

# Rethinking Development Planning and Management in Less Developed Countries: Institutional Weaknesses, Strategic Approaches, and Policy Implications

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Development planning and management remain central instruments for the socio-economic transformation of less developed countries (LDCs). Despite decades of planning interventions, many LDCs continue to experience persistent poverty, inequality, weak institutions, and structural underdevelopment, raising critical questions about the effectiveness of existing planning and management frameworks. This paper examines the theoretical foundations, strategic approaches, and practical challenges of development planning and management, with particular emphasis on LDCs. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative research design based on documentary and thematic analysis. Secondary data were drawn from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and international development reports from institutions such as the World Bank, UNDP, and IMF. Data were analysed through systematic coding and thematic categorisation around key concepts, including underdevelopment, development administration, industrialisation, decentralisation, public enterprise management, and grassroots participation. A comparative analytical approach was also used to examine development strategies across capitalist, socialist, and mixed economic systems. Findings reveal that while development planning remains essential for socio-economic transformation, its effectiveness is constrained by weak institutional capacity, policy inconsistency, corruption, limited fiscal resources, and external dependency. Comparative evidence shows that countries with strong institutions and policy continuity achieve better development outcomes. The study concludes that LDCs must adopt flexible, participatory, and context-specific planning models supported by institutional strengthening, policy coherence, inclusive governance, and technology-driven systems to enhance development effectiveness.

### **Background to the Study**

Development planning and management constitute critical instruments for achieving socio-economic transformation, particularly in less developed countries (LDCs). Since the post-World War II era, governments across Africa, Asia, and Latin America have increasingly adopted national development plans, medium-term expenditure frameworks, and sectoral strategies to accelerate economic growth, reduce poverty, and address structural inequalities (Todaro & Smith, 2021). Development planning involves the systematic identification of priorities, allocation of scarce resources, and articulation of long-term goals, while development management focuses on the institutional processes of implementation, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation necessary to achieve these objectives.

The need for effective development planning in LDCs is underscored by persistent socio-economic deficits. According to the World Bank (2023), over 650 million people globally still live in extreme poverty (defined as living on less than \$2.15 per day), with a significant proportion concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, unemployment and underemployment remain pervasive, particularly among youth populations. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2023) estimates that youth unemployment rates in many developing economies exceed 20%, reflecting structural weaknesses in labour markets and limited industrial capacity.

Beyond income poverty, development deficits in LDCs are also reflected in multidimensional indicators. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2022) highlights disparities in the Human Development Index (HDI), which combines life expectancy, education, and income indicators. Many LDCs consistently rank in the low human development category, with HDI scores below 0.55. For example, life expectancy in several Sub-Saharan African countries remains below 65 years, compared to over 75 years in high-income countries. Similarly, access to quality education and healthcare services remains uneven, contributing to low human capital development.

Infrastructure deficits further constrain development outcomes. The African Development Bank (AfDB, 2022) estimates that Africa faces an annual infrastructure financing gap of between \$68 billion and \$108 billion. Inadequate transportation networks, unreliable electricity supply, and limited access to clean water and sanitation services significantly hinder productivity and economic diversification. For instance, frequent power outages in many LDCs reduce firm productivity by as much as 20–30%, discouraging both domestic and foreign investment (World Bank, 2023).

Economic structure also remains a critical challenge. Many LDCs are characterised by a heavy reliance on primary commodity exports, making them vulnerable to global price fluctuations. Agriculture, often dominated by subsistence farming, employs a large share of the population but contributes relatively little to GDP due to low productivity levels (FAO, 2022). Industrialisation, which has historically driven development in advanced economies, remains limited in many LDCs, with manufacturing contributing less than 10% to GDP in several cases (Rodrik, 2018).

Inequality and social exclusion further complicate development efforts. The World Inequality Report (2022) indicates that income inequality has widened in many developing regions, with the top 10% of earners capturing a disproportionate share of national income. Gender disparities also persist, particularly in access to education, employment, and political participation (UN Women, 2023). These inequalities undermine inclusive development and weaken the effectiveness of planning interventions.

In response to these challenges, development planning and management frameworks in LDCs have evolved to incorporate participatory approaches, results-based management, and evidence-driven policymaking. Contemporary planning paradigms emphasise the integration of economic, social, and environmental dimensions of development, as reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda (United Nations, 2023). This shift underscores the need for adaptive, inclusive, and context-specific planning systems that can respond to both domestic constraints and global dynamics.

However, despite these advancements, significant gaps remain between planning and outcomes. Weak institutional capacity, policy inconsistency, corruption, and limited stakeholder engagement continue to undermine the effectiveness of development planning in many LDCs (UNDP, 2022). As such, there is a growing recognition that the success of development initiatives depends not only on the quality of plans but also on the effectiveness of management systems and governance structures. This paper examines the nexus between development planning and management, focusing on strategies, policies, and outcomes within LDCs. It seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice by examining how planning frameworks can be better aligned with implementation realities to achieve sustainable and inclusive development.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite decades of development planning efforts, many less developed countries (LDCs) continue to experience persistent poverty, inequality, and structural underdevelopment. Successive national development plans, ranging from short-term stabilisation programmes to long-term visions, have often failed to achieve their stated objectives. This failure is largely attributed to weak implementation mechanisms, limited institutional capacity, policy inconsistency, corruption, and inadequate stakeholder participation (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2022). Extant literature highlights the magnitude and persistence of these challenges. Globally, extreme poverty remains concentrated in LDCs, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where economic growth has not translated proportionately into improved living standards (World Bank, 2023). In many cases, development plans are well-articulated but poorly executed, reflecting a disconnect between policy formulation and implementation. This “implementation gap” is further exacerbated by bureaucratic inefficiencies and weak governance structures.

In Nigeria, for instance, multiple development frameworks, including Vision 20:2020, the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), and the National Development Plan

(2021–2025), have aimed to stimulate economic growth and reduce poverty. However, poverty rates remain high, with over 40% of the population living below the national poverty line (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022). Similarly, unemployment and underemployment continue to pose serious challenges, particularly among youth, undermining the country's demographic dividend. Beyond Nigeria, other LDCs exhibit similar patterns of underdevelopment, characterised by low human development indicators, limited industrialisation, and high vulnerability to external shocks. These challenges are multidimensional, encompassing economic, social, and institutional dimensions.

**Table 1: Selected Development Indicators in LDCs (Including Nigeria)**

Country	GDP per Capita (USD)	Poverty Rate (%)	HDI Score	Unemployment Rate (%)	Access to Electricity (%)
Nigeria	2,184	40.1	0.535	33.3	62
Ethiopia	1,027	24.5	0.498	19.1	50
Bangladesh	2,688	18.7	0.661	5.3	92
Niger	594	41.8	0.400	0.5*	19
Haiti	1,745	59.2	0.535	14.5	45

**Note:** Low unemployment in Niger reflects high informal sector participation rather than job availability.

**Sources:** World Bank (2023); UNDP (2022); ILO (2023).

The data in Table 1 illustrate stark disparities in development outcomes across LDCs. Nigeria, despite being Africa's largest economy, continues to grapple with high poverty and unemployment rates. In contrast, Bangladesh has made notable progress in reducing poverty and improving human development indicators, largely due to effective policy coordination and export-led industrialisation strategies (World Bank, 2023). This contrast underscores the importance of effective development management, rather than planning alone. Infrastructure deficits further compound development challenges. Limited access to electricity, transportation, and basic services constrains productivity and economic diversification in many LDCs. For example, electricity access remains below 50% in several African countries, significantly affecting industrial growth and service delivery.

**Table 2: Infrastructure and Social Development Challenges in Selected LDCs**

Country	Access to Clean Water (%)	Literacy Rate (%)	Life Expectancy (Years)	Infrastructure Quality Index (1-7)
Nigeria	67	62	54	2.8
Ethiopia	57	52	66	3.0
Bangladesh	98	75	72	3.5
Niger	46	35	62	2.5
Haiti	65	61	64	2.6

**Sources:** UNDP (2022); World Bank (2023); World Economic Forum (2022).

The persistence of these challenges raises fundamental questions about the effectiveness of development planning frameworks in LDCs. A critical issue is the adoption of externally driven development models that may not align with local socio-political and economic realities. Many LDCs have historically implemented policies influenced by international financial institutions, such as Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which often prioritised macroeconomic stability over social development (Stiglitz, 2019). While such policies achieved certain fiscal objectives, they frequently led to reduced public spending on essential services, thereby exacerbating poverty and inequality.

Furthermore, governance deficits remain a central concern. Weak institutions, lack of transparency, and corruption undermine the efficient allocation and utilisation of resources. According to Transparency International (2023), many LDCs rank low on the Corruption Perceptions Index, indicating systemic governance challenges that hinder development outcomes.

Another critical issue is the limited involvement of local stakeholders in the planning process. Development planning in many LDCs tends to be top-down, with minimal input from communities and civil society organisations. This often results in policies that do not reflect local needs and priorities, thereby reducing their effectiveness and sustainability (Faguet, 2014).

In addition, global economic dynamics, such as commodity price volatility, debt burdens, and climate change, pose significant constraints on development planning in LDCs. For instance, countries heavily dependent on oil exports, like Nigeria, are highly vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices, which affect government revenue and development spending (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2023).

**Table 3:** Key Structural Challenges Affecting Development Planning in LDCs

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Implication for Development Planning</b>
Weak Institutions	Inefficient public administration systems	Poor implementation of policies
Corruption	Misallocation of public resources	Reduced development outcomes
Policy Inconsistency	Frequent policy changes	Investor uncertainty
External Dependency	Reliance on foreign aid and exports	Economic vulnerability
Limited Participation	Exclusion of local stakeholders	Low policy acceptance
Infrastructure Deficit	Inadequate basic services	Reduced productivity

The central problem confronting LDCs is not merely the absence of development plans but the inability to effectively implement and manage them. The disconnect between planning and execution has resulted in suboptimal development outcomes, despite the availability of policy frameworks and strategic visions. The challenge, therefore, lies in understanding why development planning strategies have yielded limited success and how development management practices can be strengthened to enhance implementation, accountability, and sustainability. Addressing this problem requires a shift from plan formulation to results-oriented management, supported by strong institutions, inclusive governance, and context-specific policy design.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study aims to:

1. Examine the concepts and theories of development and underdevelopment.
2. Analyse key strategies and models of development planning in LDCs.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness and limitations of these strategies.
4. Assess the role of policy frameworks in development planning and management.
5. Provide recommendations for improving development outcomes in LDCs.

### **Concept of Development and Underdevelopment**

Development is a multidimensional and dynamic process that extends beyond economic growth to include improvements in human wellbeing, social inclusion, institutional effectiveness, and sustainable resource utilisation. While early development paradigms focused narrowly on increases in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), contemporary scholarship emphasises a broader, people-centred perspective that integrates economic, social, and political dimensions (Sen, 1999; Todaro & Smith, 2021). In this sense, development involves the expansion of human capabilities, enhancement of freedoms, and improvement in quality of life.

This broader conception is reinforced by the human development approach, which evaluates development using indicators such as life expectancy, education, and income. The Human Development Index (HDI), for instance, demonstrates that many less developed countries (LDCs) continue to lag behind in key dimensions of wellbeing despite modest economic growth (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022). Similarly, scholars such as Anam (2014) emphasise that development must be understood within the context of community transformation, where local participation, empowerment, and rural development initiatives play a central role in improving livelihoods.

In his book *Understanding Community and Rural Development*, Anam (2016) argues that development is most meaningful when it is rooted in grassroots realities and driven by community participation. He highlights that rural development, through access to basic amenities, local governance, and participatory planning, is critical for addressing structural inequalities in developing societies. This perspective aligns with contemporary development thinking, which stresses inclusive and bottom-up

approaches to planning and implementation. Furthermore, empirical studies by Anam (2014) on poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria reveal that development interventions often fail when they are not tailored to local socio-economic conditions. His analysis of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) demonstrates that weak implementation, lack of community engagement, and institutional inefficiencies undermine development outcomes.

Beyond community-focused perspectives, development is increasingly linked to sustainability. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework underscores the need to balance economic growth with environmental protection and social equity (United Nations, 2023). This is particularly relevant for LDCs, where environmental degradation, climate vulnerability, and resource dependence pose significant threats to long-term development.

**Table 4:** Multidimensional Indicators of Development

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Relevance to Development</b>
GDP per Capita	Average income per person	Measures economic performance
Human Development Index (HDI)	Composite of health, education, and income	Captures overall wellbeing
Poverty Rate	Percentage below poverty line	Indicates deprivation
Life Expectancy	Average lifespan	Reflects health conditions
Literacy Rate	Level of education attainment	Measures human capital
Access to Basic Services	Water, electricity, healthcare	Indicates quality of life

**Sources:** UNDP (2022); World Bank (2023).

In contrast, underdevelopment refers to a condition characterised by persistent poverty, low productivity, weak institutions, and limited access to essential services. It is not simply the absence of development but a structurally embedded condition shaped by historical, political, and economic processes (Rodrik, 2018). Underdeveloped economies are typically marked by high dependence on primary commodities, low industrial capacity, widespread unemployment, and significant inequality.

Theoretical explanations of underdevelopment differ across intellectual traditions. Modernisation theory, as advanced by Rostow (1960), conceptualises development as a linear progression through stages, from traditional societies to modern industrial economies. Underdevelopment, in this view, results from internal constraints such as inadequate technology, low savings, and traditional value systems. The policy implication is that LDCs should emulate Western development models through industrialisation and institutional reform. In contrast, dependency theory provides a

structural explanation, arguing that underdevelopment is historically produced through unequal relationships between developed and developing countries (Frank, 1967). According to this perspective, resources flow from the periphery (LDCs) to the core (developed economies), perpetuating dependency and limiting autonomous development. This argument is particularly relevant in the African context, where colonial legacies and global trade imbalances continue to shape development trajectories. Contemporary extensions of dependency theory, such as world-systems theory, further highlight the hierarchical structure of the global economy, categorising countries into core, semi-periphery, and periphery (Wallerstein, 2004). LDCs, often situated in the periphery, face structural constraints that hinder industrialisation and economic diversification.

More recent scholarship emphasises the role of institutions and governance in explaining development outcomes. Institutional theorists argue that effective governance systems, characterised by transparency, accountability, and rule of law, are critical for sustainable development (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). In many LDCs, weak institutions contribute to corruption, policy inconsistency, and poor implementation of development plans. Extant literature from health and social development research further reinforces the importance of context in development processes. Studies involving Bassey Ebenso and colleagues demonstrate that development interventions, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, are highly dependent on trust, local context, and institutional arrangements. For example, research on community health programmes in Nigeria shows that programme effectiveness is shaped by social trust, stakeholder engagement, and the sustainability of policy interventions.

**Table 5:** Theoretical Perspectives on Development and Underdevelopment

Theory	Key Proponents	Core Argument	Policy Implications
Modernisation Theory	Rostow (1960)	Development is linear and internal	Adopt Western models
Dependency Theory	Frank (1967)	Underdevelopment is externally imposed	Reduce global dependency
World-Systems Theory	Wallerstein (2004)	Global hierarchy constrains development	Structural transformation
Institutional Theory	Acemoglu & Robinson (2012)	Institutions drive development	Strengthen governance
Community-Based Development	Anam (2016)	Development is grassroots-driven	Promote participation and local empowerment

In addition, underdevelopment is increasingly understood as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing social exclusion, political marginalisation, and

environmental vulnerability. Gender inequality, for instance, limits access to education and economic opportunities for women, thereby constraining overall development (UN Women, 2023). Similarly, climate change disproportionately affects LDCs, exacerbating poverty and undermining development gains.

In Nigeria and similar contexts, underdevelopment is often linked to a combination of colonial legacies, governance challenges, and structural economic weaknesses. Despite abundant natural resources, the persistence of poverty and inequality reflects what scholars describe as the “resource curse,” where resource wealth fails to translate into broad-based development due to mismanagement and weak institutions (Auty, 2001). The concepts of development and underdevelopment are complex and interrelated, requiring an integrated analytical framework that combines economic, social, and institutional perspectives. As Anam (2016) and related empirical studies suggest, sustainable development in LDCs depends not only on macroeconomic growth but also on effective community engagement, institutional strength, and context-specific policy design.

### **Development Planning and Administration**

Development planning involves the systematic articulation of national priorities, formulation of policies, and allocation of resources to achieve defined socio-economic goals. It typically operates through short-, medium-, and long-term frameworks such as national development plans, rolling plans, and sectoral strategies. Development administration, on the other hand, refers to the institutional arrangements, bureaucratic structures, and managerial processes required to translate these plans into tangible outcomes (Riggs, 1964; Todaro & Smith, 2021).

In practice, development administration encompasses policy implementation, inter-agency coordination, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluation. It also involves the mobilisation of human, financial, and material resources to ensure that development objectives are realised. The effectiveness of development planning is therefore heavily dependent on administrative capacity, governance quality, and institutional coherence.

A foundational theoretical contribution to development administration is Fred W. Riggs' ecological approach, particularly his concept of the “prismatic society.” Riggs (1964) argues that developing countries exhibit a hybrid institutional structure in which traditional norms coexist with modern bureaucratic systems. This coexistence often produces what he terms “formalism”, a situation where formal rules exist but are not effectively enforced, and “heterogeneity,” where multiple value systems operate simultaneously. These characteristics lead to administrative inefficiencies, corruption, and weak policy implementation (McCourt, 2018).

Contemporary scholarship builds on Riggs' insights by incorporating perspectives such as New Public Management (NPM) and Good Governance. NPM emphasises efficiency, performance measurement, and private-sector practices in public administration, while

the Good Governance framework stresses transparency, accountability, rule of law, and citizen participation (World Bank, 2023). In many LDCs, however, the adoption of these models has yielded mixed results due to contextual constraints such as weak institutions and political interference. Anam (2016) argues that development administration must be grounded in community realities, with strong linkages between central planning authorities and grassroots institutions. His work highlights those administrative inefficiencies at the local level – such as poor coordination and lack of accountability, often undermine the success of rural development programmes in Nigeria.

**Table 6:** Core Components of Development Planning and Administration

Component	Description	Key Challenges in LDCs
Goal Setting	Identification of development priorities	Political interference
Policy Formulation	Designing strategies and programmes	Policy inconsistency
Resource Allocation	توزيع financial and material resources	Limited fiscal capacity
Implementation	Execution of policies and programmes	Weak institutions
Monitoring & Evaluation	Tracking progress and outcomes	Data limitations

### Strategies of Development Planning in LDCs

Development planning in LDCs employs a variety of strategies aimed at promoting economic growth, reducing poverty, and enhancing social welfare. These strategies are often shaped by historical experiences, political ideologies, and global economic dynamics. While no single strategy is universally applicable, most LDCs adopt a combination of approaches tailored to their specific contexts.

**Table 7:** Key Development Planning Strategies in LDCs (Expanded)

Strategy	Description	Expected Outcomes	Key Limitations
Industrialisation	Expansion of manufacturing sector	Economic growth, job creation	Capital constraints, global competition
Decentralisation	Transfer of authority to local governments	Improved service delivery	Weak local capacity
Public Enterprises	State ownership in key sectors	Infrastructure development	Inefficiency, corruption
Grassroots Participation	Citizen involvement in planning	Inclusive development	Limited awareness, elite capture
Integrated Rural Development	Multi-sectoral rural programmes	Poverty reduction	Poor coordination

### **Industrialisation**

Industrialisation is widely recognised as a cornerstone of economic transformation, enabling countries to shift from agrarian-based economies to more productive manufacturing and service sectors. Historically, industrialisation has been associated with increased productivity, technological advancement, and employment generation (Rodrik, 2018). However, many LDCs face the challenge of “premature deindustrialisation,” where manufacturing sectors decline at lower levels of income compared to earlier industrialisers. Factors contributing to this trend include globalisation, competition from established industrial economies, limited technological capacity, and inadequate infrastructure. In Nigeria, for example, the manufacturing sector contributes less than 10% to GDP, reflecting structural weaknesses in industrial policy and implementation (World Bank, 2023). Anam (2016) emphasises that industrialisation efforts in developing contexts must be linked to rural development and local resource utilisation. Without integrating rural economies into industrial strategies, industrial growth may remain enclave-based and fail to generate widespread development benefits.

### **Decentralisation and Grassroots Governance**

Decentralisation involves the transfer of political, administrative, and fiscal authority from central governments to subnational units. It is widely regarded as a strategy for enhancing efficiency, accountability, and citizen participation in governance (Faguet, 2014). By bringing decision-making closer to the people, decentralisation can improve service delivery and ensure that development policies reflect local needs. In practice, however, decentralisation in many LDCs has been constrained by weak institutional capacity at the local level, inadequate funding, and political interference. In Nigeria, local governments are constitutionally recognised as the third tier of government, yet their effectiveness is often undermined by fiscal dependency and limited autonomy. Anam's empirical studies on community participation highlight that grassroots involvement is critical for sustainable development outcomes. He argues that participatory planning enhances project ownership, accountability, and long-term sustainability, particularly in rural communities (Anam, 2016).

### **Public Enterprises and State Intervention**

Public enterprises have historically played a significant role in the development strategies of LDCs, particularly in sectors such as energy, transportation, and telecommunications. These enterprises were established to address market failures, promote industrialisation, and provide essential services. The performance of public enterprises in many LDCs has been mixed. While they have contributed to infrastructure development, they are often plagued by inefficiency, corruption, and political interference (World Bank, 2023). In Nigeria, for example, state-owned enterprises in the power and petroleum sectors have faced persistent challenges related to mismanagement and underperformance. Reform efforts, including privatisation and public-private partnerships (PPPs), have been introduced to improve efficiency. Nevertheless, these reforms require strong regulatory frameworks and institutional capacity to be effective.

### Policy Frameworks: Capitalist, Socialist, and Mixed Economies.

Development planning strategies are often influenced by underlying economic systems. LDCs have experimented with capitalist, socialist, and mixed economic models, each with distinct implications for development outcomes.

**Table 8:** Comparative Analysis of Economic Systems in LDCs

System	Features	Advantages	Limitations	Examples
Capitalist	Market-driven, private ownership	Efficiency, innovation	Inequality, market failures	Kenya, Bangladesh
Socialist	State ownership and central planning	Equity, social welfare	Bureaucratic inefficiency	Cuba (historically)
Mixed Economy	Combination of state and market	Balanced growth and equity	Policy inconsistency	Nigeria, India

Most LDCs, including Nigeria, operate mixed economies that combine market mechanisms with state intervention. This approach seeks to harness the efficiency of markets while ensuring social welfare through government policies (Stiglitz, 2019). However, achieving this balance remains a significant challenge due to policy inconsistency, weak institutions, and governance deficits. Anam (2016) argues that irrespective of the economic system adopted, development outcomes ultimately depend on the effectiveness of implementation and the extent to which policies are aligned with local realities. He emphasises that community-based approaches and participatory governance are essential for bridging the gap between policy formulation and actual development outcomes.

### Challenges in Development Planning and Management

Despite the widespread adoption of development planning frameworks in less developed countries (LDCs), the effectiveness of these frameworks is significantly constrained by a range of structural, institutional, and socio-economic challenges. These challenges not only undermine the formulation of sound policies but also weaken implementation, monitoring, and evaluation processes. Consequently, development outcomes often fall short of planned objectives (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022).

#### Weak Institutional Capacity

Institutional capacity refers to the ability of public institutions to design, implement, and sustain development policies effectively. In many LDCs, institutions are characterised by inadequate human resources, poor technical expertise, weak organisational structures, and limited administrative efficiency. These deficiencies hinder policy execution and reduce the impact of development initiatives.

For instance, ineffective coordination among ministries, departments, and agencies often leads to duplication of efforts and resource wastage. In Nigeria, overlapping mandates

among government agencies have been identified as a major obstacle to policy implementation and service delivery (World Bank, 2023). Furthermore, weak data systems limit the ability of governments to conduct evidence-based planning and performance evaluation. Anam (2016) emphasises that institutional weaknesses at the local government level are particularly problematic, as they directly affect the delivery of development programmes in rural communities. Without strengthening institutional frameworks, development planning remains largely aspirational rather than operational.

### **Corruption and Governance Deficits**

Corruption remains one of the most critical impediments to development planning and management in LDCs. It manifests in various forms, including embezzlement of public funds, procurement irregularities, and political patronage. These practices distort resource allocation, inflate project costs, and undermine public trust in government institutions. Governance deficits, such as lack of transparency, weak accountability mechanisms, and poor rule of law, further exacerbate the problem. According to Transparency International (2023), many LDCs rank low on the Corruption Perceptions Index, indicating pervasive governance challenges. In Nigeria, corruption has significantly affected sectors such as infrastructure, health, and education, resulting in suboptimal development outcomes.

The implications for development planning are profound: projects are either abandoned, poorly executed, or fail to meet their intended objectives. As a result, even well-designed plans may not translate into tangible benefits for citizens.

### **Policy Inconsistency and Political Instability**

Policy inconsistency is another major challenge confronting development planning in LDCs. Frequent changes in government, shifting political priorities, and lack of continuity in policy implementation often disrupt long-term development plans. This instability discourages investment, undermines policy credibility, and weakens institutional memory.

In many cases, development plans are abandoned or replaced with new initiatives following changes in political leadership. In Nigeria, successive administrations have introduced different development agendas with limited continuity, thereby affecting the sustainability of development programmes (National Planning Commission, 2021). Additionally, political interference in administrative processes often leads to the prioritisation of short-term political gains over long-term development objectives. This undermines the effectiveness of planning and reduces the overall impact of development strategies.

### **Limited Financial Resources**

Adequate financing is essential for the successful implementation of development plans. However, many LDCs face significant fiscal constraints due to low revenue generation, narrow tax bases, and high levels of public debt. These limitations restrict the ability of governments to invest in critical sectors such as infrastructure, education, and healthcare.

In Nigeria, for example, revenue dependence on oil exports exposes the economy to external shocks, particularly fluctuations in global oil prices. This volatility affects government spending and disrupts development planning (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2023). Similarly, high debt servicing obligations reduce the fiscal space available for development projects. The financing gap is further compounded by inefficiencies in public expenditure management, including budget leakages and poor prioritisation of projects. As a result, many development plans remain underfunded or partially implemented.

### **External Dependency and Global Economic Pressures**

Many LDCs rely heavily on external sources of finance, including foreign aid, loans, and foreign direct investment (FDI), to support development initiatives. While these resources can provide much-needed capital, they often come with conditionalities that may not align with domestic development priorities. Historically, programmes such as Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) imposed by international financial institutions have shaped development policies in LDCs, sometimes at the expense of social welfare (Stiglitz, 2019). External dependency also makes LDCs vulnerable to global economic fluctuations, such as commodity price volatility and changes in international trade dynamics. For resource-dependent economies like Nigeria, reliance on crude oil exports creates economic instability and limits diversification efforts. This dependency constrains long-term development planning and exposes the economy to external shocks.

### **Socio-Cultural and Structural Constraints**

In addition to economic and institutional challenges, socio-cultural factors such as ethnic diversity, social inequality, and traditional power structures can influence development planning outcomes. In some cases, these factors lead to unequal distribution of resources and marginalisation of certain groups. Anam (2016) highlights that failure to incorporate local socio-cultural realities into development planning often results in resistance from communities and low project sustainability. Development initiatives that do not reflect local values and priorities are less likely to succeed.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation Deficiencies**

Effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are essential for tracking progress, identifying challenges, and ensuring accountability in development planning. However, many LDCs lack robust M&E frameworks due to inadequate data systems, limited technical capacity, and weak institutional support. Without reliable data, policymakers are unable to assess the impact of development programmes or make informed decisions. This results in poor feedback mechanisms and limited opportunities for policy learning and improvement.

**Table 9:** Major Challenges in Development Planning and Management in LDCs

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Impact on Development Outcomes</b>
Weak Institutional Capacity	Inadequate administrative and technical skills	Poor policy implementation
Corruption	Mismanagement of public resources	Reduced efficiency and trust
Policy Inconsistency	Frequent policy changes	Disruption of long-term plans
Financial Constraints	Limited revenue and high debt	Underfunded projects
External Dependency	Reliance on foreign aid and exports	Economic vulnerability
Socio-Cultural Barriers	Cultural and social inequalities	Low policy acceptance
Weak M&E Systems	Poor data and evaluation mechanisms	Ineffective decision-making

The challenges outlined above are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Weak institutions, for example, create opportunities for corruption, while financial constraints limit the ability to strengthen institutional capacity. Similarly, external dependency and policy inconsistency can undermine long-term planning efforts. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that integrates institutional reform, good governance, fiscal sustainability, and participatory development. As Anam (2016) suggests, strengthening grassroots institutions and promoting community participation are critical for overcoming many of these barriers and ensuring that development planning translates into meaningful outcomes.

### **Lessons from Developed and Emerging Economies**

The analysis of development planning and management in less developed countries (LDCs) reveals that despite the existence of well-articulated policies and strategic frameworks, outcomes remain constrained by deep-seated structural and institutional limitations. These constraints include weak governance systems, limited administrative capacity, policy inconsistency, and inadequate coordination between planning and implementation agencies. As a result, the gap between development planning and actual socio-economic transformation remains wide in many LDCs.

Although strategies such as industrialisation, decentralisation, public sector reform, and grassroots participation are theoretically sound, their effectiveness is highly dependent on governance quality, institutional strength, and policy coherence. In many LDCs, the absence of these enabling conditions leads to partial implementation or outright failure of otherwise well-designed development plans. This reinforces the argument that development is not merely a technical exercise in planning, but a political and institutional process deeply embedded in governance structures (Todaro & Smith, 2021).

Furthermore, global economic forces significantly shape domestic development outcomes. LDCs operate within an unequal global system characterised by trade asymmetries, financial dependency, and technological gaps. These external constraints interact with internal weaknesses to limit policy effectiveness. For instance, volatility in global commodity prices, dependence on foreign aid, and restrictive debt obligations reduce fiscal space for development planning, particularly in resource-dependent economies such as Nigeria (World Bank, 2023).

However, comparative development experiences from both developed and emerging economies provide important lessons for LDCs. Countries in East Asia, such as South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan – demonstrate that sustained development is achievable through a combination of strong institutions, strategic state intervention, and adaptive policymaking (Rodrik, 2018). These countries transitioned from low-income to high-income status within a few decades by prioritising industrial policy, human capital development, and export-oriented growth strategies.

### **Lessons from Developed and Emerging Economies**

#### **(a). Strong and Autonomous Institutions**

One of the most important lessons from developed economies is the centrality of strong institutions. Countries that have achieved sustained development typically possess efficient bureaucracies, merit-based civil services, and strong rule of law systems. For example, South Korea's developmental state model was driven by a highly competent bureaucracy that coordinated industrial policy and ensured disciplined implementation (Amsden, 1989). In contrast, many LDCs suffer from politicised institutions, weak enforcement mechanisms, and administrative inefficiencies. Strengthening institutional autonomy and professionalism is therefore critical for improving development planning and management outcomes.

#### **(b). Strategic and Long-Term Planning**

Developed and emerging economies emphasise long-term, consistent development planning that transcends political cycles. Singapore, for instance, adopted multi-decade strategic planning frameworks focused on industrialisation, education, and infrastructure development. In LDCs, however, development plans are often disrupted by political transitions, leading to discontinuity and poor implementation. A key lesson is the need for institutionalised development planning agencies that are insulated from political interference and committed to long-term national objectives.

#### **(c). Investment in Human Capital**

Another major lesson is the prioritisation of education, skills development, and healthcare. Countries such as Finland and South Korea invested heavily in human capital development as a foundation for economic transformation. Empirical evidence shows that human capital accumulation is strongly correlated with productivity growth and innovation (World Bank, 2023). In many LDCs, inadequate investment in education and health systems continues to limit labour productivity and economic competitiveness.

**(d). Industrial Policy and Economic Diversification**

Successful development experiences highlight the importance of deliberate industrial policy and economic diversification. East Asian economies used targeted industrial policies to promote export-oriented manufacturing, protect infant industries, and build competitive advantages in global markets. Rodrik (2018) argues that no country has achieved rapid development without some form of state-led industrial strategy. In contrast, many LDCs remain heavily dependent on primary commodities, making them vulnerable to external shocks and limiting structural transformation.

**(e). Effective Decentralisation with Capacity Building**

While decentralisation is widely promoted in LDCs, developed countries demonstrate that decentralisation only works effectively when local institutions have adequate capacity, fiscal autonomy, and accountability mechanisms. In countries like Germany and Canada, decentralised governance systems function effectively due to strong institutional frameworks and clear division of responsibilities. In many LDCs, decentralisation has been implemented without corresponding capacity building, resulting in weak local governance and limited-service delivery improvements.

**Table 10:** Comparative Lessons from Developed and Emerging Economies for LDCs

<b>Development Area</b>	<b>Developed/Emerging Economies Practice</b>	<b>Lesson for LDCs</b>
Institutions	Merit-based, autonomous bureaucracy	Strengthen institutional independence
Planning	Long-term strategic frameworks	Ensure policy continuity
Human Capital	High investment in education/health	Prioritise social sector spending
Industrialisation	State-led export-oriented strategy	Adopt targeted industrial policies
Decentralisation	Strong local government capacity	Build subnational institutional strength
Governance	Transparency and accountability	Strengthen anti-corruption systems

The experiences of developed and emerging economies demonstrate that development is not accidental but the result of deliberate policy choices, institutional strength, and long-term commitment to transformation. While LDCs have adopted many of the same policy frameworks, outcomes differ significantly due to differences in implementation capacity and governance quality. Anam (2016) reinforces this argument by emphasising that development must be grounded in local realities and supported by strong community participation. His work on community and rural development highlights that externally imposed models often fail when they are not adapted to socio-cultural and institutional contexts. This suggests that while LDCs can learn from developed countries, policy

transfer must be contextualised rather than replicated wholesale. Similarly, Rodrik (2018) cautions against one-size-fits-all development models, arguing that successful development requires “context-specific experimentation” rather than rigid adherence to global policy prescriptions. This is particularly relevant for LDCs, where institutional diversity and structural constraints vary significantly.

### **Conclusion**

Development planning and management remain indispensable instruments for achieving sustainable socio-economic transformation in less developed countries (LDCs). They provide the framework through which governments articulate priorities, allocate scarce resources, and coordinate development interventions across sectors. However, as the analysis in this study has demonstrated, the effectiveness of development planning is not determined solely by the existence of plans, but by the quality of implementation, institutional strength, governance structures, and the degree of stakeholder inclusion.

Empirical evidence across LDCs, including Nigeria and comparable developing economies, shows a persistent gap between policy formulation and actual development outcomes. This implementation gap is largely driven by weak institutional capacity, corruption, policy inconsistency, and limited fiscal space. In many cases, development plans remain aspirational documents rather than actionable roadmaps due to inadequate administrative structures and poor coordination among implementing agencies.

Also, the study reveals that development outcomes are significantly influenced by the nature of governance and institutional arrangements. Where institutions are weak, politicised, or fragmented, even well-designed development plans fail to produce meaningful results. Conversely, countries that have achieved sustained development demonstrate strong institutions, policy continuity, and adaptive governance systems that allow for long-term planning and effective execution (Rodrik, 2018).

The analysis also highlights the importance of shifting from rigid, top-down planning models to more flexible, participatory, and context-sensitive approaches. Traditional planning models, which often assume uniformity in socio-economic conditions, are increasingly inadequate in addressing the complex and dynamic realities of LDCs. Instead, contemporary development practice requires adaptive planning frameworks that incorporate local knowledge, community participation, and continuous feedback mechanisms. In addition, the integration of technological innovations into development planning and management presents new opportunities for improving efficiency, transparency, and accountability. Digital governance tools, data analytics, and e-governance platforms can enhance monitoring and evaluation systems, thereby strengthening evidence-based decision-making.

Development planning and management remain vital, but their effectiveness depends on institutional reform, governance improvement, and contextual adaptation. Without

addressing these structural constraints, development efforts in LDCs will continue to yield limited and uneven results. The success of development planning and management in LDCs depends on a comprehensive reform agenda that integrates institutional strengthening, participatory governance, technological innovation, and economic restructuring. Without such reforms, development planning will continue to face implementation gaps and limited impact on socio-economic transformation.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Strengthen Institutional Capacity**

Governments in LDCs should prioritise the development of strong, professional, and merit-based public institutions. This includes continuous training and capacity-building for public administrators in areas such as project management, policy analysis, monitoring and evaluation, and financial management. Institutional reforms should also focus on reducing bureaucratic inefficiencies and enhancing coordination among ministries, departments, and agencies.

### **2. Enhance Policy Consistency and Continuity**

To ensure sustainable development outcomes, long-term development plans should be insulated from frequent political changes. This can be achieved by establishing independent planning commissions or development councils with clearly defined mandates that transcend electoral cycles. Policy continuity is essential for maintaining investor confidence and ensuring the full implementation of development programmes.

### **3. Promote Inclusive and Participatory Development Planning**

Citizens, civil society organisations, and local communities should be actively involved in all stages of the development planning process, including design, implementation, and evaluation. Participatory approaches enhance ownership, improve policy relevance, and increase the sustainability of development interventions. As emphasised by Anam (2016), grassroots participation is critical for ensuring that development reflects local needs and priorities.

### **4. Strengthen Accountability and Anti-Corruption Mechanisms**

Effective development planning requires transparent governance systems and strong accountability frameworks. Governments should strengthen anti-corruption institutions, enforce procurement regulations, and promote open budgeting systems. Regular audits, performance evaluations, and civic oversight mechanisms should be institutionalised to reduce mismanagement of public resources.

### **5. Adopt Context-Specific and Flexible Development Strategies**

Development models should not be imported wholesale from developed countries but should instead be adapted to local socio-economic, cultural, and institutional realities. Policymakers should adopt experimental and adaptive approaches that allow for policy learning and adjustment over time. This ensures that development strategies remain relevant and effective in changing environments.

## **6. Leverage Technology for Development Planning and Management**

The integration of digital technologies into development planning processes can significantly improve efficiency and accountability. Governments should invest in e-governance systems, digital data collection tools, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and real-time monitoring platforms. These technologies can enhance evidence-based decision-making, improve service delivery, and reduce corruption through increased transparency.

## **7. Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation Systems**

Robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks should be institutionalised to track the performance of development plans. This includes the establishment of clear performance indicators, regular reporting mechanisms, and independent evaluation bodies. Strengthening M&E systems will ensure that development policies are continuously assessed and improved based on empirical evidence.

## **8. Diversify Economic Structures and Promote Industrialisation**

LDCs should prioritise economic diversification away from overreliance on primary commodities. Strategic industrial policies should be implemented to promote manufacturing, agro-processing, and value-added production. This will enhance employment creation, increase export competitiveness, and reduce vulnerability to external shocks.

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