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Ethical Governance in Urban Environmental Management: A Nigerian Perspective

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Abstract: This study examines the critical role of ethical governance in addressing Nigeria's urban environmental challenges exacerbated by rapid urbanization, environmental degradation, and socio-economic disparities. Drawing insights from interviews with relevant stakeholders and case studies from Lagos State, Ibadan, and Niger Delta, the study emphasizes the importance of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity. Through comparative analysis with other nations facing similar challenges and an evaluation of existing environmental laws, the study highlights practical solutions such as green infrastructure integration, technology adoption, and enhanced public participation. The report makes specific recommendations for promoting sustainable, equitable urban development, emphasizing ethical leadership as a foundation for transformative change.

Keywords: Ethical Governance, Urban Environmental Management, Sustainable Development

Introduction

"Good governance is not just about making policies—it's about ensuring that those policies serve both the people and the planet with integrity and accountability" (Frederickson, 2010). This principle is particularly pertinent to Nigeria, where rapid urbanization is both an opportunity and a challenge. By 2050, Nigeria's urban population is projected to exceed 400 million, transforming cities like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt into enormous urban centers (UN DESA, 2018). However, this urban sprawl has shown a persisting gap between Nigeria's aspirations for sustainable development and the existing reality of inefficient governance, environmental degradation, and socioeconomic disparities. This gap raises the question: how can urban governance address these issues while ensuring inclusivity and sustainability?

Urban environmental challenges such as poor waste management, pollution, and deforestation indicate this governance gap. For example, Lagos generates about 13,000 tons of waste per day, yet inadequate infrastructure and poor management leave many areas littered with uncollected rubbish, posing environmental and health risks (LAWMA, 2022). Similarly, the Niger Delta's long-standing concerns with oil spills and gas flaring demonstrate a failure to strike a balance between economic growth and environmental

conservation (Oni et al., 2020). These instances show a gap between idealized frameworks for ethical governance and their practical application in Nigerian cities.

Addressing this gap requires governance grounded in transparency, accountability, and equity. Ethical governance offers a way to navigate these challenges by fostering fairness, inclusivity, and sustainability (Frederickson, 2010; Ezeudu, T. S. et al, 2023). In the context of Nigeria's urban centers, this study examines how ethical leadership can close the gap between policy ambitions and real-world outcomes.

This article explores the role of ethical governance in addressing Nigeria's urban environmental concerns. Drawing on interviews with relevant stakeholders like urban planners, government officials, and environmental activists, and case studies from Lagos, Ibadan, and the Niger Delta, it emphasizes governance failings and showcases actionable strategies. The discussion emphasizes green infrastructure integration, enhanced public participation, and policy reform. By bridging the gap between ideals and practice, the study provides practical solutions to build more equitable, transparent, and environmentally responsible cities in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Transparency, accountability, justice, and honesty are central to ethics in public administration, occupying the critical role of ensuring equality is prioritized over personal or political interests. In urban environmental management, ethics guides decisions that strike a balance between development and sustainability in the face of resource restrictions and opposing interests. This study adopts a conceptual framework that connects ethical governance to effective urban environmental management, concentrating on three key principles (see Figure 1).

- **Ethical Governance:** The principles of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity are all part of ethical governance. These principles ensure that urban policies are carried out with integrity and fairness while tackling systemic corruption and governance shortcomings (Gooden, 2014; Brennan & Lo, 2016).
- **Urban Environmental Management:** This encompasses integrated strategies for waste management, pollution control, and resilience to climate change. A critical element of this management is green infrastructure, which includes nature-based solutions like urban forests, wetlands, and green rooftops. These interventions address issues like flooding, air pollution, and urban heat while improving community well-being (Benedict & McMahon, 2006).
- **Sustainability and Social Equity:** This principle prioritizes long-term environmental goals while also paying attention to the needs of the disadvantaged, ensuring that no community is left behind (Gooden, 2014; Brennan & Lo, 2016).

The interconnections of these components give a framework for investigating how ethical leadership might promote sustainable and equitable urban development.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two interrelated theoretical frameworks: the Social Equity Framework and the Environmental Ethics Perspective, which together provide a foundation for analyzing ethical governance in urban environmental management (see Figure 1).

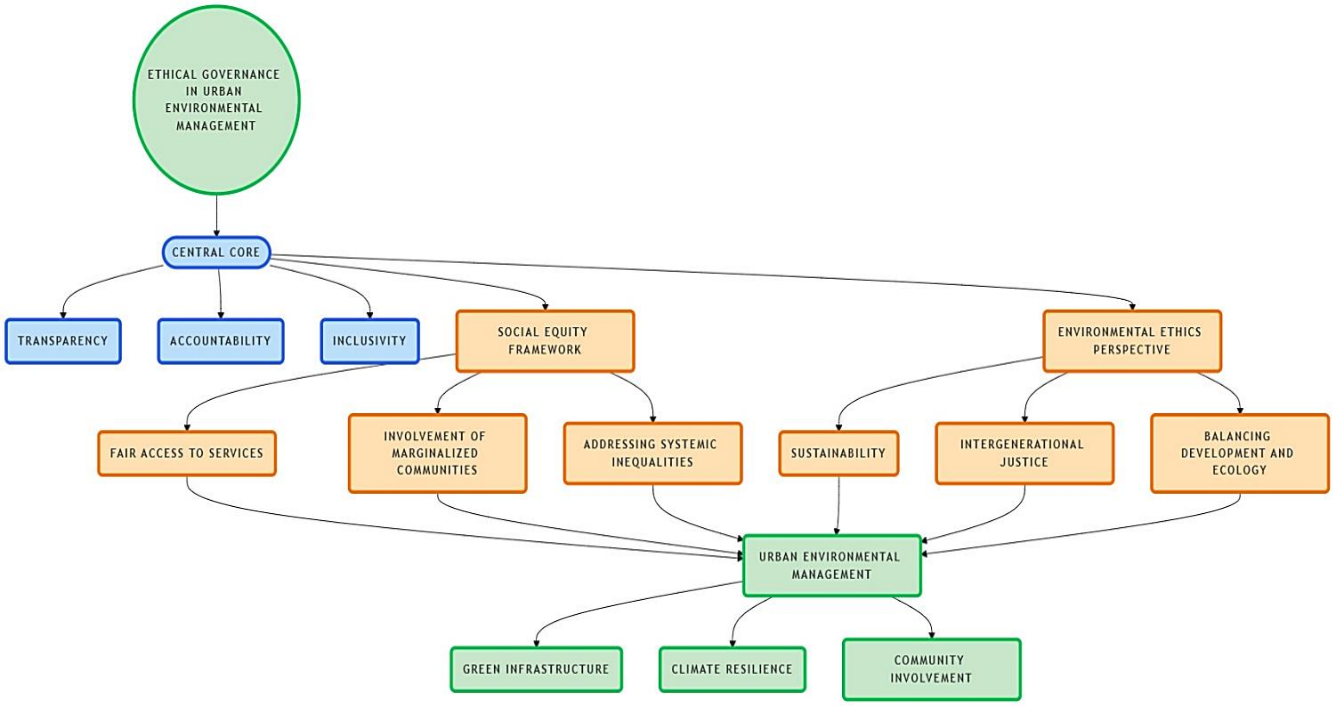

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of Ethical Governance in Urban Environmental Management

Social Equity Framework

The Social Equity Framework (Frederickson, 2010; Gooden, 2014) emphasizes fairness in public administration, particularly when dealing with systemic inequities. According to Gooden (2014), ethical governance should prioritize vulnerable people, who are frequently disproportionately affected by environmental degradation. Equity-based urban environmental management policies ensure that impoverished groups, who are usually disproportionately affected by environmental deterioration, are involved in decision-making and resource allocation. This framework encourages equal access to fundamental environmental services, such as waste collection and clean air, for informal settlements and underprivileged communities in Nigerian cities like Lagos and Abuja.

Environmental Ethics Perspective

The Environmental Ethics Perspective, on the other hand, emphasizes the government's and society's moral responsibility to conserve natural ecosystems for present and future generations. According to Brennan and Lo (2016), environmental governance is more than just managing resources; it also entails guaranteeing sustainability and intergenerational fairness. This approach is especially crucial in Nigeria, where growing urbanization has caused serious environmental problems such as pollution in the Niger

Delta and floods in coastal regions. This framework-inspired ethical governance stresses sustainability while balancing environmental health and economic development. The interactions between these frameworks highlight the importance of transparency, accountability, and sustainability in addressing Nigeria's urban environmental challenges.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative research, case studies, and comparative analysis to examine the ethical and environmental dimensions of urban governance in Nigeria. Through stakeholder interviews, case studies, and comparative analysis, the research examines the complexities of promoting sustainable urban environmental management in rapidly growing urban centers.

A qualitative research method was adopted to capture the nuanced perspectives of key stakeholders in Nigeria's urban governance landscape. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the challenges and opportunities in aligning ethical governance with sustainable environmental practices (Creswell, 2014). Semi-structured interviews with urban planners, government officials, and environmental activists provided insights into policy formulation, public engagement, grassroots advocacy, and ethical dilemmas. Real-world examples, such as the Alimosho Master Plan modification and the Sabo waste management initiative, helped to anchor these perspectives in practical reality.

Case studies of initiatives like Lagos Waste Management Reforms, Otodo Gbame Displacement, the Sabo Waste Management Initiative in Ibadan, and the Niger Delta environmental crisis revealed successes and ethical challenges in governance. Comparative analysis of global practices, including Kenya's reforestation projects, Singapore's technology-driven urban management, and India's sanitation campaigns, identified adaptable strategies for Nigeria.

Thematic analysis indicated fundamental principles of ethical governance, such as transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, while also revealing obstacles such as policy enforcement gaps and insufficient public participation. Opportunities for innovation, such as harnessing technology and fostering collaboration, emerged as crucial pathways to better governance. These findings offer practical proposals for improving ethical and sustainable urban management in Nigeria.

Result and Discussion

Ethical and Environmental Dimensions of Urban Governance: Voices from Nigeria's Urban Landscape

Urban governance in Nigeria is a complicated interplay of ethical, environmental, and political concerns, particularly in Lagos and the resource-rich but ecologically vulnerable Niger Delta. In Lagos, the challenges include inefficient waste management systems, periodic flooding due to insufficient urban drainage and green cover, and controversies such as those surrounding major infrastructure projects such as the 4th Mainland Bridge, which have raised concerns about transparency and fair compensation for affected communities.

Environmental governance challenges are most visible in the Niger Delta, where oil extraction has resulted in widespread damage, including water contamination, biodiversity loss, and community dislocation. These instances demonstrate the urgent need for inclusive, ethical solutions to address governance issues and promote sustainable development. Interviews with urban planners, government officials, and environmental activists highlight not only policy inadequacies but also alternative avenues to sustainable and equitable urban development.

Urban planning in Nigeria requires ethical governance that emphasizes inclusivity, transparency, and accountability to foster equitable and sustainable development (Authors, 2024). However, policies that disproportionately affect marginalized groups frequently stymie inclusivity, and urban planning frameworks usually fail to engage local populations meaningfully. For example, during the redesign of the Alimosho Master Plan, efforts to include green buffers were thwarted by political meddling and budget constraints, leaving vulnerable areas without proper environmental protections (Interview with Stakeholders, 2024). According to an urban planner, lowering building permit charges for low-income groups is an important step toward ensuring legal participation in urban development. Contrarily, when regulations impose high fees and complex procedures, they exclude marginalized communities and deepen inequality (Interview with Government Official, 2024).

Inconsistencies such as opaque procurement processes and unexplained project finances are examples of transparency issues, as seen in high-profile projects such as Lagos' 4th Mainland Bridge, where delayed compensations fanned public distrust. Accountability in public services remains limited around the country, with enforcement mechanisms absent or hampered by political interference, leaving environmental and socioeconomic issues mostly unaddressed. For instance, delayed cleanup of oil spills in the Niger Delta has amplified grievances, as local communities perceive these efforts as insufficient or insincere (Interview with Stakeholders, 2024).

A persistent lack of trust between the government and the people emerged as a critical issue, stemming from incidents such as delays and cost overruns in Lagos's 4th Mainland Bridge project and unfulfilled compensation promises to displaced residents. Practical instances of governance issues, such as a failed waste management program in Sabo, Ibadan, caused by a lack of community engagement and education, highlight the significance of public participation and education at all stages of urban initiatives (Interview with Stakeholders, 2024). Community-driven projects often led by activists in rural areas, such as locally operated recycling facilities and agricultural waste composting, demonstrate the possibilities of ethical governance, prioritizing public education and engagement, empowering individuals, and establishing trust (Interview with Stakeholders, 2024).

Another reoccurring issue is the failure to incorporate green infrastructure into urban planning. For example, the Lagos State Master Plan continuously prioritizes residential and commercial development, leaving flood-prone areas and heat islands with insufficient green space. Interviews emphasized the redevelopment of abandoned land in Alimosho into a park as a grassroots initiative that successfully offered green space while encouraging

community ownership. Such efforts highlight the value of bottom-up techniques in filling environmental gaps left by top-down planning. Incorporating green buffers and permeable surfaces into urban development has the potential to reduce flooding and boost urban resilience, but doing so involves overcoming political and economic obstacles. Furthermore, urban planners remarked that the integration of green roofs and vertical gardens in urban developments could be feasible solutions for densely populated districts (Interview with Stakeholders, 2024).

Respondents also expressed skepticism regarding the government's commitment to environmental priorities, with many actions motivated by political interests rather than public welfare. Strengthening the independence of institutions such as the Nigerian Institute of Town Planners (NITP) was advocated as a way to reduce political interference and improve transparency. Giving the NITP more autonomy would ensure that urban development initiatives adhere to ethical norms and emphasize public welfare over political considerations (Interview with Stakeholders, 2024).

Addressing urban environmental concerns requires multisectoral collaboration. The Alimosho Master Plan remodelling shows collaborative gaps, as innovative suggestions to incorporate green infrastructure into the design were hindered by political influence and budget constraints. Despite these obstacles, planners mentioned numerous projects in Lagos that have involved a wide range of stakeholders in planning decisions, ensuring that environmental, social, and economic concerns are handled holistically. For example, during the planning phases of various urban development projects in Lagos, multi-stakeholder workshops were held with urban planners, environmental activists, and affected community members to ensure that all opinions are heard (Interview with Stakeholders, 2024).

In the Niger Delta, there are examples of successful collaborative interventions. For instance, a multi-stakeholder initiative led by local NGOs, oil companies, and government agencies resulted in the restoration of mangrove forests in some areas, which improved biodiversity and livelihoods. Conversely, continuous attempts to adopt stronger gas flaring restrictions and community-based monitoring systems are helping to build an accountability culture. However, these interventions remain isolated and must be scaled to achieve a broader impact (Interview with Stakeholders, 2024). The collaborative monitoring systems in the Niger Delta could provide a transparent mechanism for tracking the environmental repercussions of oil extraction and ensure responsibility. Such practical implementations would build trust and produce equitable results (Interview with Stakeholders, 2024).

Quantitative data further emphasizes the enormity of these challenges, which could be streamlined through the incorporation of ethical governance in urban environmental management. For instance, Lagos produces over 13,000 metric tons of waste every day, with just 40% adequately collected and handled. Similarly, Nigeria loses an estimated $10 billion per year as a result of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, with around 75% of oil spills remaining unaddressed, exacerbating local concerns. Incorporating such numbers

into governance conversations can assists in solidifying arguments and emphasizes the urgent need for action (Interview with Stakeholders, 2024).

As Nigeria struggles with growing urbanization, environmental degradation, and social disparities, the demand for ethical governance in urban management has never been greater. Examples from around Nigeria demonstrate how public participation, effective awareness campaigns, and the incorporation of green spaces into urban development may result in major environmental and social benefits. However, attaining this objective will necessitate strong political will, accountability structures, and collaborative efforts from stakeholders. Nigeria can achieve a more sustainable urban future by putting the environment and the well-being of her citizens first.

Based on the insights from interviews with various stakeholders, several key recommendations that emerge are:

- Lower building permit costs and simplify regulatory processes for marginalized groups.
- Launch awareness campaigns and partner with local leaders to foster participation.
- Mandate green infrastructure in development projects and provide incentives for developers.
- Strengthen oversight and engage independent evaluators for fairness.
- Create platforms for dialogue among stakeholders and foster partnerships.
- Advocate for collective benefits in policies and institutionalize sustainable urban practices.
- Replicate successful environmental campaigns and use data for scalability.
- Use AI, IoT, and renewable energy to improve urban management and reduce impacts.

Ethical urban environmental governance is not just a theoretical ideal; it is a practical necessity for creating cities that are livable, resilient, and equitable. By prioritizing the environment and the well-being of all citizens, Nigeria can chart a path toward a more sustainable urban future.

Case Study: Ethical and Environmental Realities in Nigerian Urban Governance

This section examines four case studies to highlight the interplay between ethical governance and environmental challenges in Nigeria: waste management reforms in Lagos State, Otodo Gbame's displacement in Lagos, waste management initiatives in Sabo, Ibadan, and environmental activism in the Niger Delta. These examples demonstrate how governance practices influence environmental outcomes, emphasizing the importance of transparency, public participation, and accountability.

Case Study 1: Waste Management Reforms in Lagos State

Lagos State, Nigeria, generates roughly 12,000 metric tons of trash each day, which equates to approximately 0.72 kg per person. However, only about 73% of this garbage makes it to final disposal sites, indicating waste management inefficiencies (Nijest, 2020). To solve this, the Lagos State Waste Management Authority (LAWMA) hired private service providers (PSPs), who received 60% of the collected fees based on predicted waste quantities

(Olukanni & Oresanya, 2018). Furthermore, the Blue Box program and other recycling initiatives encouraged resource recovery through composting, landfilling, and plastic pelletization.

The Cleaner Lagos Initiative also aimed to transform the waste management industry by incorporating private-sector operators in order to decrease bureaucratic barriers and increase efficiency (Olukanni & Oresanya, 2018). However, issues remain due to financial restrictions, with Lagos allocating only 2% of its budget to waste management, considerably below the suggested 5% required for effective systems (Ayadi & Alo, 2020). Public participation is minimal, reflecting the larger difficulty of enforcing waste management rules (Ogunkan, 2022).

According to recent data, Lagos inhabitants generate around 5.46 million tonnes of waste each year, emphasizing the need for efficient solutions (NewsWireNG, 2024). LAWMA has implemented a two-bin system to facilitate trash segregation at the source, with the goal of increasing recycling and reducing landfill dependency. Furthermore, the "Adopt-a-Bin" project encourages homeowners to containerize waste, which promotes cleanliness and increases waste collection efficiency (NewsWireNG, 2024). These initiatives are consistent with the larger goal of sustainable waste management and include ongoing collaborations with Swedish enterprises to construct waste-to-energy projects that turn solid and liquid waste into valuable resources (Nairametrics, 2024).

To prevent plastic pollution, Nigeria has planned a statewide ban on single-use plastics, which will take effect in January 2025. This strategy targets straws, plastic bottles, and water sachets in an effort to reduce the nearly 2.5 million tonnes of plastic trash generated per year (Anyaogu, 2024). These efforts emphasize the ethical requirement of equitable service delivery, building public trust, and promoting inclusive engagement in environmental governance.

Case Study 2: Otodo Gbame's Displacement

The forced eviction in Otodo Gbame displaced over 30,000 people and destroyed nearly 2,400 houses, highlighting the high human cost of urban land reclamation initiatives (Nitbani, 2017). Despite court orders forbidding demolitions, the Lagos State Government carried out the evictions, creating serious human rights concerns (Amnesty International, 2017). The demolitions, where live bullets and tear gas were used, led to injuries, deaths, and extensive displacement (Amnesty International, 2017).

The evictions not only destroyed homes but also affected livelihoods, especially for inhabitants who rely on the waterfront for fishing and other economic activities (Aderemi et al., 2020). The government justified such actions by citing security concerns; nonetheless, these policies have been criticized for violating international human rights legislation, especially the right to sufficient housing (OHCHR, 2016). In response, the UN and human rights organizations have demanded immediate investigations and accountability (OHCHR, 2016; Amnesty International, 2017).

In a landmark decision, the Lagos State High Court ruled that forced evictions were cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment that violated the Nigerian Constitution (Amnesty International, 2017). Nonetheless, the lack of effective resettlement plans and

compensation has rendered many former inhabitants destitute and unsupported. This highlights the ethical consequences of urban development strategies that favor privileged interests over vulnerable communities. Transparent governance and community engagement are critical for avoiding such injustices and ensuring sustainable and inclusive urban development (Amah, 2024).

Case Study 3: Waste Management Reforms in Sabo, Ibadan

Sabo's densely populated environment has serious waste management concerns, including incorrect use and infrequent emptying of scattered public waste containers (Aderemi et al., 2020). Residents generate a wide range of waste, including paper, nylon, wood, cloth, metal scraps, and food remains, and incorrect disposal techniques, such as roadside dumping, exacerbate sanitation issues (Aderemi et al., 2020). Overflowing dumpsters imply systemic inadequacies in policy implementation and infrastructure provision (Adedeji, 2019).

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have been explored as a possible solution, but they face challenges such as insufficient funding, infrastructure deficiencies, and low community involvement, limiting their overall efficacy (Alabi et al., 2019). Community education activities, such as those carried out by the Environmental Health Officers Association of Nigeria (EHSAN) on World Environmental Health Day, seek to close these gaps by promoting proper waste disposal and vector control among residents (LSPHCB, 2024).

Despite these attempts, obstacles still exist. Open burning and roadside dumping are frequent practices among residents, contributing to environmental pollution and health concerns (Aderemi et al., 2020). To solve these issues, efforts must be made to tighten regulatory enforcement, improve infrastructure, and encourage greater community participation. To build long-term solutions, government agencies, corporate sector partners, and local communities must work collaboratively. To solve systemic waste management failures, strategies must prioritize effective execution of environmental protection regulations (Amin et al., 2024).

Case Study 4: Environmentalism in the Niger Delta

Oil exploration activities such as spills, gas flaring, and deforestation have all had a negative impact on the Niger Delta's ecosystem. Poor enforcement of environmental legislation has endangered biodiversity and harmed local livelihoods (Nwilo & Badejo, 2006). Over 6,000 oil spills were documented between 1976 and 1996, releasing an estimated 2 million barrels of crude oil into the environment. This extensive pollution has poisoned water bodies, threatened aquatic life, and devastated farmlands, resulting in food insecurity and health risks for local residents (Financial Times, 2024).

Agriculture has also suffered severely, with lower crop yields and increasing poverty among farmers. Six decades of oil exploration have made the Niger Delta one of the world's most polluted places, destroying farmlands and sustaining socioeconomic inequities (Chijioke, 2022). Efforts such as the $1 billion Ogoniland Clean-up, which began in 2017, seek to remediate widespread contamination. However, progress has been slow, with

reports of inefficiencies in the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (Hyprep), such as inexperienced contractors and insufficient laboratory facilities, delaying restoration efforts (AP News, 2023).

Ethical governance, defined by transparency, accountability, and community engagement, is critical to tackling these issues. Collaboration among government agencies, business entities, and local communities can result in long-term solutions. Emphasizing ethical frameworks ensures that environmental restoration corresponds with community well-being and promotes long-term development (Ogorugba, O. M. et al, 2024).

Synthesis and Implications

The case studies demonstrate the complex issues of urban and environmental management in Nigeria. Lagos' waste management reforms highlight the need for public-private partnerships and equitable regulations, whereas Sabo's experience stresses the need for infrastructure and education. The Otodo Gbame displacement illustrates the ethical pitfalls of exclusionary urban planning, and the Niger Delta's struggles stress the urgency of regulatory enforcement and community-led activism.

Collectively, these cases demonstrate that ethical governance characterized by transparency, inclusivity, and accountability is essential for addressing Nigeria's urban and environmental challenges sustainably. According to research on urban livability in Nigeria, reducing social exclusion and providing fair access to urban resources are critical for long-term development (Ezeudu & Chukwudubem, 2023). Ethical governance lays the groundwork for balancing environmental sustainability with social justice by ensuring that all stakeholders, particularly vulnerable populations, actively shape urban policies and practices.

Comparative Analysis: Nigerian Urban Governance Practices in Perspective

Comparing Nigeria's urban governance systems to those of other countries, including South Africa, India, Kenya, and China, reveals important lessons for improvement. Nigeria presents unique challenges caused by growing urbanization, environmental deterioration, and entrenched social imbalances. These challenges stem from a complicated sociopolitical and economic framework in which poor policy implementation, corruption, and historical distrust of government institutions compound urban governance issues (Akinola & Enisan, 2021). Despite these challenges, using worldwide best practices provides a pathway for efficiently tackling these concerns while personalizing solutions to Nigeria's unique contexts.

Mistrust and poor implementation are common reasons for the failure of public awareness campaigns in Nigeria, which stem from a history of uneven policy enforcement, a lack of transparency in decision-making, and insufficient community engagement (Osuntokun et al., 2020). Historical neglect of underprivileged populations, combined with weak follow-through on previous urban projects, has raised concerns about the motivations underlying government initiatives. For example, a failed waste management program in Sabo, Ibadan, demonstrates the negative repercussions of insufficient community

involvement and education (Adedeji & Ilesanmi, 2019). South Africa's community-driven Integrated Waste Management Plans (IWMPs) show how grassroots involvement may develop trust and achieve long-term results (Abdullahi et al., 2020). Similarly, India's Swachh Bharat Mission (Clean India Mission) uses media campaigns, local influencers, and educational seminars to increase public participation and behavior change, resulting in cleaner cities and better public health outcomes (Moulik, 2018).

Nigeria also lags in the incorporation of green spaces. For example, the Lagos State Master Plan has frequently prioritized infrastructural growth over environmental considerations, ignoring the inclusion of green buffer zones to reduce urban flooding and heat islands (Ayeni & Salako, 2021). Projects like the Lekki Free Trade Zone have been chastised for their lack of integrated green spaces, which exacerbates environmental degradation in the surrounding neighborhoods (Okunola et al., 2021). Kenya's Nairobi Green City Project offers a strong alternative. Kenya has improved air quality, reduced flood risks, and increased community well-being by including green infrastructure such as parks and tree-lined avenues into urban development (Mwangi W. et al., 2020). Similarly, Singapore's "City in a Garden" concept uses vertical gardens and rooftop greenery to balance urban development and environmental sustainability (Wong et al., 2019). These examples demonstrate the ability of green infrastructure to provide both environmental and social advantages, which Nigeria could apply by legislating green space inclusion in urban projects.

Waste management in Nigeria faces numerous logistical hurdles, including insufficient infrastructure for waste collection and recycling, fragmented enforcement mechanisms, and limited coordination between public and private sectors. Urban centers such as Lagos heavily depend on landfills, with limited segregated processing facilities, leading to illegal dumping and inefficiencies in waste disposal. Moreover, enforcement is often undercut by resource shortages within municipal agencies. Indonesia’s Waste Bank initiative exemplifies a grassroots approach where citizens can exchange recyclable waste for financial rewards, thus encouraging community involvement (Simatupang et al., 2020). Similarly, Rwanda's Umuganda program shows how structured communal engagement in monthly civic clean-ups can improve waste management outcomes while instilling a feeling of collective responsibility (Mukamana & Matsuda, 2021). Adopting comparable approaches might considerably enhance Nigeria's waste management systems.

Accountability and political will are critical for effective urban governance. However, Nigeria has obstacles such as corruption, with funds allotted for urban projects frequently misappropriated, and short-term objectives pushed by political agendas impeding long-term development (Ogundipe et al., 2021). Delays in compensating villages displaced by the 4th Mainland Bridge project are an example of Nigeria's governance issues, as bureaucratic inefficiency and political involvement impede quick restitution. Stakeholders complained that the delays damaged public trust by subjecting impacted residents to protracted uncertainty and financial hardship (Nwankwo & Ogunyemi, 2020). These challenges contrast sharply with China's eco-city plans, such as the Tianjin Eco-City, which show how strong political will can drive transformative urban efforts through renewable energy

integration and waste-to-energy systems (de Jong et al., 2019). Similarly, Botswana's urban governance model in Gaborone exemplifies how transparency and independent oversight can ensure equitable development and public trust (UN-Habitat, 2019).

To improve urban governance, Nigeria can draw on these international best practices while addressing its unique urban dynamics. Implementing behavior-change campaigns akin to India's Swachh Bharat Mission could build trust and encourage public participation. Mandating green infrastructure, inspired by Kenya's Green City Project and Singapore's "City in a Garden," could enhance urban resilience. Adopting waste management models like Indonesia's Waste Banks and Rwanda's Umuganda program could address logistical challenges and foster community engagement. Establishing independent regulatory bodies modeled after Botswana's governance structures could improve accountability, while promoting long-term policy visions, as exemplified by China's eco-city initiatives, could prioritize sustainability and equity.

By integrating these strategies with Nigeria's urban governance needs, the country can address its challenges while leveraging global best practices. This approach can create inclusive, sustainable, and resilient urban environments tailored to local needs while meeting international sustainability benchmarks.

Conclusion

Nigeria's urban governance faces critical challenges at the nexus of environmental degradation, social inequality, and urbanization. This study demonstrated that the future of Nigerian cities is dependent not only on policy creation but also on ethical governance and practical execution. Examples such as the Alimosho Master Plan remodelling illustrate the promise of inclusive planning, but the Sabo waste bin initiative and the Niger Delta oil crisis highlight the consequences of governance failures. The Niger Delta's long-standing environmental concerns highlight the importance of accountability, transparency, and justice.

This study underscores the value of green spaces, technology, and stakeholder collaboration as essential components for sustainable urban development. It contributes to the discourse on urban governance by combining grounded insights from stakeholder interviews with lessons from global best practices, offering a unique blend of theory and application. However, the study's reliance on qualitative methods may limit the breadth of perspectives, particularly from underserved communities or private sector actors. Future research could build on these findings with quantitative data or focused case studies to expand understanding.

The findings reaffirm that ethical governance, coupled with bold political will and collaborative action, can transform Nigeria's cities into sustainable and equitable spaces. The vision of thriving, inclusive urban centers is achievable with the tools, strategies, and commitment outlined in this study.

Recommendations

This study underscores the urgent need for ethical governance in urban environmental management in Nigeria. By addressing gaps in transparency, inclusivity, accountability, and sustainability, transformative policies can be implemented to tackle urban challenges. Key recommendations include:

1. **Prioritize Ethical Governance:** Nigeria should implement transparent systems for project execution and funding, establish compensation measures for displaced communities, and empower independent bodies like the Nigerian Institute of Town Planners (NITP) to oversee urban projects without political interference. For instance, a government official highlighted the importance of reducing building permit fees to promote inclusion, showing how ethical leadership can address systemic inequalities.
2. **Strengthen Policy Frameworks and Enforcement:** Nigeria should revise the National Environmental Policy (NEP) to address inclusivity, enhance Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) with stricter criteria and monitoring, and create independent regulatory bodies, similar to Kenya's EMCA, to ensure fair enforcement. The Otodo Gbame eviction highlights the need for socially equitable and enforceable policies.
3. **Encourage Public Participation and Awareness Campaign:** There's need to institutionalize public consultations throughout all stages of urban planning and launch awareness campaigns akin to India's Swachh Bharat Mission. An activist highlighted a successful initiative where educating farmers on sustainable practices simultaneously generated income and improved environmental outcomes.
4. **Incorporate Green Infrastructure into Urban Planning:** Nigeria should mandate the inclusion of parks, wetlands, and green roofs in all urban projects and learn from Singapore's City in a Garden model, which demonstrates the seamless integration of green spaces with urban growth. In Lagos, a lack of green buffers exacerbates floods during the rainy season. Including wetlands restoration in urban planning could considerably lessen these dangers.
5. **Utilize Technology and Innovation:** Nigeria should deploy IoT systems for real-time waste tracking and air quality monitoring and utilize AI-driven traffic systems to reduce congestion and improve urban mobility. The success of Lagos' LAWMA Blue Box recycling program demonstrates the potential for scaling sustainable waste practices through technology.
6. **Strengthen Collaboration Among Stakeholders:** There's need to establish multi-stakeholder forums for collaboration and partner with international organizations for technical and financial support. The Alimosho Master Plan revision exemplified the benefits of stakeholder collaboration, with including Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) resulting in improved outcomes.
7. **Address Financial Constraints:** The country can employ green funding tools, such as green bonds or international climate funds, focus on affordable options like walkable communities and biodiesel-powered buses, and collaborate with international organizations to secure technical and financial support. Rwanda's Umuganda

community cleanup program exemplifies how low-cost, community-driven approaches can have a big environmental impact.

8. **Develop Capacity and Train Professionals:** The creation of training programs focused on sustainability and ethical governance and collaborating with universities to offer specialized courses in green urban design is essential. For instance, an urban planner emphasized the need for education and capacity-building to bridge gaps between policy design and implementation.
9. **Promote Political Commitment:** There's also need advocate for policy visions that prioritize collective benefits over short-term gains and integrate sustainability principles into legal frameworks and administrative systems.

By adopting these recommendations, Nigeria can build cities that are inclusive, resilient, and environmentally sustainable. Ethical governance, combined with community engagement, green infrastructure, and innovative solutions, offers a pathway to addressing immediate urban challenges while laying the foundation for sustainable development and equity.

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