

The Relevance of Transformational Leadership for Strengthening Ecumenical Unity and Institutional Renewal in the Christian Council of Togo

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Abstract

Ecumenical institutions play a vital role in fostering Christian unity and providing a collective moral witness within diverse ecclesial and socio-political contexts. In Togo, the Christian Council of Togo (CCT) was established to promote unity among Protestant churches and engage society on issues of justice, peace, and development. However, the Council continues to face challenges related to leadership effectiveness, internal cohesion, and public credibility. This study examines the relevance of transformational leadership for strengthening ecumenical unity and institutional renewal within the CCT. Adopting a qualitative, interpretivist approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with approximately thirty participants, including national and regional leaders, member church representatives, and youth and women involved in ecumenical activities. Thematic analysis was used to interpret participants' experiences and perceptions. Findings indicate that the CCT's limited effectiveness is shaped by internal factors such as leadership rivalries, weak governance, denominational competition, communication gaps, and resource conflicts, as well as external pressures including political sensitivities and socio-economic constraints. The study concludes that transformational leadership, complemented by servant and relational approaches, provides a practical framework for promoting unity, restoring credibility, and enhancing institutional effectiveness.

Keywords: *Ecumenism, Transformational Leadership, Christian Council of Togo, Ecumenical Unity, Church Leadership*

1.0 Introduction

Ecumenical institutions play an important role in fostering Christian unity and providing a collective moral voice within societies marked by religious diversity, political complexity, and social change. By bringing together churches from different traditions, national Christian councils seek to embody unity in diversity while coordinating common action in areas such as peacebuilding, social justice, and national development. In many African contexts, these bodies have historically been influential actors in public life, particularly during periods of political transition or social crisis. Nevertheless, sustaining unity and effectiveness within ecumenical institutions remains a persistent challenge, especially where leadership practices and governance structures are weak or contested (Gifford, 1998).

The Christian Council of Togo (CCT) was established to serve as an ecumenical platform for Protestant churches in Togo, with the mandate to promote Christian unity, strengthen cooperation among member churches, and offer a credible Christian witness in society. Over time, the Council has been recognized as a significant ecclesial actor within the Togolese

religious landscape (Ross, Asamoah-Gyadu, & Johnson, 2017; World Council of Churches, 2006). However, in recent years, concerns have emerged regarding its ability to fulfil this mandate effectively. Member churches and observers have pointed to internal divisions, declining participation, weakened advocacy, and reduced institutional credibility. These concerns suggest deeper leadership and organizational challenges that warrant systematic scholarly examination (Kobia, 2003; Gifford, 2009).

Leadership has increasingly been identified in church studies and organizational scholarship as a decisive factor in shaping institutional performance and sustainability. In ecumenical contexts, leadership is particularly complex because authority is largely moral and relational rather than hierarchical or coercive. Effective leadership, therefore, depends on the ability to inspire trust, manage diversity, and foster voluntary collaboration among autonomous churches (Wainwright, 1986). Where leadership becomes personalized, competitive, or insufficiently accountable, ecumenical unity is easily weakened, and collective action becomes difficult to sustain.

Transformational leadership theory offers a useful framework for analyzing these challenges. Transformational leadership emphasizes the role of leaders in articulating shared vision, modelling ethical integrity, empowering followers, and encouraging innovation and learning (Bass, 1985), building on the earlier work of Burns (1978).

These elements resonate strongly with Christian leadership values and with the practical demands of ecumenical institutions. Unlike transactional leadership, which focuses on exchanges and compliance, transformational leadership seeks to mobilize commitment around shared moral purpose, making it particularly relevant for value-driven organizations such as churches (Kiggundu, 2002; Nkomo & Kriek, 2011).

This article examines *The Relevance of Transformational Leadership for Strengthening Ecumenical Unity and Institutional Renewal in the Christian Council of Togo*. Drawing on qualitative data from interviews with leaders within the CCT and its member churches, the study seeks to answer two central questions: How do leadership practices and challenges shape ecumenical unity and institutional performance within the CCT, and how can transformational leadership help address the identified challenges? By addressing these questions, the article contributes to broader discussions on ecumenical leadership in African church contexts and offers insights that may inform both scholarship and practice.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows: the next section situates the study within broader debates on ecumenism and leadership in the African church context. This is followed

by a presentation of the theoretical framework and a detailed description of the research methodology. The subsequent section presents and analyses the findings of the study. The final section discusses the implications of these findings for ecumenical leadership practice and institutional renewal within the Christian Council of Togo.

2.0 Ecumenism, Leadership, and the African Church Context

Ecumenism refers to the theological and practical movement that seeks to promote unity, cooperation, and mutual recognition among diverse Christian traditions, grounded in the conviction that the Church is one in Christ despite denominational divisions (Kärkkäinen, 2003; World Council of Churches, 2013). In the African church context, ecumenism is both a theological conviction and a practical response to social, political, and ecclesial realities. The modern ecumenical movement emerged from the recognition that Christian disunity undermines the credibility of the Church's witness and weakens its capacity to address shared challenges (Rouse & Neill, 1954; World Council of Churches, 2013).

Historically, the global ecumenical movement developed through key initiatives such as the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 and the subsequent formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948, which sought to foster visible unity and cooperation among churches worldwide (Rouse & Neill, 1954; World Council of Churches, 2013). These developments provided an institutional and theological foundation for ecumenism, both as dialogue and as common action (Kärkkäinen, 2003). Within this global trajectory, African churches have actively appropriated and reshaped ecumenical ideals in response to their own contexts (Bediako, 1995). In Africa, where Christianity has experienced rapid growth alongside increasing denominational diversity, ecumenical institutions such as national Christian councils have become important platforms for cooperation, dialogue, and public engagement (Kobia, 2003). These bodies seek to translate the biblical vision of unity into concrete institutional practice while respecting the diversity of theological traditions and ecclesial identities (World Council of Churches, 2013).

The theological foundations of ecumenism are deeply rooted in Scripture and Christian tradition. The prayer of Jesus "that they may all be one" (John 17:21) has long been understood as both a spiritual aspiration and an ethical imperative for the Church's life and mission. This vision of unity is further reinforced in the New Testament through the apostolic witness. In Ephesians 4:3-6, believers are urged to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," grounded in the affirmation of "one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith,

one baptism.” Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, the Church is described as the body of Christ, where diversity of members is essential yet ordered toward unity and mutual interdependence. The call to unity is also expressed in Philippians 2:1-5, where believers are exhorted to be “of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind,” reflecting the humility and self-giving character of Christ. Together, these texts underscore that ecumenical unity is not merely institutional but deeply relational, rooted in shared identity in Christ and expressed through love, humility, and mutual commitment. Scholars have emphasized that unity in diversity requires intentional leadership capable of nurturing trust, facilitating dialogue, and sustaining commitment over time (Wainwright, 1986). Where such leadership is lacking, ecumenical structures tend to operate symbolically, with limited capacity to generate substantive transformation.

In Africa, ecumenism has been shaped by historical and contextual factors, including the legacy of missionary Christianity, colonialism, and post-independence nation-building. Mission churches often introduced denominational structures and leadership models that reflected Western ecclesial traditions, while African cultural values emphasized communal life, consensus, and relational authority (Bediako, 1995; Sanneh, 2003). The interaction between these influences has produced complex leadership cultures within African churches and ecumenical bodies (Bediako, 1995). While ecumenical institutions have provided spaces for cooperation, they have also been sites of tension, particularly where denominational identity, power, and access to resources intersect. Leadership occupies a central place in navigating these tensions. Ecumenical leadership differs significantly from leadership within single denominations, as it relies less on formal authority and more on moral credibility, persuasion, and consensus-building (Kobia, 2003; Wainwright, 1986). Leaders in ecumenical settings must balance loyalty to their own traditions with commitment to the collective good. Kobia (2003) argues that ecumenical leadership requires the capacity to “hold together diversity without erasing difference,” a task that demands humility, patience, and vision. Where leadership becomes competitive or exclusionary, ecumenical unity is easily compromised.

African church leadership has been widely discussed in scholarly literature as both a strength and a challenge. On the one hand, churches have often provided moral leadership in contexts of political instability, social injustice, and economic hardship. On the other hand, leadership struggles, including personalization of authority, lack of accountability, and governance weaknesses, have undermined the credibility of church institutions (Gathogo, 2008). These

challenges are particularly acute in ecumenical bodies, where leadership legitimacy depends on trust across denominational boundaries rather than hierarchical control.

Denominationalism poses a further challenge to ecumenical leadership in Africa. As churches seek to grow, maintain visibility, and secure resources, competition can overshadow cooperation. Scholars note that denominational rivalry often manifests in struggles over representation, influence, and agenda-setting within ecumenical institutions (Phiri, 2004). In contexts of limited financial resources, such competition is intensified, placing additional ethical demands on leadership. Effective ecumenical leadership must therefore address not only theological differences but also underlying power dynamics and material realities.

Beyond internal ecclesial dynamics, African ecumenical bodies are also shaped by their engagement with the public sphere. National Christian councils have historically played significant roles in advocacy, peacebuilding, and social development. During periods of political transition, churches have often been among the few institutions capable of mobilizing moral authority and public trust (De Gruchy, 1995). This public role, however, exposes ecumenical institutions to political pressure and risk. Leaders must navigate delicate relationships with the state while remaining faithful to the Church's prophetic calling. Where leadership lacks unity or clarity, ecumenical bodies tend to adopt cautious or ambiguous positions, thereby weakening their public witness.

Cultural expectations surrounding leadership further complicate the African ecumenical context. In many societies, leadership is associated with seniority, authority, and control, values that may conflict with participatory and collaborative leadership models. These cultural norms influence both how leaders exercise authority and how followers respond to it. Bediako (1995) observes that African Christian leadership is often situated at the intersection of communal values and hierarchical structures, requiring careful negotiation to avoid authoritarianism or fragmentation. Recent scholarship increasingly calls for leadership models that are relational, ethical, and transformative in addressing these challenges. Traditional managerial or authoritarian approaches have proven inadequate for sustaining unity and credibility in complex ecclesial environments. Instead, leadership that emphasizes shared vision, moral integrity, empowerment, and learning is seen as more capable of fostering resilient ecumenical institutions (Roxburgh & Romanuk, 2006). This shift in leadership thinking provides an important backdrop for considering transformational leadership as a relevant framework for ecumenical renewal.

Ecumenism in the African church context is deeply intertwined with questions of leadership. Ecumenical unity cannot be sustained through institutional arrangements alone; it requires leadership that can navigate diversity, manage power responsibly, and articulate a compelling common purpose. The challenges facing the Christian Council of Togo reflect broader patterns within African ecumenical institutions, where leadership weaknesses often undermine unity and public witness. Situating the findings within a broader African context enhances the analytical depth of this study by highlighting both shared and context-specific leadership challenges across ecumenical bodies. Similar to the Christian Council of Togo (CCT), ecumenical organizations in countries such as Ghana and Nigeria face persistent challenges related to leadership coordination, institutional credibility, and sustaining unity among diverse denominational groups.

In Ghana, the Christian Council of Ghana has historically played a significant role in national development and public advocacy. However, recent studies indicate that it faces challenges related to declining youth participation, generational leadership gaps, and difficulties in maintaining relevance in a rapidly changing religious landscape characterized by the rise of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013; Aidoo, 2020). These dynamics parallel those in the CCT, where the limited inclusion of youth and emerging leaders constrains institutional renewal and long-term sustainability.

Similarly, in Nigeria, the Christian Association of Nigeria operates within a highly complex socio-religious and political environment. Research shows that leadership challenges within this body include politicization of leadership roles, internal denominational tensions, and difficulties in presenting a unified voice on national issues (Kukah, 2012; Marshall, 2009). More recent analyses highlight how leadership fragmentation and competition among church blocs can weaken collective advocacy and reduce institutional effectiveness (Ojo, 2021). These issues resonate with the challenges observed in the CCT, particularly regarding weak coordination mechanisms and limited consensus-building among member churches.

Across these contexts, a common pattern emerges: ecumenical institutions struggle to balance diversity with unity, maintain credibility in changing religious environments, and adapt leadership structures to contemporary realities. However, differences also exist. While Nigerian ecumenical leadership is often shaped by political engagement and interreligious tensions, Ghanaian and Togolese contexts are more influenced by internal organizational dynamics, such as governance structures, participation, and vision alignment.

This comparative perspective underscores the need for leadership approaches that are not only transformational but also contextually responsive. It reinforces the relevance of integrating transformational leadership with relational, servant, and missional perspectives to address shared African ecclesial challenges while remaining sensitive to local realities. By situating the CCT within this broader regional discourse, the study contributes to African leadership scholarship by demonstrating that ecumenical renewal requires both context-specific strategies and cross-contextual learning.

3.0 Theoretical Framework: Transformational Leadership

This study is anchored in transformational leadership theory as the central analytical framework for examining leadership challenges and renewal within the Christian Council of Togo. Transformational leadership is particularly appropriate for ecclesial and ecumenical contexts because it emphasizes shared values, moral purpose, relational influence, and inspiring commitment rather than hierarchical control or transactional exchange (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). In institutions where authority is relational and morally grounded, leadership effectiveness hinges on the capacity to build trust, mobilize shared commitment, and sustain unity across diverse theological and institutional traditions.

Transformational leadership was first articulated by Burns (1978), who described it as a process in which leaders and followers elevate one another's motivation and morality. Bass (1985) later operationalized this into four core elements: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Recent literature continues to affirm the relevance of these dimensions while also highlighting the need to contextualize transformational leadership within specific cultural and institutional environments (Northouse, 2022). Moreover, systematic reviews suggest that transformational leadership remains a dominant model in leadership research, influencing organizational performance and follower motivation across sectors (Agazu et al., 2025).

Idealized influence refers to ethical role modeling that fosters trust and legitimacy. In ecclesial contexts, credibility is deeply tied to moral integrity. Christian leadership literature consistently emphasizes that ethical character and integrity are foundational to leadership effectiveness in faith-based organizations (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004). Recent research in faith-based educational settings highlights how transformational leadership grounded in ethical and spiritual values enhances organizational culture, community cohesion, and shared purpose (Akira et al., 2025). However, critics note potential risks when charismatic authority

overshadows institutional accountability, leading to uncritical followership or pseudo-transformational behaviours that prioritize self-interest over collective good (Tourish, 2013; Stock et al., 2023).

Inspirational motivation involves articulating a compelling shared vision that aligns individual and collective purpose. Transformational leaders communicate high expectations and meaning, which is crucial for fostering unity among diverse denominational members. Recent studies on value-based leadership highlight that such motivational behaviours are increasingly viewed as integral to leadership effectiveness in both religious and secular settings (Samul, 2024).

Intellectual stimulation encourages innovation, dialogue, and critical engagement. In ecclesial contexts with rich theological diversity, this dimension supports constructive engagement across traditions without enforcing uniformity. Contemporary leadership research underscores the importance of adaptive and learning-oriented leadership in navigating complex social change (Heifetz et al., 2009), a concept that resonates with ecumenical dialogue and leadership renewal.

Individualized consideration focuses on mentoring, empowerment, and inclusion. Transformational leaders attend to followers' developmental needs, strengthening participation and organizational resilience. This aligns with Christian values of community care and mutual support. Studies of inclusive and servant leadership stress the importance of attentiveness to underrepresented voices, such as youth and women, in enhancing organisational relevance (Shore et al., 2018).

Despite its strengths, transformational leadership has limitations. Scholars note conceptual overlap and measurement challenges when distinguishing it from other value-based leadership approaches, including authentic, ethical, and servant leadership (Stock et al., 2023). Moreover, emerging meta-analytic evidence suggests that while transformational leadership predicts positive outcomes, other leadership styles (e.g., servant leadership) may more strongly explain intrinsic follower commitment and perceived insider status (Frontiers research, 2025).

To address these critiques and broaden interpretive insight, this framework integrates complementary leadership perspectives:

Servant leadership, which emphasizes humility, service to others, and follower well-being (Greenleaf, 1977; Eva et al., 2019). While servant leadership shares moral foundations with transformational leadership, scholars caution that its measurement and theoretical boundaries

remain contested, necessitating careful integration rather than substitution (Lemoine et al., 2025).

Relational leadership, which conceptualizes leadership as emergent through social interaction, dialogue, and trust rather than positional authority (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Relational leadership is particularly significant because it shifts the focus from authority and position to relationships, trust, and dialogue. In contexts such as ecumenical institutions, where unity depends on collaboration among diverse actors, leadership cannot be imposed but must emerge through genuine interaction and mutual understanding. This perspective highlights that sustainable unity is not achieved through structures alone but through the quality of relationships cultivated among leaders and member communities.

Missional leadership, which situates leadership within the *missio Dei* (God's mission), emphasizing discernment of divine purpose and theological orientation toward faithful witness and social engagement (Roxburgh & Romanuk, 2006). Missional leadership provides a meaningful theological grounding by situating leadership within the *missio Dei*. It serves as a reminder that leadership in Christian contexts is not merely about institutional maintenance or organizational efficiency, but about participating in God's ongoing work in the world. From this standpoint, leadership becomes a process of discernment, requiring attentiveness to both spiritual direction and contextual realities. This perspective challenges leaders to move beyond internal concerns and align their actions with a broader purpose of service, witness, and transformation in society.

Taken together, this integrative framework conceptualizes leadership as ethical, relational, visionary, inclusive, and mission-oriented, offering a comprehensive lens for analyzing leadership dynamics within ecumenical institutions. By grounding the study in this framework, the analysis moves beyond descriptive accounts to provide deep interpretive insights into how leadership practices shape ecumenical unity, institutional credibility, and transformation in complex contexts.

4.0 Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore leadership challenges and ecumenical unity within the Christian Council of Togo (CCT). A qualitative design was appropriate because the study focused on understanding participants' experiences and perceptions of leadership practices within an ecumenical institution rather than measuring variables (Creswell, 2014). The research was guided by an interpretivist paradigm, which views

leadership as a socially constructed and relational process shaped by ecclesial and socio-political contexts (Bryman, 2016).

A case study design was employed, with the CCT examined as a bounded institutional context. This design enabled an in-depth analysis of leadership dynamics within their real-life setting (Yin, 2018). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with approximately thirty purposively selected participants (n=30), including national and regional CCT leaders, representatives of member churches, and selected youth and women leaders. Interviews lasted between thirty and forty-five minutes, were audio-recorded with informed consent, and supplemented by field notes.

Data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. While transformational leadership theory informed the analysis, themes were generated inductively to foreground participants' perspectives. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, and confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw were strictly observed (Israel & Hay, 2006).

5.0 Findings and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the key findings of the study in relation to leadership challenges and ecumenical unity within the Christian Council of Togo (CCT). The discussion integrates participants' perspectives with the theoretical framework of transformational leadership and relevant scholarly literature, in line with APA referencing standards. Rather than treating findings and discussion as separate components, the section adopts an interpretive approach in which empirical evidence is analysed and discussed concurrently.

5.1 Internal Leadership Challenges as a Basis for Transformational Leadership

The findings of this study indicate that internal leadership challenges are among the most significant obstacles to ecumenical unity within the Christian Council of Togo (CCT). However, beyond merely representing institutional weaknesses, these challenges provide a critical basis for understanding the relevance of transformational leadership in fostering ecumenical unity. Participants consistently emphasized that while external pressures shape the Council's operating environment, the erosion of unity is largely rooted in internal leadership practices, governance deficiencies, and relational dynamics. These realities point to the need for a leadership approach capable of transforming both structures and relationships within the Council.

One of the most prominent challenges identified was leadership rivalry and competition for influence. Participants described a leadership culture in which positions are sometimes perceived as avenues for personal authority, denominational visibility, or access to limited resources rather than as opportunities for service. Such perceptions foster suspicion and weaken collaboration among member churches. This finding reflects Burns' (1978) argument that leadership ceases to be transformational when it is driven by self-interest rather than a shared moral purpose. It also aligns with recent studies on African church leadership, which show that competition for influence and institutional visibility often undermines cooperation and shared mission (Adogame, 2021; Öhlmann et al., 2020). In contrast, transformational leadership emphasizes collective vision, moral responsibility, and commitment to the common good, making it particularly relevant for overcoming rivalry and restoring unity in ecumenical settings.

Closely linked to leadership rivalry is the weakness of governance and decision-making structures within the CCT. Participants noted that leadership roles are not always clearly defined and that decision-making processes often lack transparency and consistency. As a result, decisions are frequently delayed, contested, or unevenly implemented, leading to frustration and disengagement among member churches. This situation highlights the need for transformational leadership that aligns institutional systems with shared vision and values. As Bass (1998) argues, transformational leadership is effective only when organizational structures support accountability, participation, and coherence.

Denominational competition emerged as another major internal challenge. While theological diversity is an inherent characteristic of ecumenical bodies, participants indicated that differences in doctrine, ecclesial culture, and worship practice are not always managed constructively. In the absence of intentional dialogue and inclusive leadership, denominational identity often takes precedence over ecumenical commitment. This finding supports Wainwright's (1986) assertion that unity in diversity requires sustained leadership effort. Transformational leadership, with its emphasis on inclusivity and shared identity, provides a framework for managing diversity in ways that strengthen rather than fragment unity.

Communication breakdowns further exacerbate these internal leadership challenges. Participants reported that information flow within the CCT is often irregular and dependent on informal networks, leaving some churches feeling excluded from important discussions and decisions. Poor communication undermines transparency, reduces collective ownership, and fuels mistrust. From a relational leadership perspective, communication is central to trust-

building and shared meaning-making (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Transformational leadership directly addresses this gap by promoting open communication, participatory engagement, and the co-creation of vision, which are increasingly recognized as essential for leadership effectiveness in contemporary African church contexts (Kgatle, 2022).

Resource-related tensions also play a significant role in shaping internal leadership dynamics. In a context of limited financial and material resources, decisions regarding allocation are highly sensitive. Participants expressed concern that perceived inequities intensify competition and suspicion among member churches. These tensions highlight the ethical dimension of leadership, particularly the need for fairness and accountability. Transformational leadership, grounded in ethical integrity and transparency, is essential for ensuring that resource management contributes to unity rather than division (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004), especially in contexts where accountability challenges remain prevalent in African church institutions (Adedibu, 2023).

In all, these findings demonstrate that internal leadership challenges within the CCT are deeply relational, structural, and ethical in nature. More importantly, they reveal that existing leadership practices are insufficient for sustaining ecumenical unity. Transformational leadership provides a relevant framework for addressing these challenges by emphasizing shared vision, moral integrity, inclusivity, and relational engagement (Bass, 1985). These findings are consistent with patterns observed in other African ecumenical bodies, where leadership challenges include limited inclusivity, weak coordination, and difficulties in sustaining a shared vision (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013; Ojo, 2021; Kgatle, 2022). The internal challenges identified in this study, therefore, do not merely describe institutional weaknesses; they justify the need for a transformation of leadership culture within the CCT.

5.2 External Contextual Pressures and the Need for Transformational Leadership

Beyond internal leadership challenges, the findings reveal that the Christian Council of Togo operates within a complex external environment that significantly shapes its leadership practices, unity, and institutional performance. These external pressures not only constrain the Council's operations but also reinforce the need for transformational leadership that is contextually aware, adaptive, and ethically grounded.

One of the most influential external pressures identified relates to the political environment in Togo. Participants noted that political sensitivity, fear of reprisals, and concerns about being perceived as partisan often limit the CCT's willingness to speak clearly on issues of governance,

justice, and human rights. This finding aligns with De Gruchy's (1995) observation that church-state relations in Africa often require a delicate balance between prophetic witness and institutional survival. Recent African scholarship further emphasizes that church leadership must navigate political pressures while maintaining prophetic integrity and public credibility (Kaunda, 2020). In such a context, transformational leadership is essential, as it requires moral courage, ethical clarity, and the ability to inspire collective action despite external constraints.

Socio-economic constraints also emerged as a major pressure affecting the Council's operations. Participants highlighted chronic financial limitations, dependence on external funding, and the lack of sustainable income-generating mechanisms as factors that restrict programme implementation. These conditions intensify internal competition and strain leadership relationships. From an ethical perspective, resource scarcity heightens the need for transparency and fairness in leadership decisions (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004). Transformational leadership is particularly relevant here, as it promotes trust, accountability, and shared ownership even in contexts of scarcity, a challenge widely noted in contemporary African church leadership studies (Adedibu, 2023).

Public expectations constitute another significant contextual factor. Participants observed that churches in Togo are widely regarded as moral authorities and expected to provide guidance, mediation, and advocacy during social or political crises. However, when internal divisions prevent the CCT from responding clearly and consistently, public confidence diminishes. This finding supports Phiri's (2004) argument that the credibility of ecumenical bodies depends on coherence between internal unity and external witness. Transformational leadership, by fostering shared vision and internal cohesion, strengthens the Council's capacity to meet these expectations effectively.

Global and continental ecumenical influences further shape the external environment of the CCT. While participation in international networks provides access to resources and opportunities, participants expressed concern that externally driven agendas sometimes fail to align with local realities. This dynamic can weaken local ownership and place additional pressure on leadership. Scholars such as Kobia (2003) caution that dependence on external actors may reproduce power imbalances and limit contextual responsiveness. Transformational leadership addresses this challenge by emphasizing contextual discernment, local ownership, and participatory decision-making, which are increasingly recognized as essential for sustainable leadership in African ecclesial contexts (Kgatle, 2022).

Cultural expectations surrounding leadership also influence how the CCT operates within its external environment. Participants noted that societal norms often associate leadership with hierarchy, authority, and control, values that may conflict with participatory and collaborative models. As Bediako (1995) observes, African Christian leadership exists at the intersection of communal values and hierarchical traditions. Transformational leadership provides a way of navigating these tensions by integrating respect for cultural contexts with a commitment to inclusivity, shared leadership, and empowerment.

These external pressures highlight the complexity of the environment in which the CCT operates. They also reinforce the limitations of traditional or hierarchical leadership approaches in addressing contemporary challenges. Transformational leadership offers a relevant framework for navigating these pressures by combining contextual awareness, ethical integrity, and collective vision (Northouse, 2022).

5.3 Effects on Ecumenical Unity, Advocacy, and Institutional Credibility

The interaction between internal leadership challenges and external contextual pressures has had significant effects on the Christian Council of Togo, particularly in relation to ecumenical unity, public advocacy, and institutional credibility.

Ecumenical unity has been one of the most visibly affected dimensions. Participants indicated that unity within the CCT has become increasingly fragile and, in some cases, largely symbolic. This finding reinforces Wainwright's (1986) argument that ecumenical unity requires continuous leadership effort. Recent African studies further confirm that ecumenical fragmentation often results in symbolic unity without effective collaboration (Kgatle, 2022).

The weakening of unity has had direct implications for advocacy and public witness. Internal divisions often prevent the Council from articulating clear and unified positions. This reflects broader African realities in which church institutions are expected to serve as moral voices despite internal constraints (Kaunda, 2020). Institutional credibility has also declined, particularly due to weak accountability and governance challenges. These patterns align with broader concerns about leadership and legitimacy in African church contexts (Adedibu, 2023). Participation of youth and women has been significantly affected. Limited inclusion reduces institutional sustainability. This reflects ongoing calls for inclusive leadership in African Christianity (Adogame, 2021).

These findings highlight the urgent need for leadership renewal grounded in transformational principles.

5.4 Transformational Leadership as a Pathway for Institutional Renewal

The findings indicate that transformational leadership is widely perceived as a viable pathway for renewing the CCT. Participants emphasized the importance of shared vision, ethical integrity, inclusivity, and collaboration. These expectations align with broader shifts toward participatory and contextually responsive leadership models in African Christianity (Niemandt, 2019; Kgatle, 2022). Participants also highlighted the need for leadership that fosters trust and unity. This aligns with recent scholarship emphasizing collaborative leadership in African church contexts (Adogame, 2021). Transformational leadership, therefore, emerges as a practical and contextually grounded pathway for institutional renewal, capable of restoring unity, strengthening credibility, and enhancing public witness within the evolving realities of African Christianity (Kaunda, 2020; Öhlmann et al., 2020).

6.0 Implications for Ecumenical Leadership Practice

The findings of this study have important implications for ecumenical leadership practice, particularly within African church contexts characterized by denominational diversity, socio-political sensitivity, and high public expectations of moral leadership. By highlighting the central role of leadership in shaping ecumenical unity, credibility, and effectiveness, the study underscores the need for intentional leadership renewal that is both theologically grounded and contextually responsive.

One key implication concerns the understanding and exercise of authority within ecumenical institutions. The findings suggest that leadership practices rooted in positional power, denominational dominance, or personal influence are incompatible with the relational nature of ecumenical bodies. Because ecumenical authority is largely moral rather than hierarchical, leaders must cultivate trust through integrity, transparency, and consistency. Transformational leadership provides a framework for reimagining authority as service-oriented and vision-driven, aligning leadership practice with Christian understandings of stewardship and shared ministry (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004).

The study also points to the importance of participatory and inclusive leadership practices. The marginalization of youth, women, and smaller denominations not only undermines principles of justice and equality but also weakens institutional sustainability and relevance. Ecumenical

bodies that fail to create inclusive leadership pathways risk leadership stagnation and declining engagement, particularly among younger generations. Transformational leadership's emphasis on individualized consideration highlights the need for intentional mentoring, capacity building, and shared decision-making processes that empower diverse voices within the ecumenical community (Northouse, 2022).

Ethical leadership emerges as another critical implication. The erosion of institutional credibility within the Christian Council of Togo was closely linked to perceptions of weak accountability, inconsistent decision-making, and a lack of transparency. For ecumenical institutions that claim moral authority in society, ethical leadership is not optional but foundational. Transformational leadership's moral orientation, as articulated by Burns (1978), emphasizes the elevation of both leaders and followers toward shared ethical purpose. Embedding ethical standards within governance structures and leadership practices is, therefore, essential for restoring trust and sustaining public witness.

The findings further suggest that ecumenical leadership must be equipped to engage external contexts with discernment and courage. Political sensitivity, socio-economic constraints, and global ecumenical influences place complex demands on leadership. Rather than retreating into caution or institutional self-preservation, leaders are called to interpret these realities in light of the Church's mission. Missional leadership perspectives reinforce the need for leadership that discerns and participates in God's activity in the world, enabling ecumenical bodies to engage society with both humility and prophetic clarity (Roxburgh & Romanuk, 2006).

Institutional implications are also evident. Leadership renewal cannot depend solely on individual leaders; it must be supported by organizational systems that reinforce shared values. Clear governance structures, transparent communication channels, and accountability mechanisms are necessary to institutionalize transformational leadership practices. Without such alignment between leadership values and institutional systems, efforts at renewal risk being short-lived or unevenly implemented (Bass, 1998).

Beyond the specific case of the Christian Council of Togo, these implications resonate with challenges facing other ecumenical institutions in Africa and beyond. National Christian councils and similar bodies operate within comparable contexts of diversity, limited resources, and public expectation. The insights offered by this study, therefore, contribute to broader conversations on ecumenical leadership renewal, suggesting that transformational leadership,

enriched by servant, relational, and missional perspectives, offers a viable pathway for strengthening unity, credibility, and effectiveness.

7.0 Conclusion

This article has examined leadership challenges affecting ecumenical unity within the Christian Council of Togo and has explored the relevance of transformational leadership as a framework for institutional renewal. Situated within the broader African ecumenical context, the study demonstrates that leadership is a decisive factor shaping the effectiveness, credibility, and sustainability of ecumenical institutions. While external political, socio-economic, and cultural pressures influence the operating environment of the CCT, the findings show that internal leadership practices and governance dynamics play a more determining role in either mitigating or intensifying these pressures.

The analysis revealed that leadership rivalry, weak governance structures, denominational competition, communication breakdowns, and tensions over limited resources have significantly undermined ecumenical unity within the Christian Council of Togo. These internal challenges have weakened trust among member churches and constrained the Council's capacity for collective action. At the same time, external contextual pressures, including political sensitivity, public expectations, and dependence on global ecumenical networks, have further limited the Council's public engagement and reinforced internal fragilities. Consistent with existing scholarship on African church leadership, the study confirms that ecumenical institutions are particularly vulnerable when leadership lacks moral credibility, participatory orientation, and strategic clarity (Gathogo, 2008; Phiri, 2004).

A central contribution of this article lies in its application of transformational leadership theory to an African ecumenical context. The findings demonstrate strong alignment between the core elements of transformational leadership, shared vision, ethical integrity, empowerment, and intellectual stimulation and participants' expectations of effective ecumenical leadership. Transformational leadership provides a conceptual lens through which leadership challenges within the CCT can be understood not merely as administrative shortcomings but as deficits in vision, ethics, and relational engagement. As Burns (1978) argues, leadership becomes transformative when it elevates leaders and followers toward shared moral purpose rather than reinforcing self-interest or institutional preservation.

The study further shows that transformational leadership is most effective in ecclesial contexts when integrated with servant, relational, and missional leadership perspectives. Servant

leadership grounds transformational vision in humility and service, guarding against the personalization of authority (Greenleaf, 1977). Relational leadership emphasizes trust, dialogue, and shared meaning-making as foundations for unity across diversity (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Missional leadership situates leadership practice within the broader mission of God, reminding ecumenical institutions that unity serves a purpose beyond organizational survival (Roxburgh & Romanuk, 2006). Together, these perspectives offer a holistic framework that is both theologically faithful and contextually responsive.

The findings also underscore that leadership renewal must be institutionalized rather than personalized to produce lasting change. Reliance on individual charisma or goodwill is insufficient for sustaining transformation. Instead, transformational values must be embedded within governance systems, leadership development processes, and accountability mechanisms. This aligns with leadership scholarship emphasizing the need for coherence between leadership values and organizational structures as a condition for sustainable change (Bass, 1998).

Beyond the specific case of the Christian Council of Togo, this study contributes to wider discussions on ecumenical leadership in Africa. Many national Christian councils face similar challenges arising from denominational diversity, political complexity, and changing social expectations. The Togolese case illustrates how leadership practices can either deepen fragmentation or foster unity and credibility. By offering empirically grounded insights into these dynamics, the article provides a reference point for ecumenical bodies seeking to renew their leadership cultures and public witness.

The future effectiveness of the Christian Council of Togo, and similar ecumenical institutions, depends largely on the quality and orientation of leadership. Transformational leadership, enriched by servant, relational, and missional perspectives, offers a viable pathway for restoring unity, strengthening institutional credibility, and revitalizing public engagement. For ecumenical bodies committed to embodying unity in diversity, leadership renewal is not merely an organizational necessity but a theological imperative.

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