

PERCEPTIONS OF LANDLORD PORT MODEL AND PORT PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIA SEAPORTS

AJAYI Olusesan Oluyemi
Lincoln University College, Malaysia

ADENIYI, Sarafadeen Diran (Ph.D)
Lincoln University College, Malaysia

Abstract

This study evaluates stakeholder perceptions of the landlord port model and assesses port performance across Nigeria's seaports. It investigates regulatory structures, transparency indicators, time-related performance measures, and stakeholder inclusion as critical dimensions for enhancing port governance and operational efficiency. A qualitative research design was adopted, using In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) to collect rich, descriptive data from a wide range of stakeholders. Participants were drawn from regulatory agencies, shipping firms, private terminal operators, importers, exporters, clearing agents, logistics providers, and trade associations operating within selected seaports. Purposeful sampling ensured that experienced informants provided detailed insights into the practical realities of port administration. The IDIs, guided by semi-structured open and close-ended questions, were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed manually through content analysis. This enabled the extraction of key themes and narratives reflecting the complex dynamics of port governance under the landlord model. Findings revealed systemic inefficiencies driven by outdated legal frameworks, centralised governance inertia, and politicised appointments, which have undermined the effectiveness of reforms. Despite the establishment of dual regulators, the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) and the Nigerian Shippers Council (NSC), legal ambiguities and lack of institutional autonomy hinder optimal port performance. Participants acknowledged progress in infrastructure and digitalisation but cited persistent delays, poor inter-agency synergy, and inadequate transparency. The study concludes that beyond structural debates on centralisation versus decentralisation, there is a need for legal reform, depoliticised leadership, stakeholder trust, and technological innovation. Institutionalising transparent governance and fostering cooperation among key actors are essential for transforming Nigerian ports into globally competitive trade hubs.

Keywords: Port Governance, Legal Reform, Institutional Synergy, Operational Efficiency, Technological Innovation

Introduction

The post-port concession era in Nigeria ushered in a wave of reforms aimed at improving efficiency and productivity in the maritime sector. However, these reforms have been plagued by several emerging challenges. One critical issue is the decentralisation of the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) and the expected outcomes which, if well implemented, could have enhanced decision-making transparency, time-related performance measurement, and stakeholder engagement. Zhang et al. (2018) argue that decentralised governance promotes openness and cooperation between port authorities and users, yet these benefits remain largely unrealised in Nigeria. The inadequacy of oversight following the 2006 port concessioning prompted the federal government to set up a review committee in 2011, which found that a major challenge was the absence of an effective port economic regulator. In response, the Nigerian Shippers' Council (NSC) was appointed in 2014 as an interim

economic regulator, although Nigeria's landlord port model continues to be constrained by weak institutional frameworks and overlapping regulatory functions. Ogunsiji and Ogunsiji (2011) stress the importance of strong and accountable port governance, which remains deficient in Nigerian ports. Consequently, Nigerian seaports have yet to be classified among the top-performing and transparently governed ports in Africa.

Despite the introduction of some performance measures, the Nigerian maritime regulatory focus still largely adheres to traditional methods, often ignoring critical indicators such as transparency. According to Sen et al. (2020), metrics like turnaround and dwell time are inadequate without clear definitions and transparency benchmarks. The inefficiencies of port marine services persist, even after public-private joint ventures such as the Lagos and Bonny Channel management initiatives. The multiplicity of regulators has not translated into improvements in performance measurement or service delivery. Emeghara et al. (2018) suggest setting performance benchmarks to guide terminal operators. However, as Onwuegbuchunam et al. (2021) observe, the emphasis is still heavily skewed toward infrastructure, with little attention given to measuring the entire value chain of port operations. The absence of transparent reporting and communication processes hampers accountability and informed decision-making. Brooks et al. (2022) note that even basic port information on regulators' websites is outdated or unavailable, undermining stakeholder engagement. Similarly, Notteboom et al. (2015) emphasise that transparency in port tariffs and service charges reduces costs and enhances competitiveness. Yet, Nigerian ports fall short of providing such transparency. Furthermore, critical port users—non-state stakeholders—are often excluded from key decision-making processes, weakening the legitimacy of governance structures (Zhang et al., 2019). These gaps hinder inclusive policy formulation and sustainable development, despite assertions that port governance must accommodate all stakeholders to maximise socio-economic gains (Parola et al., 2013).

The issues surrounding port transparency, stakeholder exclusion, and inefficient regulatory oversight have collectively undermined the realisation of the full potential of Nigerian ports. According to the African Union (2019), maritime transportation remains vital for the continent's economic growth. Yet, poor governance, corruption, weak technical capacity, and infrastructural decay have rendered many African ports, including Nigeria's, underperforming on the global stage (Mlambo, 2021). Okonjo-Iweala (2014) noted that uncoordinated tariff regimes and non-transparent port processes significantly diminish competitiveness. Existing literature on Nigerian port performance is either limited in scope or fails to incorporate critical transparency indicators such as turnaround time, quality of service delivery, and cargo handling efficiency (Bassey, Apiriotu & Enyioku, 2024). Moreover, the lack of transparency in port operations has discouraged inclusive participation of non-state actors, who are essential in ensuring stakeholder-led reforms. The landlord port model, by excluding these actors from the governance process, has failed to achieve its full potential in promoting performance and accountability. Therefore, this study is undertaken with the purpose of evaluating the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the landlord port model and assessing port performance in Nigeria's seaports. The study specifically focuses on issues related to regulatory structures, transparency indicators, measurement of time-related performance, and stakeholder inclusion to enhance the governance and operational efficiency of Nigerian ports.

Methods

The study adopted a qualitative research method to gain deeper insights into the operational realities of the Nigerian maritime industry. This methodological approach enabled the researcher to gather rich, descriptive data from selected seaports, relevant organisations, and

port agencies. These institutions included both management and non-management officials actively involved in various aspects of port administration and logistics. The qualitative design proved effective in eliciting firsthand information and expert opinions on the practical implementation and outcomes of the landlord port model across different port locations in Nigeria.

Participants in the study were drawn from a broad spectrum of stakeholders within the maritime sector. These included senior personnel from regulatory agencies, shipping companies, private terminal operators, importers, exporters, clearing and forwarding agencies, logistics and transport service providers, chambers of commerce, trade associations, and industrial unions. All participants either worked at or were officially represented at the selected seaports. Key informants were purposefully selected to provide comprehensive and insightful perspectives, reflecting the diversity and complexity of port-related operations and governance.

The primary instrument for data collection was the In-Depth Interview (IDI) guide, which facilitated the gathering of detailed qualitative data from the chosen participants. The IDIs were structured to include both open-ended and close-ended questions and were directed at port managers and heads of key organisations within the maritime industry. This tool enabled direct engagement with respondents, ensuring that their perceptions, experiences, and assessments of the landlord port model were accurately captured. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analysed manually through content analysis. The process involved cleaning the data, transcribing responses verbatim, and interpreting the content to identify key themes and significant insights. This approach ensured that essential viewpoints were not lost and that the resulting interpretations provided a reliable basis for evaluating port performance in the Nigerian context

Results

In the context of corporate strategy, Away *et al* (2021) explores the major factors impacting the centralized or decentralized structure as a corporate choice of many organisations and industries. The authors argued that decentralization enables authority by delegating decision process through low-level officials for supposed execution of faster decision making. In this mode, some of the benefits include innovativeness and creativeness, where it is assumed that the innovation is speed without the necessary input of several layers of opinions of line managers in the organisational hierarchy. She also stated that the reason for centralised structures is due to the lack of skilled lower-level officials that can oversee or manage decision-making processes faster in the absence of the manager. In an article that captures the essence of port services, Wale (2016) states that both concepts have their merits and demerits and can be applied in its necessity. For a central structure to be effective, Wale considered that the following factors must be in place.

In considering problems in the Nigerian port system, this study's focus on the assessment of factors negatively impacting optimal port performance within the landlord port model raises the questions about the centralised structure of the NPA, without the size of the port and the complexities warranting the delays and the lack of adequate technology that will speed up cargo deliveries and movements for the importers and exporters. According to the point of view of the General Manager regulatory and monitoring services of Nigeria Port Authority (NPA), the factors affecting the return to a centralised is a matter legal requirement. He claimed that:

“...In 2003, the management of Nigerian Port Authority appointed a consultant named Spring Fountain. Sat down and created a structure based on the new

reality. In 2007, the ministry made a recommendation to late Ya'ra Adua then. Okay. Part of the things that were done was to create a 2-port structure, 1 in the east, 1 in the west. But there was no legal backing. The only thing we had in the law was a single structure. When Ya'ra Adua came to power in 2007, he was told that there was no legal backing for that structure. He directed that NPA management to be centralised and continue as it was. In the process of doing so, they took us back to the structure that was created by Babamanga Tukur in 1975. This is basically the structure that we are still operating. There have been changes here and there but basically, this is the structure that we're operating. The structure that was created in 1975. So, the structure we have now is not optimal. We touch it here and there, yes, but it's not optimal. This is not the structure we should have...." **(Male/IDI/ General Manager, Regulatory and Monitoring Services/NPA/October 4, 2024/Lagos).**

According to the stance of the National President of the Association of Customs Licensed Agents of Nigeria (ANCLA), the factors affecting the return to a centralised are self-inflicted. He claimed that:

"...in the days when Mr. Sarumi was the Managing Director of the NPA, there was a clearly defined decentralised administrative system where the seaports were classified into Eastern and Western ports and headed by Executive Directors with sole responsibilities. The idea of improving growth and creating innovation were the motivating factors for the decentralisation at the time. However, after he left, under a new Managing Director, Mr. Omar Suleiman, the need to fuse back the previously autonomous ports was mooted to reduce the cost of governance within the large scale of the federal government strategy which also tried to prune the cost of federal governance. In looking at the issue of the centralization, I think it is still the best for us. There is no big deal about that..." **(Male/IDI/President, ANCLA/October 8, 2024/Lagos).**

In an insightful perspective from another male interviewer, he argued about the enacting new legislation would enhance faster decision-making of the port administration and improve port performance of the concessioned ports in the country as he acclaimed:

"The foundation which the port reforms stand on are sections 7, 8, 9 and section 25 of the Nigeria Port of 1999. Therefore, the legal enablement that we've had to do that was

sections 7, 8, 9 and 25. So, the combined effect of this section was what gave NPA the legal right to concession the port terminals. *However, what was missing at that period, there was no legal framework for a concession. No legal framework. It was only by the provision of the ICRC Act of 2005 that we had a legal framework. But then ICRC did not come into operation until 2007. So, at that time, what was missing was a concise legal in a single document.* But we use these sections that I show you as the legal enablement to do what we. Another, major challenge are Government policy and institutional impediment.

Government policy is a hindrance factor because most of the people that craft the policies do not know what is on ground. More so, in respect of the institutional impediment the way the legislator the time it takes to amend our laws, the time it takes to pass a law, the effort it takes to pass a law, in the area for instance, when the port concession started in 2003, we came with what we call maritime statutory fund bills. It's a whole package we are now in 2024, 21 years. None of them has passed...." **(Male/IDI/ General Manager, Regulatory and Monitoring Services/Nigeria Port Authority /October 4, 2024/Lagos).**

In contrast with the standpoint of the General Manager, Regulatory and Monitoring Services of Nigeria Port Authority, another male interviewer the Director, Port regulatory services of the Nigeria Shippers Council, he argued about the legal framework and regulatory framework not from the perspective of either centralisation or decentralisation of the landlord port governance port administration in the country as he acclaimed:

“Then we have the last one which is what we call the National Transport Commission Bill. That National Transport Commission Bill is to establish a regulator that will act like a watchdog to the operators of the port and the landlords, I mean the private sectors operator and the landlord. because the government look at it that the Nigerian ports cannot continue to regulate itself, because in other parts of the world before the government carry out a form exercise of some of his economic assets because ports is an economic asset to the Nigerian government. Before they carry out such reform, it must be preceded by legal framework and regulatory framework. So the NTCB, we call it NTC, National Transport Commission, is to give a regulatory framework for the reform that is the concession of the port such that it would be like a regulator to both the landlord and the private operator. And probably operate with the agreements. You know, I said there is what we call lease agreement between them, the agreement that try to segregate the responsibility of the landlord and the private sector. So that NTCB was to provide such a regulatory framework. And because after those things supposed to have preceded the concession of the port, but the government for whatever reason that is best known to them they found a loophole in the existing Nigerian Port Authority Act of 1999. It was a decree there of 1999 and that decree provide that Nigerian port can lease and contract its function to third parties and that is on that basis they bring in the private sector. So, but the government then realized that there may not be so much of objectivity in the whole thing except it has an independent regulator. And when they look around, they see that the function performed by Nigerian Shippers' Council...” **(Male/IDI/ Director, Port regulatory services /Nigeria Shippers Council/October 11, 2024/Lagos).**

In a unique viewpoint from another male interviewer, he argued about the impossibility of total decentralisation of the port administration in the country as he acclaimed:

“... that since the emergence of the dual system of port regulations, with NPA and NSC acting as technical and economic regulators respectively, it was imperative that the administrative system was not likely to remain a centralised or decentralised forever, especially when we consider the size and complexities of the industry and the different needs of the non-state port stakeholders such as terminal operators, freight forwarders, freight agencies, shipping agencies, exporters and importers. For instance, the basic reason for the decentralisation system under Mr. Sarumi was because there was too much authority and power emanating from the centre. The implication was that, as port customers started observing faster speed of service, at any of the ports, there will be a rush to avoid using other ports for imports or exports...” **(Male/IDI/ Snr Manager, ICT Shipping & Port Service/October 8, 2024/Lagos).**

This assumption was affirmed in Koech & Obuba (2024) as they argued that the organisational structures of the Kenya Ports Authority had significant effect on the execution of its several projects, especially in the consideration of power delegation, assurances of those in authority, and adherence to hierarchical power structures as supports. However, on the issues of involving terminal operators and development of port infrastructures, respondents in the study area did not consider both factors as prerequisites for raising port

performance bar. The implication is that whether terminal operators were made to participate in the inner administrative workings of the port industry, or whether they were partnered to develop port infrastructures, as part of their lease mandate, port performance was not likely to change drastically from its current level.

The adoption of the NSC as an economic regulator for the Nigerian port industry was initiated in 2015 in order to assist the role NPA as the technical regulator with responsibilities for managing security and safety at the ports, managing pollution issues and terminal operations while the economic regulator's role, according to Onwuegbuchunam (2020), is to manage the welfare and commercial gains of port users such as rates and tariffs. In elaborate description of the role of the economic regulator, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank (2007) highlights that their roles include the verification and enforcement of antitrust laws and anti-competitive behaviours, protecting consumers and port users against abuses by terminal operators, and protecting investors against unreasonable actions or policies of the government.

Theme 2

Considering the fact that even the Port Decongestion Committee were also populated with military and paramilitary personnel, except for some members of the forwarding and freight association at the time, it performed above expectation as stated above; thus, belying the philosophy that only skilled maritime experts could engender optimal port performance (Chilaka & Aguagua, 2024). The success of the military personnel (as non-maritime experts and who were not naval personnel) in the successful implementation of the port decongestion contrasted with the performance of civilian counterparts who also appointed in a non-skilled capacity to administer the ports. Over the years, after the transition to civilian rule in Nigeria in 1999, port performance had raised new recurring parallels, particularly accruing from the issues of board appointments of political associates where skilled maritime experts in the industry could only make muffled complaints of this anomaly. In an in-depth interview, during this study with Chairman of the Nigerian Ports Consultative Council, he acknowledged that:

“...everything is politicized. It is our politics. The way we organize our national politics is a problem. For instance, over the years, you do not have politicians coming in as Executive Directors in most of the organizations. Now we even have politicians coming in as Managing Directors. These are politicians who know nothing. In fact, there was a time I am not going to mention the organization. The man that was brought in to manage the organization was just a prince of a town. He was brought in to become the head. He was just looking bemused whenever they were talking about port reform and other port issues. He will even openly claim ‘I do not know anything about this. I just came here.’ What he did was attend these foreign exhibitions, seminars, and all that. What he did was to second somebody to do the work for him. So, the bottom line is, let professionalism work. I recommend that we should increase our personnel and improve our expertise within the system. It is just like a situation where, nobody no matter how familiar you are with the court system, you cannot be a lawyer. You will have to go to school and learn to read law, go to law school and pass. You must have a knowledge of the environment in which you are going to work.
(Male/IDI/Chairman, Nigerian Ports Consultative Council/October 21, 2024/Lagos)

The neglect of maritime experts into major positions of authority in the port industry seems to have become a norm as the new government appoints virtual novices into these positions.

This seems to happen at the high-ranking offices where the thoughts, visions and direction for the organisation institution should emanate. In Ibraheem, Mohammed & Akanni (2019:36), Hadiza Bala Usman who was Managing Director of the NPA between July 11, 2026, and May 6, 2019, was acclaimed to have stated that:

“...When I assumed office, I did not have the knowledge of the maritime industry, and I remember clearly saying to the outgoing Managing Director that this attribute could be an advantage. Because when you come into a place you have little or no knowledge of, you do not have the burden of having an entrenched interest...”

Though her justification for the lack of knowledge for the high office of the leadership of the ports industry was worrisome, her attributing it as an advantageous factor in leadership has no real rationale and wisdom as a performance factor. It is then considered that such leadership would have to learn the ropes before getting any understanding of the role and objectives that are to be fulfilled. These are issues that the government of the day needs to be reminded of, especially for the technical and economic regulators whose roles are to ensure the adherence to the NPA Act that was amended on May 10, 1999, by the National Parliament of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (No. 38). For the purpose of public knowledge, the NPA Act (Sect 2) Subsection C of Establishment and Membership of the Governing Board stipulates in one of its clauses that membership of the governing board must include ‘*five persons with experience in shipping and commercial matters*’. This official disregard for laws and regulations in board appointments clearly identifies a political motive as enhance political patronage and indifference to port performance by government.

Another interviewee from a shipping agency hinted at the negative impact of bringing government appointees into the boards of NPA and Nigerian Shippers’ Council, without relevant professional maritime experience that will enhance stakeholder transparency across the different sectors of the industry. He stated that:

“...If you ask my opinion, it is high time they stopped making appointments politically. It is time the government found out that port performance is principally generated through appointments made on a professional basis. For instance, if you grow a port system, because it is a system where you do not just hire and fire. There is an example where a vessel we chartered to do a cabotage work. The people who brought the vessel on the first voyage, or rather the people that brought the vessel from overseas managed it. When those people completed their term, the NPA dumped those people and paid them off, and recruited another team who had no idea of the workings of that vessel. So, what happened? During their first voyage, they had problems. Their second voyage was impossible to undertake. The situation was like recruiting a traffic manager from the brewery to run the port effectively. Only the brew master knows how to bottle his products. You cannot just come and make policy for the ports authority without being part of the system. It will have a negative effect and a negative impact...” **(Male/IDI/Gen Manager, Operations/CMA–CGM Shipping Nigeria Ltd /September 9, 2024/Lagos).**

These commentaries from study respondents draw upon the need to assert necessary political authority from the national leadership to avert continuous poor port performance in the maritime industry. With parliamentary standing committees of the Nigeria’s House of Representatives (2023–2027) covering shipping services, maritime safety, ports and harbours, elected parliamentarians should be trained by experts in the necessary skills required for them to function effectively and to understand the ethos of the maritime industry while they work as committee members during their political terms of office.

However, the lack of improvement for a knowledgeable population could lead to frustration and conflict as highlighted in Ukaidi (2023) where we assume that the employees whose indication, in this study, had shown huge understanding of what port performance was. In this kind of situation, the nature of employee grievance investigated by Ukaidi (2023) could have been necessitated, in part, by the problems associated with deficient performance at the seaports.

One of the interviewees for this study who was asked his opinion on the service delivery as a time-related port performance factor disclosed that:

“...we still have a lot of challenges about how our harbour system works. Like, in other parts of the world, if a vessel is arriving, all the agents need to do is book the vessel, and then the port will assign a pilot. And after the vessel reporting arrival will notify the pilots. The pilot is on standby talking to the vessel. There will not be any loss of time. Then the pilot will proceed to check the pilot quota to see to bring in the vessel. But here (*Nigerian seaports*), the case is different. We have a system where the agent of the vessel must get physically involved at the ports to check on the pilot, to follow-up on the pilot. It is a culture here that the pilot does not call a vessel. Even when you call port operation or port control, they will tell you to contact your agent. This kind of system needs to be revised to be on a global scale. We are wasting time working like this. By the time we run around all these looking for all the necessary people that will get the work done, time would have gone...” **(Male/IDI/Senior Manager, Grimaldi Agency Nigeria Ltd/August 27, 2024/Lagos)**

These comments were largely unexpected to be heard of the port industry after almost twenty years of the introduction of the landlord port governance model to restructure the port and improve port performance. When we consider the objectives behind the introduction of private investors with concessionaire licenses to operate as terminal operators, there is need to question its rationale and to ensure a periodic review, the length of terminal lease agreement notwithstanding. *Bassey, et al (2024) noted that the Federal Government of Nigeria effort to improve port efficiency led to the adoption of the landlord port model during which twenty-five terminals were concessioned under different lease agreements between 10 and 25 years. Part of the concession agreement was to undertake a Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) pact in major seaports covered in this study. These areas were covered to improve port performance. Oyenuga et al (2024)'s study on the relationship between the landlord model and port performance, with shipping traffic, cargo throughput and port facilities acting as predictors revealed that the landlord model had significant relationship with operational performance. But they recommended the tool port model for the purpose of mitigating maritime environmental threats as a way of complementing port performance.*

Further assessment of time-related variables impacting port performance hinged on the role of the NPA as the technical regulator. Another interviewee critically examined the role of the NPA. He stated that:

“...there may be a situation where there is operational constraint where an assigned pilot is already out of service and the port user is not reassigned a new pilot. In this situation, the vessel will be delayed. So, the timeline for all this is not an added advantage for the port user on the marine side. This is where NPA needs to focus on to see how best ways to handle this kind of situation. Hanging on to the possible or supposed objectives of the concessionaire agreement should not be where everything starts and ends for us to achieve professional efficiency and performance in our port system. Recently, we have been keeping records of delays from tugboats arrivals to

support the berthing of vessels. In the logbook you can see a record number of delays from tugboats managed by NPA. Nevertheless, these things can be improved for us to achieve quick vessel turnaround as it is done in other parts of the world...”
(Male/IDI/Senior Manager, Grimaldi Agency Nigeria Ltd/August 27, 2024/Lagos)

The matter of installing large notice boards and digital dashboards at the concessioned port terminals to project port operations information and scheduled incoming and sailed vessels has remained a challenge. Undoubtedly, the respondents’ opinions suggest a lack of credence in the effectiveness of installing large notice boards and digital dashboards to boost port performance. Even though, the low acceptance level implies that respondents are either neutral or slightly disagree that such installations would have a significant impact on port performance. One of the general managers of the terminals refuted this possibility. On the question of the port terminal concessionaire's compliance with disseminating of information on port operations by the port terminal operators on their notice board or public dashboards. According to him:

“...For every terminal particularly, that borders on security matters, safety that are always signs, signage, place at every strategic position from the port entrance, from the tender entrance up to the end, and you have a big sign board where they display all of this. Yes. All terminals have been doing that I will rate them 90% because I am involved. I know this as the secretary of the body of terminal operators. Thus, I am the head of the secretariat. So, all the information is being sent to me. Whatever is not clear I ask them please explain. I do this to cover as far as Calabar, Onne, Port Harcourt seaports. Whatever they are doing there we will know because we have a body called the Seaport Terminal Operators Association, and I am the secretary...”
(Male/IDI/General Manager, ENL Consortium Ltd - Terminal operator/October 6, 2024/Lagos)

The role of the Nigeria Shippers Council (NSC) is relevant in the context of the port administration and port regulation in Nigeria. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 appoints the NSC as Interim Port Economic Regulator via the Nigerian Shippers’ Council (Port Economic Regulator) Order, 2015.

Furthermore, Okpo, Udofia & Edemidiong (2021)’s examination of the prospect of deploying modern technology at Onne to overturn the port’s poor performances; and to ensure the expected ease-of-doing-business in Nigeria showed that the impact assessment of the types and age of equipment and infrastructure required some forms of improvement to meet the port’s turnaround time scheduling. Considering the histories of Nigerian seaports, and the capacities of their deep channels or port berths to handle different cargo and storage volumes, port performance at Onne seemed to have improved during the 2024 season due to the technical partnership existing with OIS Indorama Port Limited (OIPL), whose head of management acknowledged that *‘favourable cooperation between NPA and OIPL and the robust infrastructure, services and conducive environment that have been created by the NPA management’*. The port’s loading and cargo handling capacity were also affirmed to have exceeded one hundred and eighty vessels of different capacities, especially the loading 49,113 tonnes of urea in a single vessel within a draft of 11.4mteres (Nchey-Achukwu, 2024).

Theme 3

The subject of transparency in port businesses revolves round the digital transformation of the seaports for port users. The unfolding conditions of port users’ inability to access port information remain particularly challenging; and is a part of the study objectives. The study

believes that the challenges of conducting businesses using paper-based information input and output are outdated in the ports industry. Port Technology (2023) stated that, in addition to the digital transformation in the ports, with respect to transformation the way port businesses were conducted, the advances of artificial intelligence (AI) technology have assisted to reduces business costs and delays.

On the lack of transparency in port performance relating to the implementation of the landlord port governance model, the Onne seaport users, having the highest mean value revealed, implied that port activities at the Onne seaport had more instances of the absence of transparency in the implementation of the landlord port model. According to Okpo, Udofia & Edemidiong (2021), they noted that transparency has been veiled by the indeliberate act or otherwise, of creating a reform process with accompanying laws and regulations, but at the same time, observed that the legislations governing the landlord port model have been disjointed and overlapping. The lack of clarity in these regulations are the major sources and factors of corruption and have made the governance system across the ports corruptible, where terminal operators are observed to complain about unnecessary red-tape, delays at the berths, and harassments by, potentially, the security agencies working at the ports.

These assertions of corruptive influences of the security agencies in Okpo, Udofia & Edemidiong (2021) unveils insecurity certain port insecurity as a major port performance deficiency in the system. In Onwuegbuchunam, *et al* (2021), the findings revealed the presence of a substantial relationship between the security architecture adopted at the seaports and the observed performance levels from the users. While these findings may not be used to generalize for all ports around the country, there is a need for improvement and synergy for collaboration between the different security bodies of the NPA, the terminal operators and the customs services. A respondent who was interviewed on the role of the Nigerian customs at the ports commented that:

“...one of the reasons for the low performance of our port system is the irresponsibility of the customs service in the discharge of the extant duties. We often see cases of customs personnel going outside their scope of duty to harass personnel of the terminal operators and other port users. This is because there is no synergy among the several organisations serving at the ports. Synergy is the right word to use. I recently visited Tema port in Ghana to attend the Maritime Organisation for West and Central Africa (MOWCA) conference between 15-16 of last month. Over there in Tema port, we saw a unique kind of synergy between the terminal operators, the Ghanaian customs, and other security agencies. It revealed to us that once the Ghanaian customs give stamped approval, no other organisation questions that approval, whether it is the food and drug agency, standards organisation, or the port police. It means that the documents are deemed certified, and it is free to leave the port to destinations stated on the waybill. It is unfortunate that we have no such system in Nigeria. That is the major port performance challenge we have...”
(Male/IDI/Director of Research and Training, Port and Terminal Management Academy of Nigeria /October 7, 2024/Lagos).

The ideas and thoughts revealed above about the Ghanaian port systems and processes exposes the characteristics of the transparency of business conduct in Tema seaport, Ghana. In a detailed progressive assessment of the Tema seaport presented at the 11th session of the Conference of Experts on Transport, Trade Logistics, and Trade Facilitation between 23-24 October 2024 which was organised by the UNCTAD in Geneva, Ahiataku-Togobo (2024) stated that among other features of the port that while Tema seaport handled an approximate 20 million cargo tonnage and about 1.2ml TEU in the year, 2021, there was an increase of

about 70% of throughput of maritime trade, internationally at the port the following year. In terms of economy of other consumption needs, the report highlighted that electricity fuel consumption also decreased by 10% between 2022 and 2023, while electricity improved by 62.1% during the same period. Thus, in terms of financial performance indicator and transparency rating, Tema port had a good outcome.

As we noted the synergy and transparent communication at the Tema seaport among agencies working at the port, the study posed the question whether the involvement and collaboration of non-state port stakeholders such as the freight and forwarding agencies, importers, exporters, terminal operators, shipping agencies created any room for transparency and accountability in the port system. In a direct contrast to the situation in Nigeria, one of the interviewees with over three decades of port experience, who participated in this study noted that:

“...The port was established to provide import and export maritime services. So, in my opinion, the most important way to improve the port is to ensure port transparency and thereby improve performance and governance system. Transparency should be part of the port ecosystem, whether in our homes or in the kitchen. There should not be any room for suspicion. However, since there is no history of collaboration among government, private investors and agencies representing the importers and exporters, what you have here is a lot of suspicion from everyone to everyone. No one is certain by the rules and roles of each agency whereas, the appropriate thing to do was to avoid short-circuiting the system where the personnel of the government agencies and others are doing their work to serve their own ends and also changing the system to their personal benefits. That is why collaborations and involvement of several agencies are difficult to achieve. Thus, the system will not work normally...”
(Male/IDI/Chairman, Nigerian Ports Consultative Council /October 21, 2024/Lagos).

In another comment from one of the interviewees for this study, a freight forwarder and licensed custom agent with 28 years port experience, and who is representing the association of freight forwarders and customs licensed agents in the Nigerian port system, argued in a similar vein that.

“... why are we (in Nigeria) continually working like we are in the medieval period or in an analogue era. I have been to at least 30 port-location countries and I have noted how innovative their systems work. Our maritime domain needs to be innovative and to synchronize with what is happening in maritime communities across the world. We seem not to be futuristic at all. During my visit to Rotterdam port about 10 years ago, I discovered that they already had a Port Development Plan for 2030. This was a 20-year projected plan. This means that the Rotterdam port managers are thinking of ahead of lessening the burden of port businesses. These are things we should copy to and ensure their implementation to make our ports compete favourably, at least in Africa...” **(Male/IDI/National President, Association of Customs Licensed Agents of Nigeria /October 8, 2024/Lagos).**

Port Technology (2023) acknowledges the level of digitization and robotics adopted that is now in regular use at the Rotterdam. In a review of interviewees’ comments by non-government port users seem to reveal the disorganized organisation in the Nigerian port system. Our assessment of port report revealed NPA as expressing official information to stakeholders through its then Managing Director, Mr. Mohammed Bello-Koko of the development a 25-year plan National Port Master Plan in 2024. Now, one wonders what

would be the poor implementation of the landlord port model that was supposed to address certain anomalies in the port system (Albert & Adamu, (2024).

Similarly, an NPA report disclosed that port technology adoption has helped to escape lack of transparency, inefficiency and possible bureaucratic characteristics. According to Ballah (2024), information sharing has been enhanced through the adoption of key International Maritime conventions relating to digitalizing port information such as Port Community System (PCS). Nikghadam, *et al* (2023), in their study of the service reliability to avoid delays at Port of Rotterdam, acknowledges that sharing of port information links should be mutually beneficial and inter-organisational but may not always achieve the objective as organisational complexities may affect the nature of the needs of each organisation providing services at the ports.

Theme 4:

The subject of transparency is an important one that commands a general expectation in the economic life of any country, society, organisation, and especially the seaport as a maritime commercial entity. In the port system, port transparency has been revealed as part of an elaborate assessment of port governance models. Thus, for the landlord port model's implementation to ensure port performance, there is a need to ascertain how these issues align with each without the corruptive tendencies that commonly accompany the lack of transparency. According to an interview covered for this study, the general manager of a shipping agency stated that:

“...after the port concession, the port system shifted from its hitherto multiple billing system into a new fit where several billing structures were collapsed into a single billing system. This was initiated by the then Port Manager. The new billing system not only loosened the entanglements of bureaucratic into which they were built, but also drastically reduced human involvement or interference in the billings to create a lot of transparency. But today, we are seeing human interference again in the system where the tariff and billing department of Nigerian Port Authority will always want to intervene. And they have developed a system, the RIM system, that works with the Internet and that we do not have total control of. Then, transparency was the order of the day. But today, they are forcing the shipping agencies to go back to the RIM system where human interface plays a major role; where if the tariff and billing department does not initiate an invoice for you, you will not be able to pay...”

(Male/IDI/Gen Manager, Operations/CMA–CGM Shipping Nigeria Ltd /September 9, 2024/Lagos).

According to a report on the challenges of promoting transparency and efficiency in the Nigerian ports system, Caia (2023) acknowledged a significant challenge of ensuring that sea-borne vessels receive immigration clearance on time. The report revealed the presence of document tagged, the Nigerian Ports Process Manual (NPPM) that was designed to facilitate transparency and efficiency during seaport operations; and the ease of working within the seaport business community. The NPPM document also led to the formulation of Port Standing Task Team for the successful implementation of the NPPM, which was claimed to have improved port transparency through the reduction of customs' inspection time, inspection of boarding officials within half an hour. Whilst the report represents some of the official collaboration and training programmes between the Federal Ministry of Transportation and the Maritime Anti-Corruption Network that is based in the UK, the fact on the ground far outweighs the prevailing realities based on specific documents. An

interviewee narrated that the issue of hyping transparency in the port was due to the economic interests of the port users and stakeholders it could protect. According to him:

It is the work of the port regulator. Their work is to make sure the economic interest of the port is taken care of. What, then, is an economic interest? It is that interest that will affect the man, the importer, the agent, the government. This is where that economic interest is key. For example, are your tariffs transparent? Is it something that must be controlled only by the port regulator? You do not just come and institute any tariff without monitoring, checking and getting feedback on its implications to the port users. This is very necessary when considering reducing the cost of doing business in the ports. In Nigeria, our ports are the most expensive in the world because our tariffs are not properly regulated or controlled. So, when you are talking about transparency it should be to facilitate the economic interest of stakeholders where cargoes are cleared at reasonable cost, and cargo-laden vessels leave the port at good time. But, where they do not leave the port on time, who is responsible? Is it the terminal operator or the importer or the act of the regulator? This lack of proper transparency is because the NPA and Shipper's Council are not clear on royalty, concession fees, and ownership of infrastructure. **(Male/IDI/President, National Association of Managing Directors of Clearing and Forwarding Agents/August 6, 2024/Lagos).**

From these comments, one could consider that transparency within the port system could be enhanced when stakeholders such as freight forwarders, shipping agencies, and terminal operators are involved in the determination of operations costs of doing business within port environment. Transparency within the landlord port model's port system can be enhanced through participatory, informative, and accountability components.

A major stakeholder who was interviewed conceded that cargo operations are the most exorbitant in the world. It is no wonder that congestions are rare in Nigerian ports these days than they were in the 1970s under military regime. Thus, any port user would seek to maximise his or her export or import activities based on comparative advantage, as each would a more economical route to business. On the lack of port congestion under current regime, an interviewee reacted that:

“... the current institutional arrangement that excludes the non-state port stakeholders in policy making in the system is responsible for transparency. Thus, there is need to refine this landlord model after its creation for almost two decades now. We should remember before the ports were concessioned, all the stakeholders were being consulted. But in the post-port concession era, they are no more useful to be consulted. **(Male/IDI/Director of Research and Training, Port and Terminal Management Academy of Nigeria /October 7, 2024/Lagos)**

In Sislian & Jaegler (2022)'s investigation of the spread of social inclusion in the port of Montreal, their findings attested to the need for industry-wide collaboration. This is also a necessity for seaport in Nigeria. They averred that the possibility of positivity of the impact of socio-economic inclusion on related stakeholders in the process of decision-making. This study, therefore, assumes that as the government, through the technical and economic regulators seek new levels of port performance, the need to involve every major stakeholder including terminal operators, freight forwarders, shipping agencies is important for the Nigerian maritime industry.

Conclusion

The debate over centralisation versus decentralisation within the Nigerian port system reflects deeper structural, legal, and political complexities that hinder optimal port performance. While decentralisation is often lauded for its potential to enhance decision-making speed and innovation at the local level, the legal void surrounding the port reform process has constrained its full implementation. Testimonies from various port stakeholders reveal that centralisation persists not necessarily by strategic design but due to outdated legal frameworks, government inertia, and politicisation of leadership appointments. Despite efforts to introduce reforms through the landlord port model and the creation of dual regulatory structures involving the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) and the Nigerian Shippers Council (NSC), systemic inefficiencies remain entrenched. Legal limitations, delays in legislative reform, and the failure to implement independent regulatory bodies such as the National Transport Commission have all contributed to a regulatory environment that lacks the robustness necessary for effective port administration. Additionally, the politicisation of top management roles has further diluted the technical capacity required for meaningful progress, replacing professional competence with political loyalty. As such, the future of Nigeria's port governance requires not just a choice between centralised or decentralised structures, but a holistic overhaul that prioritises legal reform, institutional autonomy, and the appointment of seasoned maritime professionals into strategic positions of authority.

The findings from this study underscore the critical role of transparency, synergy, and technological innovation in improving port performance in Nigeria. While stakeholders acknowledge that the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) has made some strides—particularly in infrastructure development and digital transformation—major deficiencies remain in operational efficiency, timely information dissemination, and inter-agency collaboration. The recurring challenges of pilot delays, tugboat unavailability, and the questionable impact of notice boards highlight operational bottlenecks that must be urgently addressed. In contrast, ports like Tema and Rotterdam showcase best practices in digitalisation, strategic planning, and institutional cooperation, serving as benchmarks for Nigeria's port system. The absence of mutual trust and role clarity among port stakeholders, combined with persistent red tape and security-related harassment, has created a culture of suspicion and inefficiency. The lack of synergy among key agencies, especially customs and terminal operators, further impedes seamless operations and discourages international trade competitiveness. To move forward, there is a pressing need to institutionalise transparent governance frameworks, foster agency cooperation, embrace technological innovation, and cultivate a culture of accountability. Only through these measures can Nigerian ports transition from reactive to proactive hubs capable of supporting economic development and global trade integration.

REFERENCES

- Albert, O., & Adamu, H. J. (2024). NPA, Stakeholders Brainstorm on 25 Year's Ports Master Plan, NPA bilingual magazine, *Nigerian Ports Today*, 7(36), 46. Retrieved at: <https://nigerianports.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/NPA-Today-March-2024.pdf>

- Bassey, A. O., Apiriotu, A., & Enyioku, N. C. (2024). Landlord Ports Model and Operational Performance of Seaports in Nigeria, *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, 5 (1), 1102-1111.
- Brooks, M., & Schellinck, R. (2014). Assessing port reform performance: Efficiency vs. effectiveness. *Maritime Economics & Logistics*, 16(4), 482-498.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/mel.2014.23>
- Caia, F. (2023). Nigerian Ports: Enhancing Transparency and Efficiency, *Inside Bulletin*, Issue No. 1, <https://macn.dk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Nigerian-Ports-Enhancing-Transparency-and-Efficiency.pdf>
- Chilaka, E. M. & Aguagua, A. O. (2024). Black Scorpion and the 1970 Apapa Port Congestion – Solving Maritime Gateway-Hinterland Delivery Problems in Nigeria, *UNILAG Journal of Transport and Logistics*, 1 (1), 1-30.
- Emeghara, G. C., Nwokedi, T. C., & Nwolozi, C. N. (2018). Developing Forecasts and Trends for Post Concession Performance of Onne Seaport: Framework for Performance Improvement. *International Journal of Transportation Engineering and Technology*, 4(1), 11-19.
- Ibraheem, I. A., Mohammed, S. B., & Akanni, T. B. (2019) Enduring Legacy: Documentation of Vision and Achievement of Hadiza Bala Usman-led Administration at the Nigeria Ports Authority (NPA), a publication of the Eastern Ports, NPA. Published by the BTS Development Consult Limited
- Koech, E. K., & Obuba, R. O. (2024). Impact of Organisational Structure on the Implementation of Government-Funded Projects at Kenya Ports Authority, *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 22(3), 1991-1999
- Mlambo, C. (2021). The Impact of Port Performance on Trade: The Case of Selected African States, *Economies*, 9 (4), 2-18, <https://doi.org/10.3390/economies9040135>
- Nikghadam, S., Molkenboer, K. F., Tavasszy, L., & Rezaei, J., (2023). Information Sharing to Mitigate Delays in Port: The Case of Port of Rotterdam, *Maritime Economics & Logistics*, 25(1), 576-601.
- Ogunsiji, A. S., & Ogunsiji, O. O. (2011). Comparative ports performance efficiency measurement in developing nations: A matching framework analysis (M FA) Approach. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 18(4), 625-631.
- Okonjo-Iweala, G. N. (2013) Measurement of Efficiency Level in Nigerian Seaport after Reform Policy Implementation: Case Study of Onne and Rivers Seaport, *Nigeria. IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM)* Volume 12, Issue 5 (Jul. - Aug. 2013), PP 46-55
- Okpo, A. A, Udofia, E. K., & Edemidiong, E. E. (2021). The Impact of Modern Technology on Port Administration in Nigeria, *AKSU Journal of Social Sciences* 1(2), 111-12
- Onwuegbuchunam, D. E. (2020). Port Deregulation and Productivity in Nigeria: Some Implications for Economic Regulators. *Journal of Sustainable Development of Transport and Logistics*, 5(1), 133-140
- Oyenuga, A., Dooms, M., Sys, C., & Verhoeven, P. (2024). An Institutional Appraisal of Nigeria's Maritime Port Reforms and the Implications for African and Global Port Reforms. An Abstract from the annual Conference of the International Association of Maritime Economics (IAME) held June 25 – 28, 2024 in Valencia, Spain

- Parola, F., & Musso, E. (2007). Market structures and competitive strategies: the carrier-stevedore arm-wrestling in northern European ports. *Maritime Policy & Management*, 34(3), 259-278.
- Sen, M., Sequeira, S., & Djankov, S. (2014). Corruption and firm behavior: Evidence from African ports. *Journal of International Economics*, 94(2), 277-294. Cited in Sequeira, S., & Djankov, S. (2008). On the waterfront: an empirical study of corruption in ports. Mimeograph, Harvard University.
- Sislian, L., & Jaegler, A. (2022). The Spread of Social Inclusion in the Maritime Industry: A Social Study, *The International Journal of Business Ethics and Governance*, 5(1), 38-57.
- Theo Notteboom, Athanasios Pallis and Jean-Paul Rodrigue (2022) *Emerging Issues in Ports and Maritime Shipping in Port Economics, Management and Policy*, New York: Routledge.
- Ukaidi, C. (October 19, 2023). The Impact of Management Strategies on Employee Grievances in Nigeria Ports Authority, Calabar, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4607221>
- Zhang, Q., Zheng, S., Geerlings, H., & El Makhoulfi, A. (2019). Port Governance Revisited: How to Govern and for What Purpose? *Transport Policy*, 77, 46-57.