# Assessing the Influence of Servant Leadership on National Governance in Malawi, Focusing on the Tonse Alliance-Led Administration's commitment to this Leadership Style as Part of its Super High Five Governance Philosophy.

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**ABSTRACT**

This study assesses the influence of Servant Leadership on national governance in Malawi, focusing on the Tonse Alliance-led administration and its commitment to this leadership style as part of its "Super High Five" governance philosophy. Utilizing a qualitative phenomenological research strategy, the study explores how the administration's adoption of Servant Leadership principles impacts sustainable development and addresses the nation's needs. Through purposive sampling, 46 participants, including religious leaders, university scholars, and NGO directors, provided insights via key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The findings reveal mixed results, showing some success in serving others, community building, and promoting women's involvement in decision-making. However, the study also identifies significant shortcomings, including corruption, economic mismanagement, and ineffective communication. Constraints such as the political climate, a failed public service, and widespread corruption among citizens are highlighted as barriers to implementing Servant Leadership. The study concludes with strategies to enhance Servant Leadership in Malawi, emphasizing the need for building a culture of integrity, community mobilization, and strong political will.

Key words: *Servant Leadership, Good Governance*, *Tonse Alliance, foresight*, *serving others*, *community building*, *sharing of power, decision making*, *commitment, general awareness.*

## 1. 0. Background of the Study

Leadership has long captivated the interest of political statesmen, church leaders, students and other stakeholders throughout history. This is not surprising given that, as Maxwell (2007) famously stated, "Everything rises and falls on Leadership." Numerous leadership styles have been proposed and studied over time, including Charismatic, transformation, autocratic, laisser- faire, situational, democratic and servant styles. The type of leadership adopted can significantly influence the governance of the state, as effective leadership is critical to a nation's development. Adeyemo (2009) emphasize that "leadership is the benchmark for any nation, institution or organization." According to Adeyemo, if those in leadership are intellectually and morally deficient and moribund, chances are that the nation, institution or organization will be unprogressive and backward. To achieve its development goals, a country needs leaders who are dynamic, visionary, altruistic ethical and integral (Ademoyo, 2009).

At a time when good governance has become a very key aspect internationally, servant leadership has been hailed as a type of leadership style that the nations can adopt to foster positive social and political development. Meuser & Smallfield, (2023) argue that the implementation of servant leadership in Africa can lead to good governance, improve public service efficiency, and spur innovation. In countries where the servant leadership philosophy guides political and socio- economic activities, notable impacts are observed, particularly in ethical decision-making, business, education and social change (Meuser & Smallfield, 2023).

Servant leadership simply put, is leading by serving other through the provision of selfless service. This style emphasizes attending to physical, emotional and developmental needs of team members. This style serves as a tool for emotional healing and sustained relationship building through practice of the attributes such as healing, stewardship, foresight, conceptualization, commitment to the growth of others, persuasion, empathy, awareness, listening and building community (Greenleaf 1999, 1977 and Spear, 2005, 1993). The concept, "good governance" does not have a straight forward definition, though it has rapidly expanded in the developmental discourse (Grindle, 2004). Generally, good governance is associated with efficient and effective administration within a democratic framework.

For Leader to be effective in the management and decisions concerning public life and social uplifting of its citizens, the leaders themselves must always embrace the philosophy of good governance which is inherently linked to servant leadership. This approach requires servant leaders whose authority and influence are driven by the idea of increased service to others and community building. Leadership commitment and good governance are fundamental to the survival and progress of any nation including Malawi. Again, available literature suggests that the world is dire need of ethical and effective leadership that serves others, invests in their development and fulfils a shared vision. Among the various leadership styles, authoritarian, benevolent dictatorship, participatory-servant leadership best embodies the ideals of human factor.

Locally, the Tonse Alliance led- administration in Malawi introduced the philosophy of servant leadership to the general public. The proponents of Tonse Alliance advocated for national governance framework that embraces servant leadership, with a focus on addressing the public issues affecting Malawians. Under this leadership style, the primary motivation is to serve Malawians first. The current administration also championed the 'super high five' philosophy: *servant leadership, uniting Malawians, prospering together ending corruption and respecting the rule of law*. However, three years into their tenure, the country faces both progress and significant challenges as noted in the areas of corruption, economic stagnation, high level of poverty and ethnocentrism.

### 1. 1. Problem Statement

The Tonse Alliance[1]-led administration in Malawi introduced the philosophy of servant leadership to the public, promoting a national governance framework focused on addressing the critical issues facing Malawians. Central to this approach was the 'Super High Five' philosophy, which emphasized servant leadership, national unity, shared prosperity, the fight against corruption, and respect for the rule of law. The administration's goal was to prioritize the needs of Malawians and ensure leadership that serves the people first. However, three years into its tenure, Malawi continues to grapple with significant challenges, including persistent corruption, economic stagnation, widespread poverty, and growing ethnocentrism. These issues have led to questions regarding the effective implementation of servant leadership within the government. Is the Tonse Alliance genuinely committed to the principles of servant leadership, or is the concept being employed more as political rhetoric? While there has been considerable attention on the administration's adherence to the rule of law, little empirical evidence exists on the broader impact of servant leadership on national governance. This study aimed to assess effectiveness of Servant Leadership on National Governance in Malawi with a specific focus on evaluating the Tonse Alliance led- Administration's commitment to this leadership style as part of its 'Super High Five' governance Philosophy. The research assesses how this leadership approach has influenced the administration's ability to address the pressing needs of the nation and deliver sustainable development.

### 1.2. Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to assess the influence of Servant Leadership on National Governance in Malawi with a specific focus on evaluating the Tonse Alliance led- Administration's commitment to this leadership style as part of its 'Super High Five' governance Philosophy.The study evaluated how Servant Leadership approach has influenced the administration's ability to address the pressing needs of the nation and deliver sustainable development.

### 1.3. Objectives of the study

To achieve the purpose of the study, the following specific objectives were adopted:

    i.     To assess the impact of servant leadership style on National governance in Malawi

    ii.     To identify factors that pose as constraints to implementing servant leadership as a tool for improving national governance in the Country.

    iii.     To explore strategies that could help the Tonse Alliance Administration to successfully implement servant leadership in the Country.

### 1.4. Research Questions

1. What is the impact of the servant leadership style on national governance in Malawi?

2. What factors constrain the implementation of servant leadership as a tool for improving national governance in Malawi?

3. What strategies can help the Tonse Alliance Administration to successfully implement servant leadership in Malawi?

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[1] "Tonse Alliance" means – a community that allows everybody in, regardless of social or political orientation and backgrounds or tribal divide, and it means bringing people together so that collective actions can be undertaken to accomplish things together in the socio-economic development programs that need to be undertaken for the benefit of the entire nation.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework of the Study

A strong theoretical framework should align with the specific context of the study and directly support its aims. In leadership studies, particularly those exploring the interaction between leaders and their followers, a vast body of research has developed over the decades (Rost, 1993). This research is rooted in the Full Range Leadership model, with a specific emphasis on the servant leadership philosophy introduced by Greenleaf (1977, 1997). Drawing from biblical values and later expanded by scholars such as Spears (1993, 2005) and Wong and Page, servant leadership focuses on serving others, viewing work holistically, fostering a sense of community, and embracing shared leadership.

At its core, servant leadership emphasizes ethical, value-based actions and character-driven leadership, encouraging integrity and accountability in governance. Wong and Page (2000) conceptualized servant leadership around the theme of service, contrasting it with autocratic leadership, which they viewed as its opposite. Their research identified key components such as empowering others, service-oriented behavior, and inspirational leadership as essential characteristics of effective servant leaders. This model extends the leader's influence beyond personal motives, centering instead on a commitment to the welfare of both individuals and the larger community.

Spears (1993), synthesizing Greenleaf's ideas, highlighted ten essential traits of servant leadership: active listening, empathy, healing, self-awareness, persuasion, strategic thinking, foresight, stewardship, commitment to personal growth, and community building. These traits collectively foster a leadership culture that emphasizes team collaboration, shared decision-making, and a dedication to holistic organizational development principles vital for cultivating effective and ethical leadership.

### 2.2 The Servant Leadership Approach

Although interpreted in various ways, servant leadership consistently centers around a unique set of traits. To fully appreciate this leadership model, it is important to analyze the meanings of the word's "servant" and "leader." While leadership has been widely studied, the term "servant" implies voluntary service to others distinct from coerced or involuntary subservience. Historically, servants, especially in the 19th century, could hold positions of significant trust and responsibility depending on the societal context.

Robert Greenleaf, the originator of this concept, was inspired by Hermann Hesse's novel *Journey to the East*, where the character Leo serves a group but is eventually revealed to be their true leader illustrating the principle of serving first before leading. Greenleaf argued that genuine leadership begins with a commitment to serve, an idea that has sparked ongoing academic discussion due to its broad and often subjective interpretations.

What makes servant leadership particularly compelling is its moral and compassionate foundation, which stands in contrast to more rule-based or authoritarian leadership models. Spears (1998) built upon Greenleaf's work by identifying ten core characteristics of servant leaders' traits that form the bedrock of this study. The behaviour of servant leaders is rooted in a deep sense of responsibility (stewardship) and guided by shared values, aligning with the concepts of virtue ethics (Hursthouse, 1999) and substantive justice (Rest & Narvaez, 1994). This ethical framework inspires servant leaders to pursue excellence and meaningful impact, rather than settle for mediocrity.

Greenleaf proposed a key measure for servant leadership: whether the individuals being served are growing and whether the needs of the less privileged are being addressed. Nonetheless, the field still lacks a universally accepted and empirically validated definition, prompting continued exploration.

### 2.3 A Biblical Perspective on Servant Leadership

The Bible offers multiple examples of servant leadership, with Moses being a primary illustration. He demonstrated self-sacrifice and commitment to his people, often placing their needs above his own (Exodus 18:13–16). After receiving wise counsel from his father-in-law, Jethro, Moses delegated leadership responsibilities to others for more efficient governance (Exodus 18:25–26). His plea to God to remove his own name from the book of life in favour of the Israelites' salvation (Exodus 32:32) reflects profound compassion and selflessness hallmarks of a servant leader.

Jesus Christ represents the ultimate model of servant leadership. He embraced human form to guide and serve His followers, exemplifying humility and self-giving. Scripture encourages believers to adopt His mindset (Philippians 2:5), emphasizing that greatness in leadership comes through serving others (Matthew 10:43–45). One of the most powerful acts of servant leadership was when Jesus washed His disciples' feet (John 13:3–5), modelling the very behaviour He expected them to replicate (John 13:13–15). Throughout His ministry, even unto death, Jesus embodied the key elements of servant leadership-self-sacrifice, moral example, and a nurturing approach to developing His followers.

### 2.4 Authority and Power in Servant Leadership

Servant leadership presents a distinct approach to authority and power that contrasts with traditional leadership paradigms. Rather than asserting control through hierarchy or force, this model emphasizes mutual respect, shared values, and collective purpose (Ahmad et al., 2019). In this framework, a leader's authority is not solely derived from their title or position but from the willingness of followers to accept and support their influence (Presthus, 2019). This concept is central to the servant leadership philosophy, which advocates for ethical leadership grounded in strong moral convictions that inspire similar values among followers (Solinger et al., 2020).

The power held by servant leaders is described as a "power to" serve and empower others, rather than a "power over" them (Ross et al., 2020). This distinction highlights a leadership style based on persuasion and support, in contrast to models that emphasize command and control. By focusing on influence rather than dominance, servant leaders create environments that nurture growth, inclusion, and empowerment. This ethical application of power not only enhances organizational culture but also promotes a more sustainable and people-centered model of leadership.

## 2.5 Comparing Servant Leadership and Traditional Management

The line between servant leadership and traditional management can often be blurred, leading to confusion. However, understanding how they differ in purpose, planning, relationships, and execution helps to distinguish the two. Management tends to be effective in stable environments where maintaining existing systems is crucial (Kraus et al., 2018). Leadership, on the other hand, is most impactful during times of uncertainty, where vision, adaptability, and resilience are essential (Shufutinsky et al., 2021). Thus, today's fast-paced and ever-changing world demands leadership over mere management.

One of the primary differences lies in their core intent. Servant leaders are primarily focused on meeting the needs of their followers (Wu et al., 2021), while managers are primarily oriented toward achieving organizational outcomes (Latham, 2020). Managers tend to concentrate on efficiency and results (Mesdaghinia et al., 2019), often relying on control mechanisms (Panda, 2019), which may create environments where employees fear making mistakes. In contrast, servant leaders pursue organizational success by helping individuals maximize their potential (Chaturvedi et al., 2019). While managers may see employees as tools to achieve company goals (Hur, 2018), servant leaders place the individual at the center of their leadership practice (Dutta & Khatri, 2017).

When it comes to setting goals, servant leaders envision long-term success, anticipate future challenges, and approach issues from a broader strategic angle (Rashid et al., 2019). Managers, however, tend to focus on the immediate implementation of plans (Fayzullaevna, 2021), short-term improvements (Aung & Preudhikulpradab, 2021), and maintaining operational efficiency (Raisch & Krakowski, 2021). While managers are often grounded in present-day objectives (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019), servant leaders consider the well-being of their followers, the direction of the organization, and its wider societal role (Sendjaya et al., 2019; Muhtasom et al., 2017; Woo & Kang, 2020). This expansive outlook enables servant leaders to lead more effectively in high-pressure contexts, where traditional management may fall short.

In terms of interpersonal dynamics, servant leaders prioritize building strong, equal relationships with their followers (Hartnell et al., 2020), treating them as partners in the leadership process (Crippen & Willows, 2019; Xu & Wang, 2020). Managers, conversely, often place emphasis on output and task completion (Gerpott et al., 2019), and may regard employees more as subordinates than collaborators (Tang et al., 2017). While managers exercise control based on formal authority (Ravenelle, 2019), servant leaders lead through influence and support (Yang et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2017), frequently working alongside their teams rather than delegating from a distance (Chiniara & Bentein, 2018).

Operationally, managers are usually concerned with doing things efficiently and by the book (Spring & Unterhitzenberger, 2020). Servant leaders, however, focus on making ethically sound decisions and doing what is right (Agarwal & Sisodia, 2021). This reflects their commitment to moral leadership (GÜmÜsay, 2019; Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). Within this model, leaders serve their teams, while in management, teams serve their leaders (Saleem et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021). When it comes to governance, managers tend to rely on authority and control (Hettiarachchi et al., 2018), while servant leaders depend on relational influence and trust (Muzira et al., 2020). Managers may pursue recognition and advancement through the success of their teams (Agostino & Arnaboldi, 2018; Möhlmann & Zalmanson, 2017), whereas servant leaders often exemplify selflessness and humility, aiming for collective success rather than personal accolades (Urick, 2021; Mutua & Kiruhi, 2021).

## 2.6 Understanding the Concept of Governance

Since the early 1990s, the term *governance* has moved from relative obscurity to a commonly used concept in both academic and policy circles (Draper, 2000). Despite its widespread use, governance remains somewhat vague, often interpreted through different theoretical lenses or ideological frameworks. In many developing nations, it is sometimes perceived as a set of externally imposed principles or constraints promoted by Western institutions (Hufty, 2010). Governance extends beyond political boundaries and encompasses all areas of policy-making (Draper, 2000).

Traditionally, governance is rooted in long-established systems of rule, authority, and power dynamics (Tiihonen, 2004). Today, it is a central theme in global development discussions and is considered vital for shaping effective development strategies in both the Global North and South (Hye, 2000). Despite its prominence among academics, development professionals, and international aid agencies, governance is not a static concept. Instead, it is continually evolving and requires a thorough and systematic approach to analysis (Farazmand, 2012).

According to Hyden (1992), governance entails the deliberate management of institutional structures to reinforce legitimacy in the public realm, focusing more on political credibility than on economic outcomes. Rosenau (1992) provides a broader interpretation, describing governance as a process involving both state and non-state actors. Rhodes (2001) outlines several interpretations, such as minimal government, corporate oversight, and modern public administration reforms each focusing on different aspects of the state's role. Draper (2000) and Kaela (1998) conceptualize governance as the organized system of rules, procedures, and institutional arrangements that shape government actions. The British Council highlights governance as the dynamic interaction between official institutions and civil society, illustrating how authority and influence are exercised, and policies are shaped and implemented.

Plumptre and Graham (1999) emphasize that governance is the product of interactions among a wide range of participants, including businesses, community groups, and individual citizens. Doh (1998) stresses the importance of these stakeholders in shaping public policies. Nkomo (1998) reflects

on governance as an elusive concept, particularly during periods of social transformation, citing the UNDP's definition that includes political, economic, and administrative control at various levels. Scholars like Iyoha et al. (2015) and Nyewusira (2007) describe governance as a social contract between leaders and the governed, focusing on how power is exercised and maintained. Similarly, Salman (2009) explores governance in terms of leadership accountability, efficient resource use, and citizen participation. Mohiddin (2002), offering an African lens, defines traditional governance as a collective process in public administration that relies on shared leadership and responsibility.

In essence, governance refers to the complex web of relationships between institutions and citizens, as well as the systems by which decisions are made and public affairs are managed (Plumptre & Graham, 1999; Rigumamu, 1998). Ultimately, governance has a direct impact on a nation's development trajectory. Effective governance is marked by transparency, responsibility, and citizen engagement all of which are critical for sustainable development and human progress.

*2.7 Defining Good Governance: A Multi-Dimensional View*

Although there is no single, universally accepted definition of *good governance*, several characteristics are consistently identified as foundational. As outlined in the Human Development Report (2002), principles such as transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, participation, and adherence to the rule of law are widely considered key elements. International organizations like the World Bank (1994, 1997), UNDP (1997, 2002), and OECD (1995) strongly advocate for these principles, particularly in aid-dependent countries, to foster democracy, promote accountability, decentralize authority, and strengthen civic engagement in policy-making.

The World Bank (1997) argues that sound governance is essential for fostering an environment conducive to inclusive and sustainable growth. It outlines critical governance features such as political accountability, freedom of expression and association, independence of the judiciary, bureaucratic responsibility, access to information, an effective civil service system, and collaborative efforts between governments and civil society organizations (Blunt, 1995). These features are seen as prerequisites for effective governance in developing nations. Similarly, the UNDP (1997) emphasizes governance as a process in which all citizens have equal opportunities to participate in decision-making. It prioritizes transparency, fairness, and inclusivity, and stresses the importance of involving local communities in allocating resources and shaping policies. According to the UNDP, good governance not only promotes economic and political stability but also ensures the protection of human rights, enables people to influence public policy, and fosters an environment conducive to prosperity (Hope, 2005).

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) identifies eight core attributes of good governance: participation, consensus building, transparency, accountability, responsiveness, equity and inclusiveness, efficiency and effectiveness, and rule of law. This definition underscores the need to minimize corruption, ensure fair treatment of minorities, and safeguard vulnerable populations (UNESCAP, n.d.).

From a servant leadership perspective, governance involves the ethical use of authority and influence to make decisions and policies that benefit the broader public and promote social well-being. The World Bank also views governance through an administrative lens, involving aspects such as public sector reform, service delivery, civil service restructuring, outsourcing of government services, and building institutional capacity. Good governance, therefore, is not just about setting goals it's about engaging all stakeholders in determining the path toward achieving them (World Bank, 1997).

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1 Research Strategy

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore how Servant Leadership influences national governance in Malawi. As outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research utilizes an interpretive and naturalistic approach to examine phenomena in their real-world context. Its multidimensional nature allows researchers to gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Conger (1998) further emphasizes the relevance of qualitative methods in leadership research, noting that the inherent complexity of leadership requires interpretative methods at every stage of inquiry.

Given the complexity and depth of leadership as a social phenomenon, a qualitative approach was considered most suitable. The phenomenological orientation of this study aimed to assess the impact of Servant Leadership on governance, particularly focusing on how the Tonse Alliance-led administration in Malawi has embodied this leadership philosophy through its 'Super High Five' governance agenda. The study examined how the adoption of Servant Leadership principles has affected the administration's responsiveness to national challenges and its commitment to sustainable development.

### 3.2 Sampling Method

This research employed purposive sampling, a form of non-probability sampling, to identify participants with direct relevance to the research topic. Participants were selected based on their familiarity with the subject matter and their professional experience in contexts related to leadership and governance. As Freedman et al. (2007) explain, purposive sampling allows for the selection of individuals who possess specific knowledge or insights critical to the research objectives.

The sampling process involved two specific non-probability techniques: judgment sampling and snowball sampling. Participants were chosen based on their expertise and professional connections to ensure the inclusion of informed perspectives on the phenomenon under study.

### 3.3 Data Collection Methods

The primary methods used for data collection were key informant interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Participants were carefully chosen based on their potential to contribute valuable insights into the research topic. By combining these two methods, the study was able to obtain a well-rounded understanding of the issues, explore attitudes and behaviors, and examine historical and contextual factors influencing leadership practices in Malawi.

Yin (2014) points out that one of the major strengths of qualitative research is the ability to draw from multiple sources of evidence, enhancing the depth and credibility of findings. A total of 46 participants were purposively drawn from a larger population of over 1,000, ensuring gender inclusivity. The sample included leaders and members from religious communities Catholic, Evangelical, and Muslim as well as academic scholars and representatives from civil society organizations such as the Centre for Democracy and Economic Development Initiatives (CDEDI) and Youth and Society Organization. All participants had relevant experience and a direct connection to the leadership and governance issues under investigation. The study applied content analysis to process and interpret the qualitative data, enabling the researcher to explore underlying conditions and patterns in the responses.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

As described by Mouton and Marais (1991), data analysis involves deconstructing a complex phenomenon into its key components to improve understanding. In this research, content analysis was employed to interpret the data collected from interviews and focus group discussions. This method allows researchers to systematically categorize information into themes and sub-themes, which facilitates comparison and deeper analysis (Moore & McCabe, 2005). The advantage of content analysis lies in its ability to organize qualitative data in a structured manner, aligning the findings with the research questions and study objectives.

## 4.0. Study Findings and Discussions

This study aimed to assess the influence of Servant Leadership on National Governance in Malawi with a specific focus on evaluating the Tonse Alliance led- Administration's commitment to this leadership style as part of its 'Super High Five' governance Philosophy. This philosophy was introduced as a roadmap to deliver tangible and sustainable development to Malawians. The findings were analyzed using selected principles of Servant leadership as proposed by Larry spears (2005, 1993) and Robert Greenleaf (1977, 1997), along with the Modified Wong and Page's Expanding Rings Model. The study focused on six key themes: serving others, community buildings, sharing of power in decision making, foresightedness, commitment to growth of people and general awareness. The aim was to evaluate whether the current leadership in Malawi embodies, understands, and practices the tenets of Servant Leadership. The presentation and discussion of findings are structured thematically

### 4.1. Serving Others.

The findings on the Tonse Alliance administration's application of Servant Leadership principles reveal mixed picture. On the other hand, the administration has made notable efforts to prioritize the needs of others over its own interests. These efforts include:

#### 4.1.1. Efforts to combat corruption.

The respondents highlighted that the administration's vigorous effort to combat corruption, which is seen as essential for allowing Malawians to live dignified lives from deprivation.

#### 4.1.2. Provision of decent houses for Police Officers.

The construction of quality housing for police officers across various districts including remote areas, was cited as evidence of Servant Leadership in action, aiming to provide security and enhance community well-being.

#### 4.1.3. Non-Interference in Legal Matters

The administration's commitment to the rule of law, including the provision of legal aid without interference, was also noted as a positive reflection of Servant Leadership.

#### 41.4. Establishment of National Economic Empowerment Fund (NEEF).

The creation of NEEF to provide small loans to underprivileged entrepreneurs was seen as a significant step toward empowering marginalized communities and reducing income poverty. The participants pinpointed that this act is a reflection of  Servant Leadership. The participants demonstrated the knowledge by stating that the current leadership, realizing that there are some sections of the population that are not going to benefit from the high interest rates, commercial banks loans, and need direct assistance to improve their living standards through servant leadership approach; the government has to establish National Economic Empowerment Fund (NEEF)

### 4.1.5. Disaster Relief Efforts

The study findings showed that in the aftermath of natural disasters like cyclone Freddy in the southern region districts, or floods in Karonga, leaders demonstrated servant leadership principle of serving others. During an in depth interviews the respondents said:

*''When Cyclone Freddy ravaged a number of places in the southern region of Malawi, the Tonse Alliance Administration created space for community involvement in soliciting food and clothes for the households that were affected by the cyclone, and for organizing shelters for them. The Servant Leadership even extended the call for assistance to three of the country's retired State Presidents. Two of them responded to it spontaneously and positively while the third declined – a negative reaction to compassion. This is another example of factors that pose as constraints to servant leadership style. That is, while it acts with knowledge and humility and collaborates with others and for everyone, there are elements that react negatively to compassion. This is a lack of foresight that can make specific precautions impossible.''*

It was noted through the research findings that leaders stepped in to coordinate and lead relief efforts, worked tirelessly to ensure that affected communities received essential supplies, medical assistance, and emotional support by putting the needs of the victims first and serving as a pillar of strength.

One of the participants through in depth interviews on the idea of serving others by current leadership also emphasized that: *''if one would look at the program that the government is running such social protection programs, response to the cyclone Freddy, and other disasters we have had in the past, we have seen government demonstrating top notch leadership; we have seen leadership being with the people and the government providing leadership in the disaster response. That is where we see compassionate, empathy in those circumstances. Therefore, one would say yes, this is where they have demonstrated servant leadership.''*

However, the study also uncovered significant shortcomings. Respondents expressed dissatisfaction with administration's overall economic and governance management. Corruption scandals, such as the Sattar corruption case and dubious procurement procedures in fertilizer deals, were highlighted as instances where the administration's actions contradicted the principles of Servant Leadership. As one respondent put it, *'When you look at all these shenanigans, you begin to doubt whether this government is truly founded on the principles of Servant Leadership.'*

### 4.2. Community Building

Community building involves fostering a sense of togetherness and improving the well-being of all community members. The study found that the Tonse Alliance administration has made some strides in this area:

### 4.2.1. Infrastructure development

The administration's efforts to improve road networks across the country and support vulnerable groups through various projects were positively noted.

### 4.2.1. Support for Cultural Heritage

The leadership's support for cultural groups, such as Nhlaho, Chewa Heritage, and Ngoni Mthetho, was seen as a reflection of its commitment to promoting national unity and cultural identity.

### 4.2.3. Empowering Youth

Initiatives like jobs for Youth (J4Y) project and skills training in technical colleges were cited as examples of the administration's efforts to empower communities and promote sustainable development. Despite these efforts, respondents expressed concern over the administration's failure to manage the economy effectively, leading to forex shortages, rising living costs, and an unsustainable debt burden. The affordable Inputs Programme (AIP) was specifically criticized as an example of wasteful spending, exacerbating the country's economic challenges.

### 4.3. Sharing of Power in decision making

In terms of sharing of power in decision making, it was reported through *key informant interviews* that there is one positive impact in the area of consideration of more women in decision making positions. It was reported that the current leadership has appointed a number of women to serve in high government work positions, thus a characteristic of Servant Leadership; it lifts others up and empowers them. Once empowered, the women feel valued, and there is great trust among them.

The respondents named the following institutions where women have been appointed and incorporated in the decision-making process: Malawi Human Rights Commission, Ombudsperson, Financial intelligence Authority, the Inspector General of Malawi police Service, the Chief Secretary to the government, deputy secretary to the government, Vince Chancellor at MUST; all these high-profile positions are led by women as at 2024 profiles. The participants argued that they are a number of institutions which they can exemplify pertaining to where this leadership is demonstrating the consideration of women in power and decision making.

However, the study revealed that the administration has not fully delivered on its promise to reduce executive powers, particularly the power to appoint high-level officials like the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) director. This concentration of power in the hands of the president has led to concerns about the administration's commitment to genuine power-sharing and merit-based appointments.

### 4.4. Foresight

Foresight is crucial for visionary leadership, but the study found that the administration's approach has been inconsistent. While the development of the Malawi 2063 vision is a positive example of foresighted leadership, respondents criticized the administration for not sharing the Public Sector Reform Program with the public, raising doubts about its transparency and accountability. The respondents pointed out that when we are talking about foresighted leadership is also about your ability to share that vision with others.

However, respondents cited that the Tonse Alliance leadership has been induced by foresight to commit itself to improving the socio-economic development of the nation, and it intends to do this through tailor-made programs to be implemented by Ministries of Agriculture, Tourism, Mining, health and education. Nevertheless, for the current administration to deliver as indicated in the above quotation they need a vehicle, which is a political machinery vehicle, a political machinery vehicle that aligns with the strategies, the steps on how to achieve long term vision. Hence, the Public Sector Reform Program is a key because it must be attested against the vision that is in place, it must be attest against the specific output the country needs to have or to generate from the vision be it short or long term.

## 5. 0. Constraints to Implementing Servant Leadership in Malawi

The research identified several constraints that hinder the application of servant leadership within the national governance context in Malawi. These constraints are predominantly linked to the political climate, patronage systems, a failed public service, widespread corrupt practices among citizens, and entrenched leadership mindsets, alongside resource limitations.

### 5.1. Political Climate and Patronage

The study revealed that the political climate in Malawi is heavily influenced by patronage systems, where those in power often prioritize the interests of their supporters over national welfare. This has resulted in a political landscape characterized by power struggles and a focus on individual or party agendas rather than collective national interests. Participants emphasized that individuals who surround the leadership can significantly contribute to the failure of servant leadership. One respondent highlighted this by stating:

> *"You have people who surround the leadership, and these are the ones who can lead the*
> *leadership into failure. The whole president can be tossed around by the patronage itself,*
> *which also brings in the issue of corruption. Those within the corridors of power become*
> *the primary constituency for the presidency and government at the expense of the national interest."*

This environment undermines the core principles of servant leadership, as leaders are pressured to prioritize short-term political gains and personal ambitions over the needs of the people.

### 5.2. Failed Public Service

Another significant barrier to implementing servant leadership in Malawi is the failure of the public service. Participants indicated that even a leader with a genuine desire to serve the nation struggles to deliver effectively if the public service is inefficient and ineffective. Public service is considered a fundamental vehicle for national transformation, and its dysfunctionality hampers the implementation of servant leadership principles. The research pointed to rampant corrupt practices among civil servants and weak institutions as critical factors that hinder efforts to promote service-oriented leadership. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and a lack of transparency are seen as obstacles to achieving meaningful transformation.

The Tonse Alliance administration's challenges in fulfilling its servant leadership promise to end corruption are a testament to these institutional failures.

### 5.3. Corrupt Citizenry

The respondents also emphasized the role of a corrupt citizenry as a limiting factor in the application of servant leadership. Many Malawians, by nature, are perceived as being complicit in corruption, preferring to benefit from the corrupt system rather than challenge it. One respondent noted:

> *"It is difficult to see most Malawians challenging corruption because they themselves are*
> *beneficiaries of political patronage. To combat corruption and promote servant leadership,*
> *we need to fix not just the political leaders and public service but also the citizens and private*
> *sectors. The country is rotten in all sectors."*

This widespread corruption among citizens creates an environment that is resistant to the principles of servant leadership, making it challenging to cultivate a culture of integrity and accountability.

*5.4. Resource Constraints*

Effective implementation of servant leadership in Malawi requires significant investment in training programs, capacity-building, and organizational restructuring. However, the research found that inadequate resources pose substantial challenges to these initiatives. Without sufficient funding and support, efforts to foster servant leadership practices are difficult to initiate and sustain.

*5.5. Changing Leadership Mindsets*

Encouraging a shift from an authority- and control-centered leadership style to one of service and empowerment is a gradual and challenging process. The research found that leaders in Malawi often struggle to fully embrace the servant leadership mindset due to entrenched bureaucratic and authoritarian attitudes that have persisted since before the adoption of self-rule. This resistance to change hinders the development of a leadership culture centered on service and empowerment.

## 6. Strategies to help Tonse Alliance Administration Successful Servant Leadership

This section addresses the research question: *What strategies could help the Tonse Alliance administration to successfully implement servant leadership in Malawi?* The study identified several strategies, including building a culture of integrity, community sensitization, and ensuring political will and leadership buy-in.

*6.1. Building a Culture of Integrity*

The research highlighted the necessity for Malawi to invest in building a culture of integrity that is grounded in transparency and accountability. Institutional reforms across sectors, such as education and public service, are essential to embed these values. Participants argued that instilling a culture of integrity at all societal levels is crucial for the nation's future. One respondent remarked:

> *"The country is in this mess because there is no integrity at all levels. If the government can incorporate the principle of integrity into national governance, Malawi can combat corruption, nepotism, and unethical practices that hinder progress and erode public trust."*

*6.2. Community Mobilization and Sensitization*

The study found that successful implementation of servant leadership in Malawi requires engaging and educating communities about its benefits. Respondents emphasized the importance of grassroots mobilization to foster understanding and support for this leadership style. This can be achieved through well-organized forums where the government can:

- Motivate and educate citizens about the principles of servant leadership.

- Clearly articulate the direction the leadership intends to take and the reasons behind key decisions.

- Highlight how servant leadership can lead to positive outcomes in their daily lives.

By directly involving communities and making them aware of the advantages of servant leadership, the government can build a strong foundation of support and ensure that citizens are aligned with the administration's vision and goals.

*6.3. Political Will and Leadership Buy-In*

The research underscored that servant leadership can only be effectively implemented if there is strong political will and buy-in from top political leaders. These leaders must model servant leadership behaviors to foster a culture of service-oriented governance. As one respondent noted:

> *"If key stakeholders, including top political leaders, do not buy into the concept or fail to model servant leadership behaviors themselves, it can be difficult to foster a culture of service-oriented governance."*

Achieving this requires commitment from the highest levels of government to embrace and demonstrate servant leadership principles. This includes setting clear examples of ethical leadership, prioritizing the needs of the citizens, and ensuring that policies and practices reflect a commitment to serving the public interest.

By adopting these strategies, the Malawian government can work towards creating a leadership culture that prioritizes the well-being of its citizens, leading to a more inclusive and prosperous society.

## 7.0. Limitations of the Study

For this study, the following limitations were encountered:

1. **Partisan Politics in Malawi**: The political environment in Malawi, particularly partisanship, affected the respondents' willingness or ability to provide genuine responses. Some participants may have been influenced by political biases, leading to either exaggerated positivity or negativity in their feedback.

2. **Limited Understanding of the Tonse Alliance Concept**: Not all participants fully grasped the concept of the Tonse Alliance or its connection to Servant Leadership, especially those with limited educational backgrounds. This lack of understanding presented challenges in collecting accurate and meaningful data from the community members.

3. **Accessibility to Key Figures**: The researcher faced difficulties in securing interviews with key political and non-governmental leaders, many of whom had busy schedules. For instance, an interview with the leader of the opposition could not take place due to scheduling conflicts, which hindered the collection of important insights.

4. **Exaggerated or Misinformed Responses**: In some cases, respondents provided exaggerated information or outright misinformation, possibly due to misunderstandings or personal biases. The researcher had limited control over these responses, which may have affected the accuracy and reliability of the data.

5. **Reluctance to Share Sensitive Information**: Certain government-related issues are treated with confidentiality, leading some respondents to be hesitant or unwilling to share relevant information. This reluctance limited the depth of information available for analysis.

## 8.0. Conclusion

The study concludes that while the Tonse Alliance administration has taken steps to embody Servant Leadership principles, it faces significant challenges in fully realizing this leadership style. The administration's efforts to combat corruption, empower communities, and provide social services are commendable. However, these are overshadowed by economic mismanagement, corruption scandals, and limited public engagement. The political climate, a dysfunctional public service, and a corrupt citizenry further hinder the effective implementation of Servant Leadership. For the Tonse Alliance to successfully adopt this leadership approach, it must focus on building a culture of integrity, enhancing community engagement, and securing strong political commitment to ethical governance. By addressing these areas, Malawi can move towards a more inclusive and servant-oriented governance model that prioritizes the well-being of its citizens.

## 9.0. Recommendations

1. **Enhance Public Service through Radical Leadership:** The government must strengthen public services by adhering to effective leadership practices. This requires a radical leadership approach that does not compromise with inefficiency, patronage, or corruption. Top-tier government officials, including the head of government and the cabinet, must demonstrate a strong commitment to these reforms. Effective leadership at this level is crucial for transformative change.

2. **Implement Radical Leadership:** Malawi needs a leadership style that is uncompromising in the face of corruption and patronage. Radical leaders must be willing to confront these challenges head-on, setting a precedent for integrity and accountability. These reforms will require commitment and decisive action at the highest levels of government.

3. **Build Strong Relationships with Civil Society:** Establishing and maintaining a collaborative relationship with civil society organizations is vital. The government should enact laws that protect the independence of these institutions while ensuring that they can operate without undue interference. Civil society can be a powerful partner in development, bringing in valuable resources and expertise. A cooperative approach can significantly contribute to economic stability and growth.

4. **Adopt a Grassroots Approach:** To effectively address the needs of local Malawians, it is essential to engage directly with communities at the grassroots level. This will help ensure that policies and programs are responsive to the actual needs of the population.

5. **Align with Servant Leadership Principles:** In all activities, the government should align with servant leadership principles to foster a more inclusive, transparent, and effective governance system. This approach offers a framework for addressing Malawi's unique challenges and creating a more promising future for its citizens.

6. **Reshuffle Based on Competence:** Reshuffle and bring in competent individuals based on credibility and performance and also relevance qualification in special cases (e.g. Ministry of Health/Education, etc), not nepotism or tribalism. This merit-based approach is essential for effective governance.

7. **Establish Leadership Development Programs:** Implement leadership development programs that focus on servant leadership principles. These should include workshops, seminars, and training sessions emphasizing empathy, humility, and prioritizing the citizens' needs.

8. **Top-Down Commitment:** Leadership at the highest level, including the President and Cabinet members, must embody and practice servant leadership. This top-down commitment will set a powerful example and encourage others throughout the government to follow suit.

9. **Cultural Sensitivity and Local Context:** When implementing servant leadership, it is important to consider Malawi's cultural values and local context. Understanding the unique challenges and aspirations of the people will enable leaders to address their needs effectively.

10. **Transparent Communication:** Cultivate a culture of open and transparent communication between leaders and citizens. Actively listen to public concerns and feedback, and make decisions that reflect the collective interests of the population.

11. **Empower Local Communities:** Encourage decentralized decision-making and empower local communities to participate in governance. A bottom-up approach, where leaders support and enable communities to address their own issues, is crucial for sustainable development.

12. **Promote Collaborative Governance:** Foster a collaborative governance approach by involving diverse stakeholders, including civil society organizations and private sector actors, in the decision-making process. Such inclusive governance can lead to more comprehensive and sustainable policies.

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