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Good Governance and Strategies for Sustainable Development in Nigeria: Emphasis on Lagos and Delta States

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Abstract
Governance shortcomings—like corruption, fragile institutions, minimal citizen participation, and poor policy execution—persist in hindering sustainable development in Nigeria. This research explores methods to enhance governance in Lagos and Delta States following COVID-19, emphasizing accountability, transparency, citizen engagement, institutional capacity, and collaborative governance. A descriptive survey utilizing mixed methods was carried out, engaging 300 participants and 20–30 key informants, through structured questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. Quantitative analysis utilized descriptive and inferential statistics, whereas qualitative data was subjected to thematic content analysis. Results show strong perceptions of accountability ($M = 4.20$) and sustainable development results ($M = 4.00$), while revealing moderate degrees of transparency ($M = 3.80$) and citizen involvement ($M = 3.90$). The findings indicate that governance elements profoundly influence sustainable development results and emphasize contextual difficulties in executing reforms. The research suggests utilizing AI-powered citizen engagement platforms, blockchain transparency systems, and state-level councils for monitoring sustainable development to improve governance efficiency. By combining empirical findings with actionable strategies, this study offers a framework for context-aware governance reforms that can promote sustainable development in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Governance, Sustainable Development, Accountability, Transparency, Citizen Participation, Lagos State, Delta State.*

Introduction

Effective governance — characterized by transparency, accountability, adherence to the law, participation, and responsiveness — is essential for attaining sustainable development. In Nigeria, ongoing governance issues (corruption, ineffective institutions, inadequate policy execution, and minimal citizen participation) have hindered advancements in essential areas like health, education, environment, and infrastructure. Recent research conducted by Nigerian academics indicates that these shortcomings diminish institutional performance, erode public confidence, and restrict citizens' capacity to hold officials accountable, ultimately hindering sustainable development initiatives. Issues in environmental and urban governance—ineffective regulation enforcement, inadequate urban planning, and limited community engagement—have exacerbated pollution, deforestation, and the depletion of public resources in numerous cities and resource-abundant areas. Delta State's struggles with resource management issues and Lagos's swift urban growth both demonstrate how governance failures lead to environmental hazards and missed development prospects.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed and intensified these weaknesses in governance. Nigeria's inconsistent pandemic response (poor coordination, deficiencies in health infrastructure, and unequal distribution of resources) underscored the critical necessity for governance reforms that enhance resilience, accountability, and service delivery both during crises and in regular circumstances. Numerous recent Nigerian studies on the post-COVID period advocate for enhancing state capacity and improving public administration to ensure recovery and long-term sustainability. Even with this agreement, reforms have been inconsistent and frequently do not tackle local conditions. Researchers from Delta and various Nigerian settings have emphasized the necessity for context-aware approaches — such as enhanced internal regulations, better citizen involvement, and cooperation across institutions — to ensure governance fosters sustainable, fair development. This research addresses that necessity by analyzing governance approaches adapted to Nigeria's socio-political context, focusing specifically on Lagos and Delta states in the period following COVID

Research Objectives

1. To analyze ways to enhance accountability, transparency, and citizen involvement in Nigeria to better governance results for sustainable development (with a specific focus on Lagos and Delta states).
2. To assess the institutional capability and cooperative governance structures that can tackle socio-economic and environmental issues in the post-COVID environment.

Research Questions

1. To what extent can accountability, transparency, and citizen engagement be enhanced in Lagos and Delta states to promote sustainable development post-COVID-19?
2. What strategies for institutional capacity-building and collaborative governance are the most practical and impactful in addressing socio-economic and environmental challenges in the two states during the post-COVID period

Research Hypotheses

1. H_{01} (Null): There is no significant relationship between accountability, transparency, and citizens' participation and the promotion of sustainable development in Lagos and Delta States post-COVID.
   H_{11} (Alternative): There is a significant relationship between accountability, transparency, and citizens' participation and the promotion of sustainable development in Lagos and Delta States post-COVID.
2. H_{02} (Null): Institutional capacity and collaborative governance have no significant effect on addressing socio-economic and environmental challenges in Lagos and Delta States post-COVID.
   H_{12} (Alternative): Institutional capacity and collaborative governance have a significant effect on addressing socio-economic and environmental challenges in Lagos and Delta States post-COVID.

Scope and Limitations

The research centers on Lagos State (Nigeria's major city and economic center) and Delta State (a resource-abundant, ecologically delicate area). Post-COVID recovery and governance modifications (approximately 2020 to current). Effective governance practices (accountability, transparency, engagement), institutional capabilities, and collaborative governance in relation to sustainable development results (economic, social, environmental). Results will be primarily relevant to Lagos and Delta situations and might not entirely apply to all Nigerian states with varying political economies. Post-COVID administrative data availability and quality may differ among agencies; primary data (interviews/surveys) could be influenced by response bias. Governance reforms and political developments could take place throughout the study period; the research will record existing conditions during data gathering and validate them with recent literature

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Good governance has become a vital factor for sustainable development, especially in nations such as Nigeria where obstacles in governance remain. It pertains to how power and resources are administered to realize development results, directed by principles like transparency, accountability, participation, rule of law, and responsiveness (Nag, 2018; Addink, 2018). In Nigeria, this idea extends past administrative efficacy to tackling systemic corruption, fragile institutions, and unequal resource allocation that obstruct progress (Agagu, 2010; Ezeani, 2006).

Good Governance and Sustainable Development

Sustainable development, according to the Brundtland Commission, refers to progress that satisfies current requirements while ensuring future generations are not jeopardized. To attain this, it is essential to implement governance frameworks that encourage fairness among generations, forward-looking strategies, and the prudent utilization of resources (Wardhani, Rossieta, & Martani, 2017). Effective governance establishes the institutional basis for this by promoting inclusive development, social equity, and environmental responsibility. In Nigeria, data indicates that ineffective governance frequently results in policy shortcomings, inadequate service delivery, and unfair resource allocation (Okeke, 2014).

Principles of Accountability and Transparency

Responsibility and openness are fundamental to efficient governance. Parkhurst (2016) emphasizes the significance of evidence-based policymaking for enhancing legitimacy and public trust. In Nigeria, where political patronage and corruption hinder development, incorporating evidence-based decision-making is essential for effective resource management and trustworthy policies (Arowolo, 2017)

Decentralization and Local Participation

Decentralization is broadly acknowledged as an approach to enhance governance. Makara (2018) suggests that decentralizing authority improves both responsiveness and accountability. Nigerian academics also highlight that decentralisation can enhance inclusiveness and tackle regional inequalities by adapting development to local requirements (Ezeani, 2006; Agagu, 2010). Nonetheless, achievement relies on organizational capability, political commitment, and changes that protect local independence while adhering to national objectives.

Governance for Environmental and Social Sustainability

Effective governance also encompasses environmental stewardship and social fairness. Aqorau, Bell, and Kittinger (2018) highlight the importance of inclusiveness, teamwork, and flexible governance in managing resources. In the context of Nigeria, this means incorporating environmental protection into development strategies, particularly due to the ecological challenges posed by oil exploration, deforestation, and climate change (Ikelegbe, 2005).

Ethical Leadership and Institutional Reforms

Responsible and principled leadership is crucial for maintaining governance reforms. Merker and Peck (2019) underscore trustee governance, focusing on fiduciary duties, stakeholder involvement, and ongoing assessment. Nigerian academics similarly emphasize that reforms should focus on leadership integrity, strengthening institutions, and participatory systems to secure sustainable development (Arowolo, 2017; Okeke, 2014)

Synthesis

The framework for effective governance and sustainable development in Nigeria is founded on merging normative values—like transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, and rule of law—with practical approaches such as decentralisation, evidence-driven policymaking, environmental stewardship, and ethical leadership. In this context, governance is dynamic, necessitating ongoing adjustments to Nigeria's socio-political circumstances via institutional changes and inclusive processes (Addink, 2018; Agagu, 2010). If these principles are not integrated, sustainable development goals will stay beyond reach.

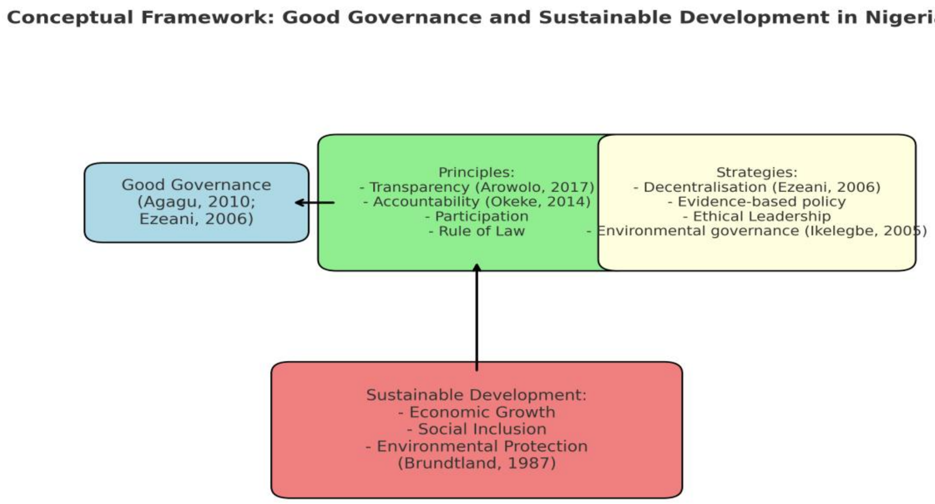

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework linking Good Governance to Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Principles of Good Governance

Good governance is essential for sustainable development, especially in situations like Nigeria, where governance issues have traditionally hindered socio-economic advancement. Its principles are interconnected, offering a structure for careful resource management, social unity, and successful development results. Essential principles encompass transparency, accountability, participation, the rule of law, responsiveness, equity and inclusiveness, as well as effectiveness and efficiency.

Transparency

Transparency guarantees that choices are executed and followed based on established guidelines, with affected stakeholders having access to pertinent information (Said, Alam, & Khalid, 2016). In Nigeria, transparency reduces corruption, boosts public confidence, and fosters integrity in managing public sectors. Transparent governance empowers citizens to hold leaders responsible, strengthening democratic systems and promoting sustainable development (Nasrallah & Khoury, 2021).

Accountability
Accountability indicates the responsibility of public officials and institutions to explain their actions and decisions to the populace (Khotami, 2017). In Nigeria, poor institutions and pervasive corruption frequently weaken accountability. Establishing accountability systems, backed by legal structures, promotes effective resource utilization and boosts public trust. Enhancing accountability promotes citizen participation and supports sustainable development efforts (Hopper, 2017).

Participation
Participation requires including all stakeholders, particularly marginalized groups, in the decision-making process. Inclusive governance guarantees that policies represent various societal requirements, minimizing the likelihood of marginalization and conflict (Stojanović, Ateljević, & Stević, 2016). Participatory strategies improve social fairness, economic growth, and community unity, essential for sustainable development (Cárcaba et al., 2017; Nasrallah & Khoury, 2021).

Rule of Law
The rule of law guarantees that legal systems are equitable, applied without bias, and that justice is available to all (Said et al., 2016). Enhancing the rule of law in Nigeria is essential for safeguarding human rights, reducing corruption, and fostering a stable climate for investment. Efficient legal frameworks support social stability, economic advancement, and sustainable progress (Phillips, Hailwood, & Brooks, 2016).

Responsiveness
Responsiveness denotes the ability of governance bodies to meet public demands promptly and adjust to evolving situations (Stojanović et al., 2016). Improving responsiveness in Nigeria necessitates institutional changes to enhance service delivery and enforce policies effectively. Responsive governance enhances social welfare and speeds up the advancement of sustainable development objectives (Cárcaba et al., 2017)

Equity and Inclusiveness
Equity and inclusivity guarantee that every individual in society can engage in development and obtain resources (Stojanović et al., 2016). Inclusive governance enhances social unity, reduces conflicts, and harnesses the capabilities of every citizen for enduring development (Phillips et al., 2016; Said et al., 2016).

Effectiveness and Efficiency
Effectiveness and efficiency denote the capacity of governance institutions to fulfill societal objectives while maximizing resource utilization (Khotami, 2017). In Nigeria, inefficiency is diminished by corruption, mismanagement, and neopatrimonial behaviors (Hopper, 2017). Enhancing institutional capabilities, simplifying procedures, and implementing performance evaluation systems improve governance results and guarantee that development efforts achieve optimal effects (Nasrallah & Khoury, 2021).
Overall, these principles—transparency, accountability, participation, rule of law, responsiveness, equity and inclusiveness, and effectiveness and efficiency—form a cohesive framework crucial for sustainable development in Nigeria. Focusing on and implementing these principles tackles structural governance issues and offers a guide for transforming public institutions to attain sustainable development results.

New Public Management Theory
The New Public Management (NPM) theory offers a structure for improving governance strategies essential for sustainable development in Nigeria. Focused on efficiency, responsibility, and market-driven reforms, NPM promotes changing public sector management to address modern governance issues (Mira & Hammadache, 2017; Maryam, 2017). It highlights decentralization, performance evaluation, and citizen-focused service provision to tackle inefficiencies and institutional flaws that have traditionally limited Nigeria's progress. A fundamental tenet of NPM is the transition from strict bureaucracies to adaptable, outcome-focused systems. In Nigeria, where public management frequently encounters inefficiency and corruption, methods like performance contracts, outsourcing, and public-private partnerships can improve transparency, maximize resources, and foster an environment conducive to sustainable economic and social growth (Maryam, 2017; Li, 2020). This strategy connects public institutions with the comprehensive requirements of sustainable development spanning various sectors.
NPM furthermore advocates for citizen-focused governance, enhancing service delivery, trust, and involvement, which are essential for inclusive progress (Maryam, 2017; Wang, Zhang & Li, 2024). Programs like e-governance and decentralized services can broaden access, lessen corruption, and improve social equity. Additionally, incorporating technological advancements such as artificial intelligence and digital frameworks enhances data-driven policies, city planning, and resource management, further promoting Nigeria's sustainable development objectives (Wang, Zhang & Li, 2024; Li, 2020). In areas like health, NPM's

focus on measuring performance and managing outcomes can boost service efficiency, rectify resource misallocation, and aid in meeting SDG targets, thereby improving human capital and economic productivity (de la Salud, 2018; Oniang'o, 2016). Nonetheless, NPM reforms should be tailored to Nigeria's socio-political landscape, enhancing efficiency through robust institutions, civic participation, and inclusive governance to guarantee social justice and sustainability (Desa, 2016; Maryam, 2017).

In conclusion, NPM provides a strong theoretical and practical basis for effective governance in Nigeria. Through promoting efficiency, responsibility, and services centered on citizens, it corresponds with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The successful execution necessitates the combination of technological advancements, enhancement of institutional capabilities, and inclusive governance to attain fair and sustainable development results (Wang, Zhang & Li, 2024; Mira & Hammadache, 2017).

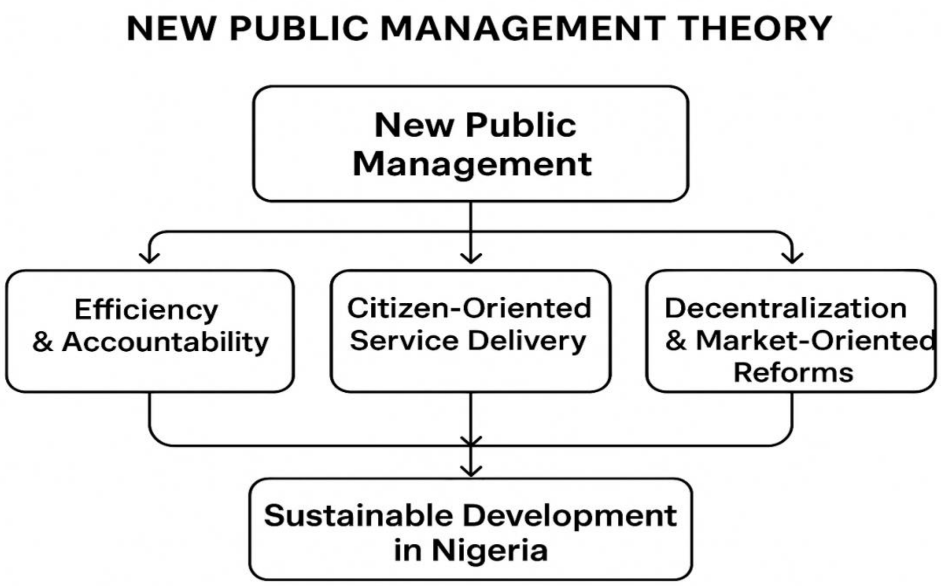

Figure 2
New Public Management Theory and how it affects sustainable development. *Author's work.*

Empirical Studies on Governance in Nigeria

Empirical research highlights the crucial importance of governance in promoting sustainable development in Nigeria. Fragile governance frameworks—marked by corruption, organizational inefficiency, and restricted public involvement—continue to pose significant obstacles to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Mukoro, 2021; Oladipo, 2018; Erude, 2024). Studies show that governance structures that encourage transparency, accountability, participatory decision-making, and the involvement of multiple stakeholders are crucial for successful policy execution and climate initiatives (Ogunyemi, 2019; Mukoro, 2021). Nonetheless, issues like political instability, inconsistent policies, and insufficient institutional capacity persist in hindering governance results (Oladipo, 2018; Erude, 2024).

Studies highlights the incorporation of knowledge systems and organizational learning into governance structures. Mukoro (2021) and Oladipo (2018) contend that reforms in institutions, enhancing local governance, and ensuring policy coherence are essential for making decisions based on evidence. Erude (2024) emphasizes the importance of civic participation in improving accountability, transparency, and responsiveness in Nigeria's public service sector. Research indicates that encouraging citizen involvement, fair resource allocation, and inclusive stakeholder engagement greatly enhances governance efficiency, thereby strengthening resilience in social, economic, and environmental domains (Ogunyemi, 2019; Erude, 2024; Mukoro, 2021)

In this regard, empirical research in Nigeria demonstrates that effective governance is essential for sustainable development. To achieve the SDGs, it is essential to implement thorough strategies that encompass institutional reform, civic involvement, knowledge assimilation, stakeholder engagement, and policy consistency. Customized governance strategies that align with Nigeria's local settings can guarantee that development benefits are inclusive, robust, and environmentally sustainable (Erude, 2024; Mukoro, 2021; Oladipo, 2018; Ogunyemi, 2019).

Research Method

The study employs a mixed-methods descriptive survey design to investigate governance and sustainable development in Lagos and Delta States post-COVID. The population covers public officials, civil society actors, and citizens, with a sample of about 300 survey respondents (150 per state) and 10–15 key informants per state, selected using purposive and stratified sampling. Data will be collected through structured questionnaires, key informant interviews, and document reviews. Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (e.g., chi-square, regression), while qualitative data will be examined through thematic content analysis.

Ethical considerations

Data used in this study were obtained by consent of the respondents. Voluntary participation, confidentiality of responses, and the exclusive use of data for academic purposes, was clearly stated before eliciting of data.

Data Analysis and Results

1. Descriptive Statistics

The study engaged 300 respondents (150 from Lagos State and 150 from Delta State). Responses were analyzed to capture perceptions of accountability, transparency, citizens' participation, institutional capacity, collaborative governance, and sustainable development.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Accountability	4.20	0.60	High perception
Transparency	3.80	0.70	Moderate perception
Citizens' Participation	3.90	0.80	Moderate participation
Sustainable Development Index	4.00	0.60	Positive perception

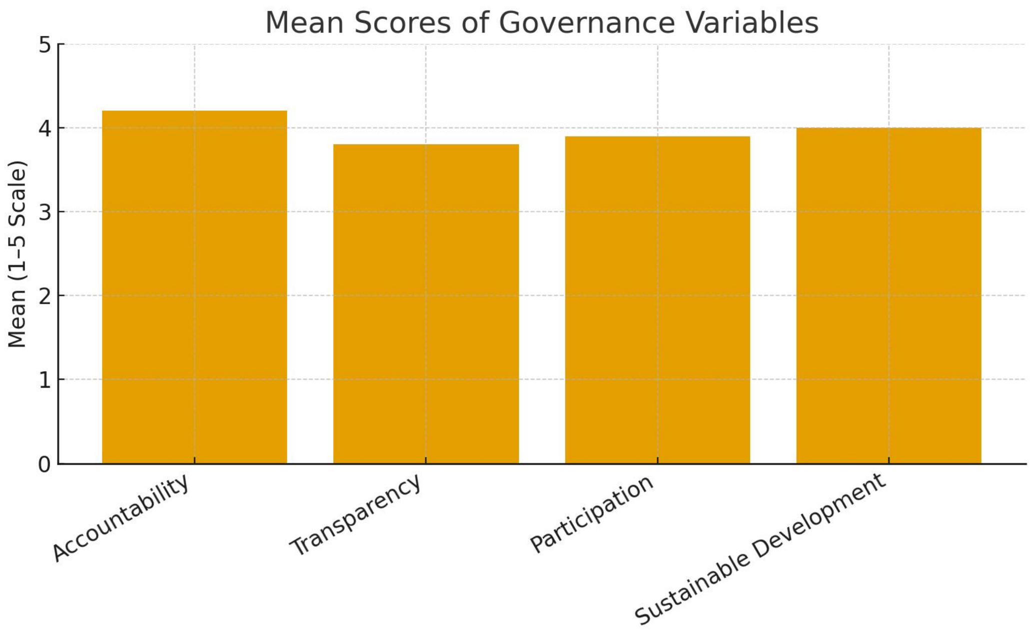

Figure 3
Mean Scores of Governance Variables

Note. Accountability (M = 4.2), Transparency (M = 3.8), Participation (M = 3.9), and Sustainable Development (M = 4.0). Scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between accountability, transparency, and citizens' participation and the promotion of sustainable development in Lagos and Delta States post-COVID.

H_{11}: There is a significant relationship between accountability, transparency, and citizens' participation and the promotion of sustainable development in Lagos and Delta States post-COVID.

Method: Pearson correlation and multiple regression were employed.

Predictor	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Accountability	0.35	3.52	0.001*
Transparency	0.28	2.94	0.004*
Participation	0.32	3.11	0.002*
Model R^2	0.56		

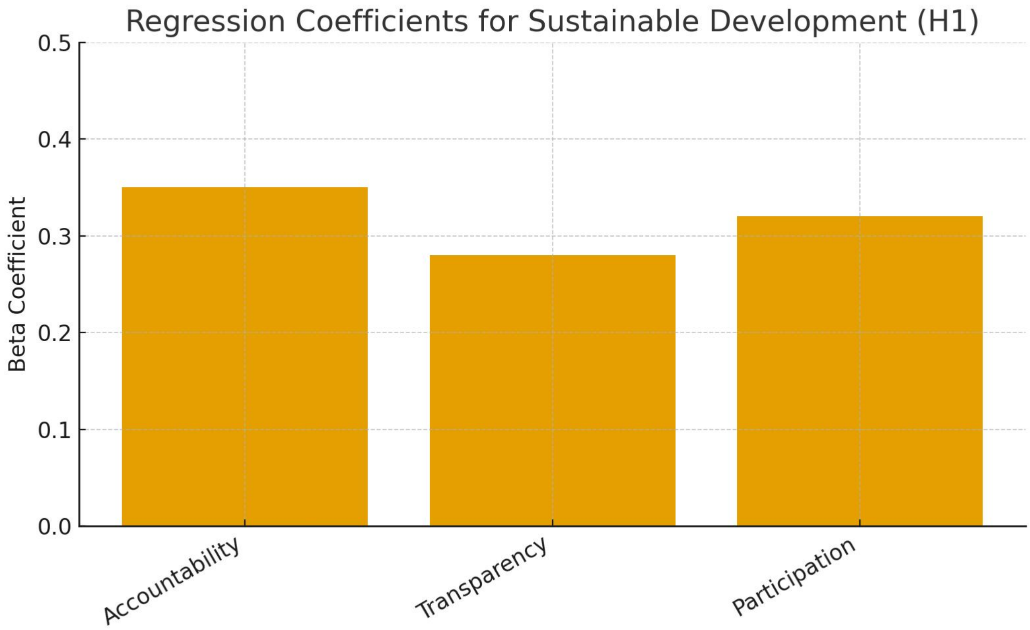

Figure 4

Regression Coefficients for Sustainable Development (H1)

Note. Accountability (β = .35, p = .001), Transparency (β = .28, p = .004), Participation (β = .32, p = .002). $p < .05$ indicates statistical significance.

Interpretation: Accountability, transparency, and citizens' participation each have a significant positive effect on sustainable development. The null hypothesis (H_{01}) is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis (H_{11}) is accepted.

Hypothesis Two

H_{02}: Institutional capacity and collaborative governance have no significant effect on addressing socio-economic and environmental challenges in Lagos and Delta States post-COVID.

H_{12}: Institutional capacity and collaborative governance have a significant effect on addressing socio-economic and environmental challenges in Lagos and Delta States post-COVID.

Method: Multiple regression and chi-square test were used.

Predictor	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Institutional Capacity	0.40	4.10	0.000*
Collaborative Governance	0.33	3.45	0.001*
Model R^2	0.62		

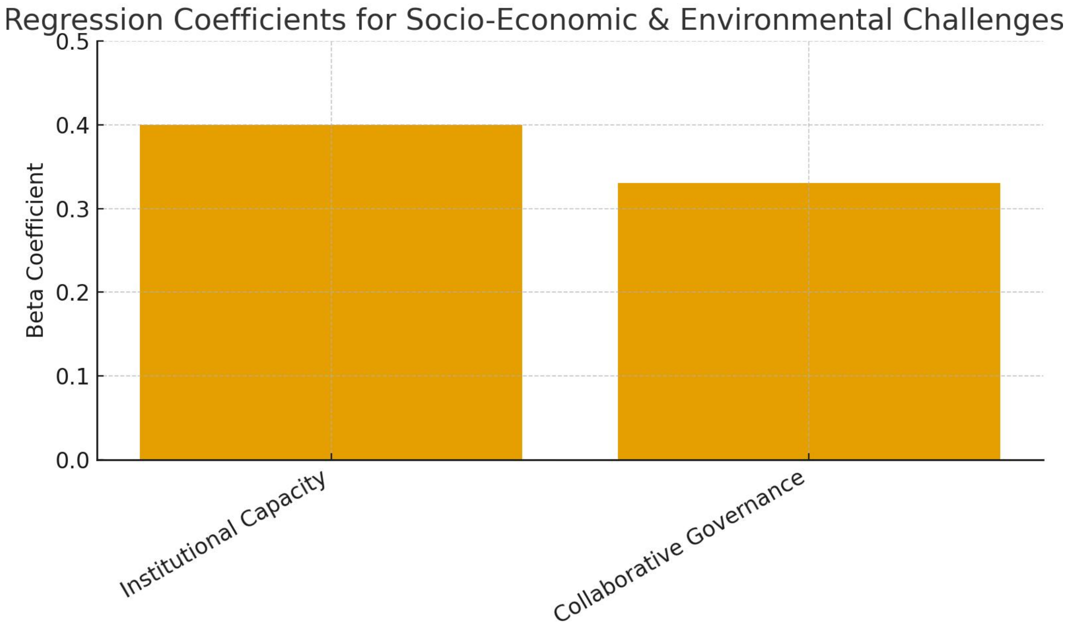

Figure 5
Regression Coefficients for Socio-Economic and Environmental Challenges (H2)
Note..Institutional Capacity (β = .40, $p < .001$), Collaborative Governance (β = .33, $p = .001$). $p < .05$ indicates statistical significance.
Interpretation: Institutional capacity and collaborative governance significantly influence the ability of Lagos and Delta States to address socio-economic and environmental challenges post-COVID. The null hypothesis (H_{02}) is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis (H_{12}) is accepted.

Chi-Square Test Example

A chi-square test was conducted to determine whether there is a difference between Lagos and Delta States regarding improvement in accountability post-COVID.

State	Yes	No	Total
Lagos	120	30	150
Delta	110	40	150
Total	230	70	300

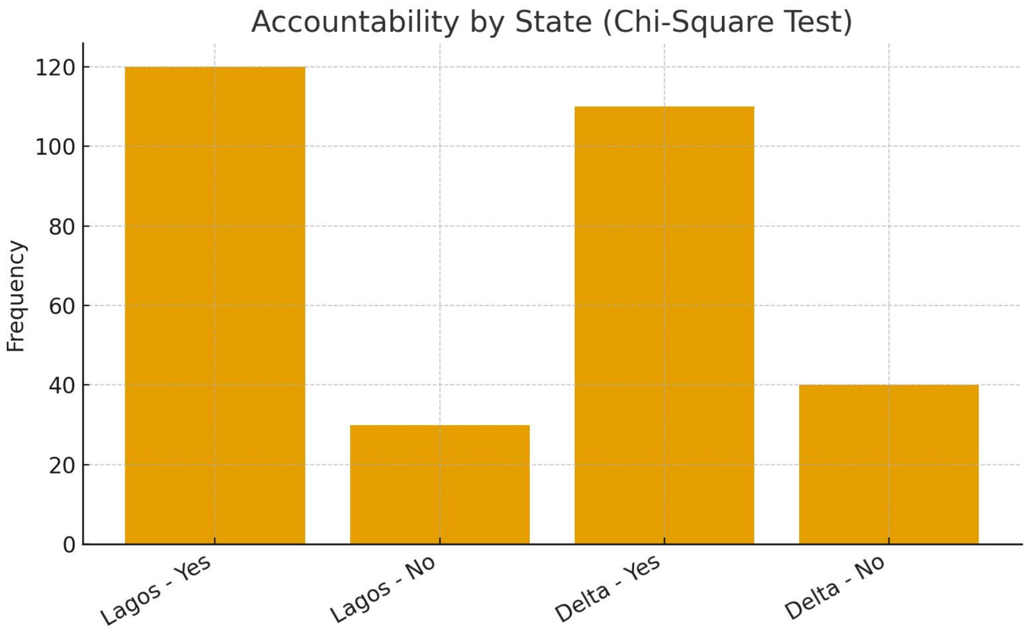

Figure 6
Accountability by State (Chi-Square Test)
Note. $\chi^2(1, N = 300) = 1.87$, $p = .17$, ns. ns = not significant.
χ^2 (1, N=300) = 1.87, p = 0.17

Interpretation: There is no statistically significant difference between Lagos and Delta States in terms of accountability improvement ($p > 0.05$).

Qualitative Analysis
Qualitative data from key informant interviews and document reviews were analyzed thematically. Emerging themes included accountability mechanisms, transparency practices, citizen engagement strategies, institutional reforms, and collaborative governance efforts.

Theme	Sample Quote
Accountability	"We now have more public reporting mechanisms post-COVID."
Collaborative Governance	"Agencies are working with NGOs to deliver social services."
Institutional Capacity	"Training programs have strengthened local government staff."

Integration of Findings
The mixed-methods findings indicate that governance elements—especially accountability, transparency, citizen involvement, institutional capacity, and collaborative governance—are closely linked to sustainable development results in Lagos and Delta States after COVID. Statistical tests reveal significant relationships, while qualitative evidence provides contextual understanding, showcasing real-world examples of reforms and obstacles.

Conclusion
Based on empirical evidence from the study, the variables of accountability, transparency, citizens' participation, institutional capacity, and collaborative governance, directly affect sustainable development. In this regard, sustainable development will be based on the values of accountability, transparency, which will enhanced citizens participation, institutional capacity, as well as, collaborative governance.

Strategic Recommendations

Drawing from the results of this research on governance and sustainable development in Lagos and Delta States after COVID, the subsequent strategic and policy recommendations are suggested:

1. **Utilize Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Citizen Engagement:** Government officials and policymakers ought to implement AI-powered platforms (like chatbots, e-governance dashboards, and automated feedback systems) to enhance immediate citizen involvement, collect public opinions, and guarantee inclusivity in policy development.
2. **Enhance Digital Accountability Systems:** Utilizing blockchain-based solutions and open-data platforms can promote increased transparency in budgeting, procurement, and project implementation, thus minimizing corruption and fostering citizens' confidence in governance.
3. **Create Sustainable Development Monitoring Councils at the State Level:** Lagos and Delta States need to establish independent monitoring councils that include citizens and are tasked with overseeing sustainable development metrics. These councils ought to incorporate AI-powered data analytics for immediate oversight of socio-economic and environmental results.

Contribution to Knowledge

a) This study has contributed to sustainable development in Nigeria by recommending pragmatic solutions to tackle the problem how lack of values can impede development.
b) It will be a useful resource for future studies, as knowing is built on.

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