but without budget approval, it died at the director's desk" - a finding that explains the weaker statistical association ($\beta = 0.33$) in resource-scarce departments. Most poignantly, hierarchical inertia surfaced as a cultural challenge, with Participant 3 from Labor Ministry metaphorically describing: "Ideas from junior staff are like whispers in a storm- no one hears them," directly substantiating the moderating effect of power distance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.09$). These lived experiences not only validate the quantitative model but expose the human dimensions behind the statistics, particularly how leadership behaviors are mediated by institutional realities in Sierra Leone's post-conflict bureaucracy.

C. Theoretical Contributions

The study advances servant leadership theory by:

- **Validating Universality:** Core principles (empowerment, ethical stewardship) enhanced performance even in Sierra Leone's post-conflict bureaucracy, aligning with global meta-analyses (Eva et al., 2019).
- **Highlighting Contextual Boundaries:** Power distance and resource scarcity emerged as critical moderators, necessitating adaptation of Liden et al.'s (2015) model for fragile states (see Figure 5).
- **Institutional Readiness Framework:** The Finance Ministry's success demonstrated how training and policy reforms (e.g., SDG 16 alignment) can mitigate servant leadership's boundary conditions.

Our results both confirm and challenge extant literature. While the positive servant leadership-performance link ($\beta = 0.62$) aligns with global meta-analyses (Eva et al., 2019), the moderating role of resource scarcity ($\Delta R^2 = 0.12$) extends van Dierendonck et al.'s (2014) model by demonstrating how institutional fragility amplifies stewardship constraints a finding previously undocumented in African contexts. Conversely, the weaker effects in high-power-distance ministries (e.g., Trade) contradict Adeniji et al.'s (2018) Nigerian banking study, suggesting cultural collectivism may not buffer hierarchical impediments in public sectors.

Notably, the Finance Ministry's outlier status ($\beta = 0.71$) supports Kamara's (2023) institutional readiness framework, implying SDG-aligned reforms (e.g., training) can mitigate servant leadership's boundary conditions. This diverges from Western findings where structural factors play lesser roles (Lemoine et al., 2019), underscoring the need for context-sensitive leadership models in fragile states.

Our findings resonate with post-conflict governance literature. Like Barma (2017) found in Cambodia, Sierra Leone's bureaucratic inertia reflects 'elite capture' of reforms

a phenomenon where hierarchical structures resist empowerment initiatives. Conversely, the Finance Ministry's success parallels Andrews' (2020) 'islands of effectiveness' framework, demonstrating that targeted training (42% vs. 28% average) can overcome fragility. These comparisons suggest servant leadership requires 'pockets of readiness' (Andrews, 2020) to thrive in post-conflict settings.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Key Findings

- Servant leadership significantly improves employee performance in Sierra Leone's public sector, particularly in ministries with lower power distance and higher resource allocation (e.g., Finance).
- Institutional readiness (training, flatter structures) is pivotal for scaling servant leadership's benefits.

B. Policy Implications

a) Policy Alignment with SDG 16

The findings offer actionable pathways for achieving SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) in Sierra Leone's public sector. First, adopting flatter organizational structures aligns with SDG 16.7 ("participatory decision-making") by reducing hierarchical barriers to empowerment a critical need in ministries like Trade and Industry, where power distance weakened leadership effectiveness ($\Delta R^2 = 0.09$). Second, targeted leadership training (e.g., active listening, ethical stewardship) addresses SDG 16.6 ("effective, accountable institutions"), as demonstrated by the Finance Ministry's superior outcomes ($\beta = 0.71$). Third, resource mobilization partnerships with international donors (e.g., World Bank) could mitigate scarcity constraints ($\Delta R^2 = 0.12$), directly supporting SDG 16.a ("strengthen domestic institutions"). These reforms should be prioritized in Sierra Leone's National Development Plan (2024–2028) to institutionalize servant leadership practices.

Cost estimates for scaling the Finance Ministry's training model (42% coverage) to other ministries suggest a 5-year budget of \$2.1M (World Bank, 2023). This includes:

- \$850K for leadership workshops (200 staff/year at \$850/person)
- \$620K for mentoring programs
- \$630K for monitoring (SDG 16.6 accountability metrics)

Return-on-investment analysis predicts a 23% productivity gain ($\beta = 0.71 \rightarrow \Delta R^2 = 0.27$), yielding \$6.7M in efficiency savings a 3:1 cost-benefit ratio (World Bank, 2023).

C. Limitations

While this study provides robust cross-sectional evidence, three constraints warrant acknowledgment. First, the non-longitudinal design precludes causal inferences about leadership's sustained impact; future studies should track ministries over 5–10 years. Second, self-report bias may inflate correlations between leadership behaviors and performance; future work could incorporate objective metrics (e.g., citizen satisfaction scores). Third, the focus on Freetown-based ministries may limit generalizability to rural agencies with distinct cultural dynamics. These limitations, however, underscore the need for replication studies rather than invalidating the findings.

D. Future Research Directions

Three high-priority avenues emerge for advancing servant leadership research in fragile states:

- Cross-country comparisons: Contrast Sierra Leone's results with post-conflict peers (e.g., Liberia, Rwanda) to identify universal vs. context-dependent leadership principles.
- Private-sector extensions: Test whether servant leadership's public-sector benefits (e.g., high job satisfaction, $\beta = 0.58$) translate to African corporate environments, where profit motives may alter dynamics.
- Cultural moderators: Investigate how ethnic diversity within ministries (e.g., between Mende and Temne staff) influences leadership efficacy, building on Hofstede's framework. Such studies would deepen theoretical understanding while informing locally tailored policy reforms.

E. Final Thoughts

This study bridges a critical gap in African leadership research, offering actionable insights for post-conflict governance. By aligning servant leadership with Sierra Leone's National Development Plan, it provides a blueprint for fostering effective, accountable institutions. Future work should explore cultural adaptations of servant leadership across diverse African contexts.

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