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STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND PERFORMANCE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN KENYA: A CASE OF SELECTED NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN ISIOLO COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between strategic leadership and the performance of selected non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Isiolo County, Kenya, focusing on four dimensions: balanced organizational controls, corporate strategic direction, strategic planning, and organizational culture. Addressing contextual and empirical gaps in existing literature, particularly the underrepresentation of arid and semi-arid land (ASAL) settings, the study provides actionable insights for NGO leaders, policymakers, and scholars. Grounded in adaptive leadership, configuration, and goal-setting theories, the study collected data from 203 staff members across seven WASH-focused NGOs, with a representative sample of 135 respondents selected through stratified and simple random sampling. Data were analysed using SPSS version 27, and ethical standards, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly observed. Findings revealed statistically significant positive relationships for three of the four strategic leadership dimensions with NGO performance. Balanced organizational controls had the strongest predictive coefficient ($\beta = 0.479$), followed by strategic planning ($\beta = 0.428$), corporate strategic direction ($\beta = 0.367$), and organizational culture ($\beta = 0.135$). The study established that NGOs that adopted transparent accountability systems, upheld mission-aligned direction, institutionalised adaptive planning cycles, and nurtured ethical, learning-oriented cultures demonstrated stronger program effectiveness, stakeholder satisfaction, and operational resilience. The study recommends that NGOs in resource-constrained environments embrace an integrated strategic leadership model that synchronizes controls, vision, planning, and culture to improve performance and sustainability.

Keywords: *Strategic Leadership, Balanced Organizational Controls, Corporate Strategic Direction, Performance of NGOs, Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs)*

INTRODUCTION

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) face persistent performance challenges stemming from environmental volatility, donor dependency, logistical fragmentation, and weak institutional capacity

(Munyugi & Nteere, 2023; Lalampaa et al., 2024). In such fragile contexts, strategic leadership, defined as the capacity to align vision, structure, culture, and control systems to navigate complexity and drive organizational performance (Pearce & Robinson, 2021), emerges not as a managerial luxury but as a survival imperative. While strategic leadership is widely theorised in stable or urban settings (Kitonga et al., 2021), its configuration and impact in ASAL environments like Isiolo County remain underexplored, despite the critical role NGOs play in delivering Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) services to nomadic and pastoralist communities. Globally, the NGO sector has evolved from ad hoc relief actors to strategic development partners, increasingly expected to demonstrate accountability, adaptive capacity, and measurable impact (Lewis, 2021). This shift has elevated the importance of strategic leadership as a core organizational capability. Strategic leadership enables organisations to anticipate disruptions, align internal systems with external demands, and mobilise resources toward mission-critical outcomes (Schoemaker et al., 2023). These approaches are equally applicable to not-for-profit organisations, which, despite their non-commercial mandate, must produce results to retain legitimacy, funding, and public trust (Abdi et al., 2024).

This study examines how four interrelated dimensions of strategic leadership, balanced organizational controls, corporate strategic direction, strategic planning, and organizational culture, jointly influence the performance of selected NGOs in Isiolo County. Over the past two decades, these dimensions have evolved in response to shifting donor expectations, technological advances, and demands for local ownership. Balanced organizational controls have matured from compliance-driven financial audits into integrated performance systems linking budgeting, real-time monitoring, and beneficiary feedback (Corderly, 2019; Oluoch et al., 2021). Corporate strategic direction has shifted from donor-prescribed missions toward adaptive, community-co-created visions that embed environmental sustainability and local priorities (Banks & Hulme, 2019; Chu & Luke, 2022). Strategic planning has transformed from rigid multi-year blueprints into dynamic, scenario-based processes capable of responding to droughts, pandemics, and funding shocks (Wachira & Mwangi, 2022; Kariuki & Ngugi, 2021). Even organizational culture, long treated as an implicit by-product of mission-driven work, is now deliberately cultivated to promote agility, inclusion, and ethical accountability (Maina & Kinyua, 2020; Kitonga et al., 2021). Yet, despite these advances, implementation remains uneven, particularly in arid and semi-arid lands like Isiolo County, where logistical fragmentation, nomadic populations, and donor unpredictability test the limits of even the most progressive leadership models.

The convergence of these dimensions is particularly vital in Isiolo, where recurring droughts, mobile populations, and donor unpredictability demand leadership that is simultaneously structured and flexible. Prior research has largely examined these variables in isolation or within urban NGO contexts (e.g., Kitonga et al., 2016; Wachira

& Mwangi, 2022), creating a contextual and methodological gap. This study addresses those gaps by testing an integrated strategic leadership model grounded in Adaptive Leadership Theory (Heifetz et al., 2009), Configuration Theory (Miles & Snow, 1987), and Goal-Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 2010), theories that collectively explain how leadership practices must adapt, align, and motivate to enhance performance in volatile environments. By doing so, the research contributes both empirical evidence and practical guidance for strengthening civil society resilience in Kenya's most marginalised regions.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite their critical role in Kenya's development landscape, contributing over KES 170 billion to the national economy in 2021–2022 (NGO Coordination Board, 2023), many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) such as Isiolo County continue to exhibit inconsistent and often declining performance. This underperformance persists even as strategic leadership is widely theorised as a cornerstone of organizational effectiveness in volatile environments (Pearce & Robinson, 2021; Schoemaker et al., 2023). In Isiolo, NGOs managing Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) programmes confront a confluence of challenges: recurring droughts that disrupt service delivery, mobile pastoralist populations that complicate beneficiary targeting, donor unpredictability that strains financial planning, and weak infrastructure that hampers monitoring and evaluation (Munyugi & Nteere, 2023; Lalampaa et al., 2024). These conditions demand leadership that is not only strategic but also adaptive, integrated, and contextually grounded.

Yet, empirical evidence from the region reveals a troubling disconnect. While balanced organizational controls have evolved from compliance-driven audits to integrated performance systems (Chu & Luke, 2022), many Isiolo-based NGOs remain trapped in donor-imposed reporting frameworks that prioritise upward accountability over local learning and adaptation (Oluoch et al., 2021). Similarly, strategic planning, now widely recognised as a dynamic, scenario-based process in post-2020 humanitarian practice (Wachira & Mwangi, 2022), often remains static and outdated in Isiolo, failing to anticipate ecological shocks or shifting community needs. This reactive posture erodes programmatic impact, weakens stakeholder trust, and ultimately undermines organizational sustainability.

Compounding this operational gap is a significant scholarly deficit. Prior research on strategic leadership in Kenyan NGOs has overwhelmingly focused on urban centres like Nairobi (Kitonga et al., 2016; Wachira & Mwangi, 2022), where stable infrastructure, fixed beneficiary bases, and predictable funding streams create conditions fundamentally different from those in ASAL counties. Findings from these contexts cannot be uncritically transplanted to Isiolo, where logistical fragmentation and environmental volatility reshape leadership dynamics. Moreover, existing studies tend to examine

strategic leadership dimensions in isolation, assessing culture *or* planning *or* controls, rather than analysing their synergistic, configurational effect on performance (Lalampaa et al., 2024). This methodological limitation obscures how the *alignment* among controls, direction, planning, and culture, not just their individual presence, drives resilience in fragile settings.

Consequently, while strategic leadership is presumed to enhance NGO performance, there is insufficient empirical understanding of how its core dimensions jointly influence multidimensional performance outcomes, including program impact, stakeholder satisfaction, operational efficiency, and financial sustainability, in the complex, resource-constrained environment of Isiolo County. This knowledge gap impedes the development of contextually relevant leadership frameworks and limits the sector's capacity to institutionalise practices that foster long-term impact. Therefore, this study sought to address the following problem: Despite theoretical consensus on the importance of strategic leadership, there is inadequate empirical evidence on how the integrated application of balanced organizational controls, corporate strategic direction, strategic planning, and organizational culture collectively shapes the performance of NGOs operating in Kenya's arid and semi-arid regions.

OBJECTIVES

This study sought to examine how four interrelated dimensions of strategic leadership, balanced organizational controls, corporate strategic direction, strategic planning, and organizational culture, jointly influence the performance of WASH-focused non-governmental organisations in Isiolo County, Kenya. Specifically, the research aimed to assess the individual and collective effects of these leadership practices on multidimensional NGO performance, identify which dimensions exert the strongest predictive influence in an ASAL context, and generate contextually grounded insights to inform more resilient, adaptive, and integrated leadership frameworks for civil society organisations operating in fragile, resource-constrained environments.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study offers timely theoretical and practical insights into strategic leadership in fragile contexts. Theoretically, it advances Configuration Theory by empirically demonstrating how the alignment of balanced organizational controls, corporate strategic direction, strategic planning, and organizational culture jointly shapes NGO performance in an arid and semi-arid land (ASAL) setting, an underrepresented context in leadership literature. For policymakers, the findings provide evidence to inform the operationalisation of Kenya's Public Benefits Organisations (PBO) Act by identifying leadership practices that enhance accountability and adaptive capacity. Practically, the results guide NGO leaders in Isiolo and similar regions to prioritise integrated control systems, adaptive planning, and mission-aligned direction to improve programmatic impact. Academically, the study fills a documented gap by shifting focus from urban

NGO hubs to marginalised ASAL counties, offering a foundation for comparative research across fragile environments in the Global South.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in three interlocking theoretical perspectives, Adaptive Leadership Theory (Heifetz et al., 2009), Configuration Theory (Miles & Snow, 1987), and Goal-Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 2010), which together provide a robust explanatory lens for understanding strategic leadership in volatile, resource-constrained environments.

Adaptive Leadership Theory posits that effective leadership in complex settings involves mobilising people to confront difficult challenges through learning, experimentation, and behavioural change (Heifetz et al., 2009). In Isiolo County, where recurring droughts, mobile pastoralist populations, and donor unpredictability create persistent adaptive pressures, this theory explains why NGOs must move beyond rigid, compliance-driven models toward leadership that fosters resilience and feedback responsiveness. It particularly illuminates the roles of strategic planning and organizational culture as mechanisms for navigating uncertainty.

Complementing this, Configuration Theory asserts that organizational performance is maximised not by isolated practices, but by the alignment among strategy, structure, controls, and culture (Miles & Snow, 1987). This is especially salient in ASAL contexts, where misalignment, such as static plans clashing with ecological volatility, undermines effectiveness. The theory provides the conceptual basis for testing the synergistic influence of all four leadership dimensions on performance.

Finally, Goal-Setting Theory explains how clear, challenging, and measurable objectives enhance motivation, focus, and execution (Locke & Latham, 2010). In NGOs, where mission drift is a constant risk, this theory clarifies how corporate strategic direction translates vision into actionable priorities, ensuring that daily operations remain tethered to long-term impact.

Together, these theories form an integrated foundation: Adaptive Leadership explains why NGOs must be flexible, Configuration Theory explains how internal elements must align to enable that flexibility, and Goal-Setting Theory explains what keeps the organisation anchored to its purpose amid change.

Empirical Literature Review

Empirical research on strategic leadership in the Kenyan NGO sector has grown steadily, yet it remains disproportionately anchored in urban centres such as Nairobi. Kitonga, Bichanga, and Muema (2016) demonstrated that NGOs applying strategic leadership principles, particularly clear visioning and performance monitoring, reported

significantly higher program effectiveness and donor trust. Similarly, Wachira and Mwangi (2022) found that organizational culture rooted in ethical accountability and staff engagement correlated with improved operational outcomes in Nairobi-based NGOs. These studies affirm the relevance of strategic leadership but assume stable infrastructures, fixed beneficiary bases, and predictable funding cycles, conditions rarely present in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) like Isiolo County.

Recent work has begun to challenge this urban bias. Lalampaa, Ndiwa, and Kaelo (2024) examined leadership in Samburu County and found that adaptive, community-co-created strategic direction, not rigid donor-aligned plans, was the strongest predictor of resilience among pastoralist-serving NGOs. Their findings suggest that leadership effectiveness in ASALs depends less on formal structures and more on contextual responsiveness, a nuance absent in earlier urban studies. Munyugi and Nteere (2023) further observed that logistical fragmentation and mobile populations in Isiolo weaken the impact of top-down control systems, necessitating feedback mechanisms that prioritise local learning over external compliance.

Despite these advances, a critical methodological gap persists: most studies examine leadership dimensions in isolation. For instance, Maina and Kinyua (2020) focused exclusively on balanced organizational controls, while Kamau, K' Aol, and Lewa (2020) analysed strategic planning without considering its interaction with culture or direction. This fragmented approach obscures how the *alignment* among controls, planning, direction, and culture, not their individual presence, drives performance in volatile settings. Configuration Theory (Miles & Snow, 1987) posits that synergy among internal elements maximises effectiveness, yet few empirical studies test this proposition in ASAL contexts.

Moreover, the modest influence of organizational culture in fragile environments remains underexplored. While Reino, Roigas, and Muursepp (2020) and Strengers et al. (2022) found strong culture-performance links in stable European and Chinese firms, their findings may not generalise to Isiolo, where high staff turnover, remote postings, and crisis-driven operations limit opportunities for sustained cultural socialisation. The current study addresses this gap by testing all four dimensions simultaneously, revealing that culture, contrary to findings in stable contexts, was not a statistically significant predictor of performance in this ASAL setting ($\beta = 0.135, p > 0.05$). The findings challenge urban-centric assumptions and suggest that in environments characterized by high staff turnover and crisis-driven operations, the mechanisms through which culture traditionally influences performance may be disrupted.

Previous studies have offered valuable but fragmented insights into strategic leadership within NGOs. However, what remains under-investigated is the composite interaction among leadership dimensions under volatile field conditions. This study therefore,

extends earlier scholarship by empirically testing how the simultaneous alignment of controls, direction, planning, and culture explains performance outcomes in resource-constrained, high-risk settings. In doing so, it provides a cohesive analytical bridge between urban-based findings and the operational realities of ASAL counties such as Isiolo.

In sum, while strategic leadership is widely endorsed as a performance lever, empirical evidence from ASAL counties remains scarce, fragmented, and often extrapolated from dissimilar contexts. This study contributes by examining the *joint influence* of balanced organizational controls, corporate strategic direction, strategic planning, and organizational culture on NGO performance in Isiolo, a setting where environmental volatility, nomadic populations, and donor unpredictability demand leadership that is both structured and adaptive.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual model (Figure 1) posits that four dimensions of strategic leadership, balanced organizational controls, corporate strategic direction, strategic planning, and organizational culture, function as an integrated system to influence NGO performance. The model hypothesizes a direct, positive relationship between each independent variable and the dependent variable. These elements interact systemically, where controls enhance accountability, direction provides strategic coherence, planning supports adaptability, and culture fosters ethical cohesion, collectively driving organizational outcomes.

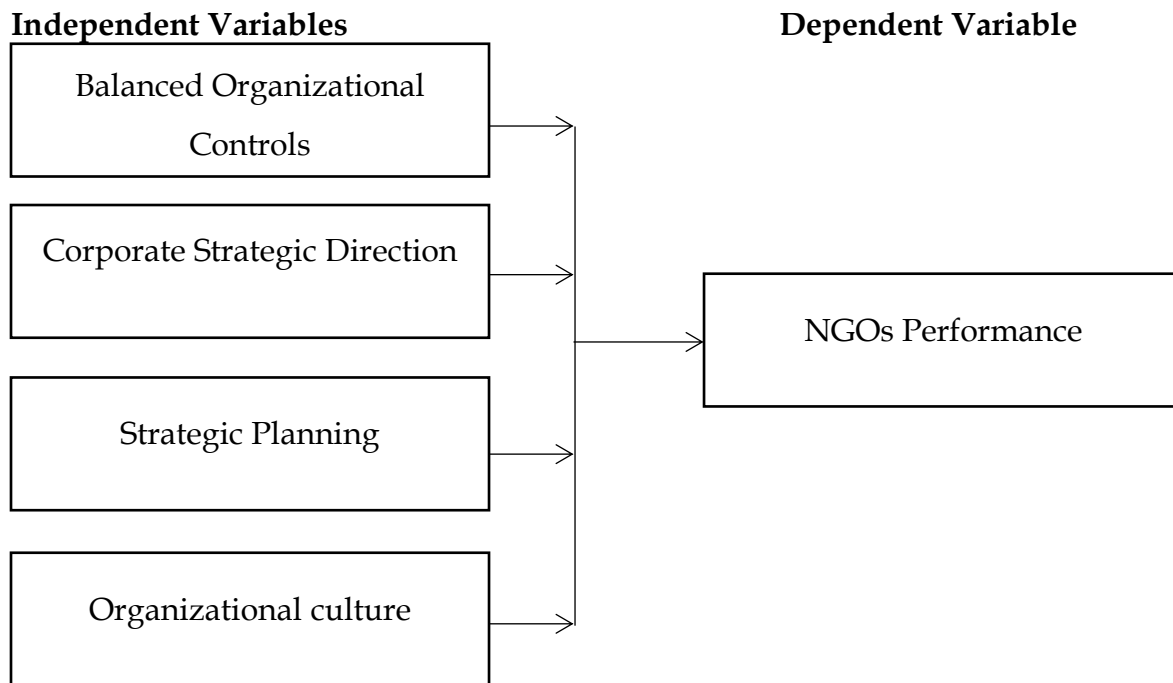


Figure 18: Conceptual diagram

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional design to examine the relationship between strategic leadership and the performance of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)-focused non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Isiolo County, Kenya. A cross-sectional approach was appropriate given the study's aim to capture a snapshot of leadership practices and performance outcomes at a single point in time, while enabling statistical inference across the target population (Bickman & Rog, 2020).

The target population comprised 203 staff members across seven NGOs operating in Isiolo County, selected based on their active involvement in WASH programming, a critical intervention sector in this arid and semi-arid land (ASAL). Using Cochran's formula for finite populations at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, a representative sample of 135 respondents was derived. Stratified random sampling was applied to ensure proportional representation across organisations and functional roles (e.g., senior management, programme, finance, and monitoring staff), thereby enhancing the generalisability of findings within the county's NGO landscape.

Data were collected through a structured, self-administered questionnaire adapted from validated instruments in prior NGO leadership studies (Kitonga et al., 2016; Wachira & Mwangi, 2022). The instrument was piloted with 10 respondents from NGOs in Mandera County, a contextually comparable ASAL region, to assess clarity, relevance, and reliability. The pilot confirmed strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.70 for all constructs: balanced organizational controls ($\alpha = 0.81$), strategic planning ($\alpha = 0.87$), corporate strategic direction ($\alpha = 0.73$), organizational culture ($\alpha = 0.86$), and NGO performance ($\alpha = 0.89$).

Ethical clearance was obtained from both the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and the Management University of Africa (MUA) Research Ethics Committee. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, and confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly upheld. The questionnaire contained no personally identifying, offensive, or sensitive items, and respondents were free to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Data were stored securely on a password-protected device and reported only in aggregate form to protect individual and organizational identities.

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) summarised demographic and variable-level responses. Inferential analyses included Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression to test the joint influence of the four strategic leadership dimensions on NGO performance. The regression model was specified as:

$Performance = \beta_0 + \beta_1(Controls) + \beta_2(Planning) + \beta_3(Direction) + \beta_4(Culture) + \varepsilon$,
with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$. Model fit was assessed using R^2 , ANOVA, and confidence intervals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined how four dimensions of strategic leadership, balanced organizational controls, corporate strategic direction, strategic planning, and organizational culture, jointly influence the performance of WASH-focused NGOs in Isiolo County, Kenya. Data were collected from 108 respondents (80% response rate) across seven NGOs and analysed using multiple linear regression in SPSS version 27.

Prior to the regression analysis, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to assess the relationships among the variables (Table 1). All four leadership dimensions were significantly correlated with NGO performance at the bivariate level.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations among Study Variables (N = 108)*

Variable	(M)	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Balanced Organizational Controls	3.25	1.31	—				
Strategic Planning	3.76	1.42	.587**	—			
Corporate Strategic Direction	4.29	1.49	.521**	.563**	—		
Organizational Culture	4.19	1.50	.498**	.512**	.610**	—	
NGO Performance	3.66	1.89	.642**	.595**	.547**	.441**	—

Note. M and SD are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The analysis revealed that three of the four strategic leadership dimensions were significant predictors of NGO performance. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(4, 103) = 33.92$, * $p < .001$, accounting for 56.8% of the variance in NGO

performance ($R^2 = .568$, Adjusted $R^2 = .548$). The ANOVA results (Table 2) and regression coefficients (Table 3) are presented below.

Table 2: ANOVA Results for Multiple Regression Model

Source	Sum of Squares	dF	Mean Square	F	P
Regression	39.42	4	9.855	33.92	< .001
Residual	29.98	103	0.291		
Total	69.40	107			

Note. The model predicted NGO performance. $F(4, 103) = 33.92$, $*p^* < .001$.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Results Predicting NGO Performance

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p.
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	0.675	0.367		1.840	.068
Balanced organizational controls	0.479	0.118	0.329	4.060	< .001
Strategic planning	0.428	0.114	0.274	3.750	< .001
Corporate strategic direction	0.367	0.106	0.233	3.460	.001
Organizational culture	0.135	0.108	0.061	1.250	.214

Note. $N=108$. $R^2=.568$. *Dependent variable: NGO performance.*

Balanced organizational controls emerged as the strongest predictor of NGO performance ($\beta = 0.479$, $p < 0.001$). This finding underscores that in Isiolo's volatile environment, characterised by donor unpredictability, logistical fragmentation, and ecological shocks, NGOs that implemented integrated control systems linking budgeting, real-time monitoring, and beneficiary feedback demonstrated superior accountability and operational discipline. These controls functioned not as rigid compliance mechanisms but as adaptive learning tools, enabling rapid course correction. This aligns with Configuration Theory (Miles & Snow, 1987), which posits that internal coherence between control systems and strategic intent enhances performance.

Strategic planning followed closely as the second strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.428$, $p < 0.001$). Contrary to the misconception that planning is irrelevant in crisis-prone settings, the findings confirm that adaptive, scenario-based planning is a critical performance lever. NGOs that institutionalised iterative planning cycles, incorporating staff input, environmental scanning, and beneficiary feedback, were better equipped to anticipate drought impacts, reallocate resources, and maintain program continuity. This supports

Goal-Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 2010), which emphasises that clear, flexible objectives enhance motivation and execution.

Corporate strategic direction also exerted a significant positive influence ($\beta = 0.367$, $p = 0.001$). NGOs with a clearly articulated, mission-aligned vision, consistently communicated across all levels, reported stronger stakeholder trust and program coherence. In a context where donor priorities often compete with community needs, a unifying strategic direction served as an anchor, enabling leaders to filter external demands through a local relevance lens. This echoes Adaptive Leadership Theory (Heifetz et al., 2009): strategic direction is not about having all the answers but about framing the right questions and mobilising collective sense-making.

Notably, while organizational culture showed a significant positive correlation with performance ($r = 0.441$, $p < 0.01$), it produced a weak and non-significant regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.061$, $p = 0.214$). This indicates that its shared variance with the other leadership dimensions accounted for its initial correlation. Therefore, it was not retained as a significant predictor in the final model.

Together, these findings affirm that strategic leadership in Isiolo operates as a configurational system, not a checklist of practices. High-performing NGOs did not excel in one dimension alone but achieved synergy among controls, planning, and direction, tailored to the realities of nomadic populations, ecological volatility, and donor dependency. This advances Configuration Theory beyond stable or for-profit contexts and offers a model for leadership in other fragile environments across the Global South.

Comparable studies in post-conflict or climate-stressed regions such as South Sudan (UNDP, 2023) and Niger (OECD, 2022) reveal similar patterns: NGOs that embed adaptive planning within strong accountability systems sustain performance despite donor unpredictability. This cross-regional alignment strengthens the argument that integrated strategic leadership, rather than isolated managerial competence, is a universal driver of resilience across fragile states.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While the study offers valuable insights, its cross-sectional design limits causal inference, and findings may not capture seasonal or long-term leadership dynamics. Data relied on self-reported perceptions, which may introduce response bias despite confidentiality assurances. Additionally, the focus on WASH-oriented NGOs within Isiolo County restricts generalisation to other sectors or counties. Future research could employ longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to validate and expand these findings.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study confirms that strategic leadership is a critical driver of NGO performance in Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands, but its effectiveness depends on integration, not

isolation. Balanced organizational controls emerged as the strongest predictor of performance ($\beta = 0.479$), followed closely by strategic planning ($\beta = 0.428$) and corporate strategic direction ($\beta = 0.367$). Organizational culture, however, was not a statistically significant predictor in the model ($\beta = 0.135$, $p > 0.05$, a finding that reflects the operational realities of Isiolo County, where mobile populations, ecological volatility, and crisis-driven programming limit opportunities for sustained cultural socialisation. Together, these dimensions explain 56.8% of the variance in NGO performance, affirming that leadership in fragile contexts functions as a configurational system, not a checklist of best practices.

For practitioners, these findings underscore three priorities. First, NGOs should institutionalise adaptive control systems that link budgeting, real-time monitoring, and beneficiary feedback, not as compliance tools, but as learning mechanisms. Second, strategic planning must shift from static documents to dynamic, scenario-based processes that anticipate droughts, funding shifts, and community mobility. Third, leaders must articulate a clear, communicated strategic vision that filters donor demands through a local relevance lens, ensuring coherence amid complexity. For policymakers, the results offer evidence to inform the long-pending operationalisation of Kenya's Public Benefits Organisations (PBO) Act. Regulatory frameworks should incentivise integrated leadership, not just financial accountability, by recognising adaptive planning, mission alignment, and stakeholder responsiveness as markers of good governance.

Future research should explore moderating variables such as donor dependency, community co-creation models, or digital transformation to deepen understanding of leadership-performance dynamics in ASALs. Longitudinal or comparative studies across fragile contexts in the Horn of Africa would further test the generalisability of this configurational model.

Strategic leadership in Isiolo demonstrates that context-sensitive coherence, not imported templates, sustains performance in adversity. When leaders harmonise control systems with adaptive planning, maintain clear strategic direction, and nurture responsive organizational cultures, NGOs are better equipped to deliver tangible results and preserve legitimacy in uncertain environments.

Practical Implications

The evidence suggests that leadership effectiveness in fragile environments depends on integration rather than imitation. Practitioners can apply these results by developing unified performance dashboards that link budgeting, field feedback, and strategy reviews; by revising strategic plans to include contingency triggers; and by cultivating value-driven team dialogues that align field realities with mission priorities. Policymakers can draw on these insights to strengthen the implementation of the Public

Benefits Organisations (PBO) Act through leadership standards that reward adaptive governance.

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