Introduction

The role of good governance in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria has been a critical area of study, particularly in the context of the country's developmental challenges and its commitment to the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Good governance, characterized by transparency, accountability, rule of law, and inclusive participation, is widely recognized as a foundational pillar for the successful implementation of the SDGs (United Nations, 2015). In Nigeria, the pursuit of the SDGs has been fraught with systemic issues such as corruption, weak institutions, and inadequate public service delivery, which have hindered progress toward sustainable development (Adegboye et al., 2021). Studies have shown that effective governance structures are essential for mobilizing resources, ensuring equitable distribution of benefits, and fostering partnerships between government, private sector, and civil society, all of which are crucial for achieving the SDGs (Oluwajuyigbe & Adeyemi, 2020).

The Nigerian government has made efforts to align its national development plans with the SDGs, including the establishment of the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs to coordinate and monitor progress (Eze et al., 2022). However, the lack of good governance practices has often undermined these efforts. For instance, corruption and mismanagement of public funds have been identified as significant barriers to the effective implementation of SDG-related projects, particularly in sectors such as health, education, and infrastructure (Okeke-Uzodike & Oni, 2021). Furthermore, the absence of strong institutional frameworks and enforcement mechanisms has limited the capacity of the government to translate policy commitments into tangible outcomes (Adeleke, 2023). This has resulted in uneven progress across the 17 SDGs, with some goals, such as poverty eradication (SDG 1) and quality education (SDG 4), lagging significantly behind due to governance deficits.

The interplay between good governance and sustainable development is particularly evident in the context of environmental sustainability and climate action (SDG 13). Nigeria, as a resource-dependent economy, faces significant challenges in balancing economic growth with environmental preservation. Weak regulatory frameworks and poor enforcement of environmental laws have exacerbated issues such as deforestation, pollution, and gas flaring, which undermine efforts to achieve SDG 13 and related goals (Onyekwena & Alike, 2021). Moreover, the lack of inclusive governance has marginalized vulnerable groups, including women and rural communities, from decision-making processes, further impeding progress toward gender equality (SDG 5) and reducing inequalities (SDG 10) (Adeyemi & Ojo, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

The role of good governance in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria is a pressing issue that underscores the intricate relationship between effective governance and sustainable development. Good governance, characterized by transparency, accountability, the rule of law, and inclusive participation, is widely recognized as a foundation for successfully implementing the SDGs. Yet, Nigeria continues to face serious governance challenges that hinder its progress toward these global targets. Corruption stands out as a major obstacle, disrupting efficient resource allocation and eroding public confidence in state institutions. According to Adegbite and Nakajima (2021), corruption in Nigeria has resulted in widespread diversion of funds meant for critical sectors such as health, education, and infrastructure, obstructing progress on SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and SDG 4 (Quality Education). This entrenched corruption is intensified by fragile institutional frameworks and the absence of strong political will to enforce anti-corruption laws, fostering a culture of impunity that repeatedly derails national development initiatives (Ibrahim & Bello, 2023).

Furthermore, Nigeria's weak and ineffective institutions represent a significant barrier to achieving the SDGs. Poor institutional coordination and policy implementation have hindered progress in confronting complex development challenges. Oluwatobi et al. (2020) observe that weak enforcement of environmental policies has impeded Nigeria's advancement toward SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land), exacerbating problems such as deforestation, pollution, and ecosystem destruction. Likewise, the absence of effective accountability mechanisms has permitted the mismanagement of public funds, further deepening inequality. This is evident in stark disparities between urban and rural populations, where many marginalized communities lack access to essential services like clean water, sanitation, and electricity, critical components of SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) (UNDP, 2024).

Moreover, the exclusion of marginalized populations, including women, youth, and rural dwellers, from key decision-making processes continues to sustain inequality and obstruct inclusive development. Eze et al. (2022) stress that inclusive governance is vital to tackling the underlying causes of inequality and ensuring that development benefits are equitably shared. However, in Nigeria, these vulnerable groups remain underrepresented in political and institutional structures, curtailing their influence on policies affecting their lives. This limited inclusion undermines progress on SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and weakens broader development efforts, as the perspectives and needs of disadvantaged populations are often ignored. Additionally, the lack of participatory governance has resulted in a disconnect between public policies and local realities, often leading to ill-conceived development interventions that fail to address the unique challenges of specific communities (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2023).

Despite Nigeria's formal commitment to the SDGs, ongoing governance failures have cast serious doubt on the country's capacity to meet the 2030 deadline. Recent research underscores the urgent need for sweeping governance reforms to foster an environment conducive to sustainable development. Ibrahim and Umar (2023) emphasize that empowering anti-corruption institutions, enhancing public sector efficiency, and increasing citizen participation are vital for improving governance and accelerating SDG attainment. In addition, there is a growing need for investments in capacity-building for public officials and for the integration of digital tools to boost transparency and accountability in governance systems. Without such reforms, Nigeria risks falling further behind, entrenching cycles of poverty, social inequality, and ecological degradation. The nexus between good governance and sustainable development is undeniable, as governance is not only a driver of the SDGs but also a goal in itself, ensuring that development is inclusive, just, and enduring for future generations.

Literature Review

Good governance plays a critical role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria, as it provides the institutional framework necessary for sustainable development. Governance, as defined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), encompasses principles such as accountability, transparency, rule of law, and participatory decision-making, which are essential for the effective implementation of the SDGs (UNDP, 2021). Nigeria, like many developing nations, faces significant governance challenges, including corruption, weak institutions, and policy inconsistency, which have hindered progress toward achieving the SDGs (Akinyemi & Adejumo, 2022). The importance of good governance in sustainable development is evident in SDG 16, which explicitly highlights the need for strong institutions, justice, and accountability as prerequisites for achieving all other goals (United Nations, 2020).

Several studies have established a strong link between governance and development outcomes in Nigeria. According to Olaniyan and Okonkwo (2021), weak governance structures have led to inefficiencies in resource allocation, mismanagement of public funds, and a lack of political will to implement policies effectively. These governance failures have significantly affected Nigeria's progress in key SDG areas such as poverty reduction, quality education, and healthcare. For example, Nigeria has struggled to meet SDG 1 (No Poverty) due to mismanagement of social welfare programs and widespread corruption in government institutions (Eze & Nwankwo, 2022). Similarly, poor governance has hampered progress in SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), as funds meant for healthcare infrastructure are often diverted, leading to inadequate medical facilities and poor service delivery, especially in rural areas (Adegbite & Yusuf, 2023).

Corruption remains one of the most significant barriers to achieving the SDGs in Nigeria. Despite various anti-corruption initiatives, such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), corruption continues to undermine governance effectiveness (Ojo, 2020). Corruption distorts public spending, weakens trust in institutions, and creates an environment where policies fail to yield the intended results (Uche & Obi, 2021). Research has shown that countries with lower corruption levels tend to perform better in SDG-related outcomes due to better governance mechanisms and efficient resource utilization (World Bank, 2022). In Nigeria, corruption in the public sector has particularly affected SDG 4 (Quality Education), as funds allocated for educational development are often misappropriated, leading to dilapidated schools, poor teacher remuneration, and low student performance (Okeke, 2023).

Another critical aspect of governance affecting Nigeria's SDG progress is political instability and weak institutional capacity. Political instability, driven by electoral violence, ethnic conflicts, and weak rule of law, has created an unstable policy environment, making long-term SDG planning difficult (Ibrahim & Lawal, 2022). Effective governance requires a stable political climate where policies can be implemented without disruption. However, Nigeria’s governance landscape has been characterized by frequent changes in leadership, policy reversals, and a lack of continuity in development programs, which have slowed down SDG implementation (Akpan & Eze, 2021). The lack of institutional capacity also contributes to poor SDG performance, as government agencies often lack the technical expertise, funding, and coordination required to execute sustainable development projects effectively (Bello, 2023).

Public participation and inclusivity are also crucial components of good governance in SDG implementation. Studies have emphasized the importance of citizen engagement in policy formulation and implementation as a means of ensuring accountability and transparency (Adamu & Sanni, 2021). In Nigeria, however, governance structures have often been criticized for being elitist, with limited participation from marginalized groups such as women, youth, and rural communities (Olawale, 2022). This lack of inclusivity has negatively affected SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), as government policies often fail to address the needs of these vulnerable populations (Nnamdi & Usman, 2023). Strengthening participatory governance mechanisms, such as town hall meetings, grassroots involvement, and digital governance platforms, can enhance accountability and improve the effectiveness of SDG implementation in Nigeria (Ogunleye & Adebayo, 2020).

Despite these challenges, good governance remains a crucial driver of sustainable development in Nigeria. Countries that have successfully implemented the SDGs have done so by strengthening governance institutions, enhancing transparency, and ensuring effective policy implementation (UNDP, 2022). The Nigerian government has made some efforts in this regard, such as the adoption of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiative and digital governance reforms to improve service delivery and transparency (Ajayi, 2021). However, more comprehensive governance reforms are needed to accelerate SDG progress. Key recommendations from scholars include strengthening anti-corruption institutions, enhancing judicial independence, improving bureaucratic efficiency, and fostering public-private partnerships for sustainable development (Ogundipe & Ibitoye, 2023).

The role of good governance in achieving the SDGs in Nigeria cannot be overstated. Governance deficiencies such as corruption, political instability, weak institutions, and a lack of inclusivity have significantly hindered Nigeria's progress in sustainable development. Addressing these governance challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that includes strengthening institutions, promoting transparency, fostering citizen engagement, and ensuring policy continuity. With the right governance framework, Nigeria has the potential to achieve substantial progress in its SDG commitments and improve the overall well-being of its citizens.

Methodology

This study adopts a literature review approach combined with thematic analysis to examine the role of good governance in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria. The literature review method is used to synthesize existing research, policy documents, and reports from reputable sources such as peer-reviewed journals, government publications, and international development organizations. However, analyzing scholarly works published between 2020 and 2023, this study ensures that recent developments and policy interventions related to governance and SDG implementation in Nigeria are considered.

Thematic analysis is employed to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns within the literature, allowing for an in-depth exploration of recurring themes related to governance and SDG implementation. This approach facilitates the classification of governance issues into major themes such as corruption, political instability, institutional weaknesses, and public sector inefficiencies. Thematic coding helps to organize findings and establish connections between governance practices and Nigeria's progress toward SDG targets.

Results and Discussion

The findings from the literature review indicate that good governance is a critical determinant of Nigeria's progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Governance principles such as accountability, transparency, the rule of law, and citizen participation significantly impact policy implementation and the overall effectiveness of SDG-related programs (Akinyemi & Adejumo, 2022). However, Nigeria continues to struggle with systemic governance challenges, including corruption, political instability, weak institutional frameworks, and inadequate public sector efficiency, which have hindered sustainable development efforts (Eze & Nwankwo, 2022). The analysis reveals that while some progress has been made in areas like digital governance and anti-corruption initiatives, governance deficits remain a major obstacle to meeting SDG targets, particularly in poverty reduction, education, healthcare, and economic growth (Ogunleye & Adebayo, 2020).

One of the most prominent findings is the pervasive issue of corruption, which undermines governance effectiveness and disrupts SDG implementation. Despite various anti-corruption measures such as the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), corruption remains deeply entrenched in Nigerian institutions, diverting resources meant for development projects and reducing public trust in governance structures (Ojo, 2020). This governance failure is evident in SDG 1 (No Poverty), where corruption has led to the misallocation of funds intended for social welfare programs, thereby limiting poverty alleviation efforts (Olaniyan & Okonkwo, 2021). Similarly, in SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), mismanagement of healthcare funds and a lack of transparency in procurement processes have resulted in poor healthcare infrastructure, insufficient medical supplies, and inadequate service delivery, particularly in rural areas (Adegbite & Yusuf, 2023).

Another key finding is the impact of political instability and weak institutional capacity on SDG implementation. The literature highlights that Nigeria's political environment, characterized by electoral violence, frequent leadership changes, and policy inconsistency, has hindered long-term planning for sustainable development (Ibrahim & Lawal, 2022). Effective governance requires policy continuity and a stable political framework; however, in Nigeria, frequent shifts in leadership often lead to the abandonment or modification of development policies, disrupting SDG progress (Akpan & Eze, 2021). Moreover, many government institutions tasked with implementing SDG-related policies suffer from bureaucratic inefficiencies, a lack of technical expertise, and inadequate funding, which further hampers effective governance and sustainable development (Bello, 2023).

Public participation and inclusivity also emerged as crucial themes in the governance-SDG nexus. Studies indicate that citizen engagement in governance enhances transparency and accountability, leading to better development outcomes (Adamu & Sanni, 2021). However, governance structures in Nigeria have been criticized for being largely elitist, with limited opportunities for marginalized groups such as women, youth, and rural communities to participate in decision-making processes (Olawale, 2022). This exclusionary governance approach has negatively impacted SDG 5 (Gender

Equality) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), as policies often fail to address the specific needs of these groups (Nnamdi & Usman, 2023). Strengthening participatory governance mechanisms, such as grassroots engagement, digital governance platforms, and community-based decision-making structures, is essential for achieving sustainable development (Ogunleye & Adebayo, 2020).

Despite these governance challenges, the findings also reveal some positive developments in Nigeria's SDG implementation efforts. The adoption of digital governance reforms, such as the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and e-governance initiatives, has improved service delivery and transparency in some sectors (Ajayi, 2021). These reforms have facilitated easier access to government services, enhanced data-driven policy-making, and reduced opportunities for corruption by minimizing human interference in administrative processes (UNDP, 2022). Additionally, partnerships between the government, private sector, and civil society organizations have played a significant role in addressing governance gaps and accelerating SDG progress (Ogundipe & Ibitoye, 2023). Strengthening these collaborations and institutionalizing good governance practices will be crucial in ensuring Nigeria's sustainable development goals are met within the set timeframe.

The results highlight that achieving the SDGs in Nigeria is heavily dependent on governance reforms. Addressing corruption, enhancing institutional capacity, ensuring policy continuity, and promoting inclusive governance are fundamental to overcoming development challenges. Without significant improvements in governance structures, Nigeria risks falling short of its SDG commitments, exacerbating social and economic inequalities. Therefore, policymakers must prioritize governance enhancements by strengthening anti-corruption frameworks, fostering transparency, improving bureaucratic efficiency, and increasing citizen participation in decision-making. With these measures in place, Nigeria stands a better chance of achieving its SDG targets and ensuring sustainable development for future generations.

Conclusion

Good governance is an essential driver of sustainable development in Nigeria, and its effectiveness directly impacts the country's ability to achieve the SDGs. The findings reveal that governance challenges such as corruption, weak institutional capacity, policy inconsistency, and lack of inclusivity have significantly hindered progress toward sustainable development. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach, including strengthening anti-corruption measures, improving institutional efficiency, and promoting participatory governance. While Nigeria has made some progress in governance reforms, more comprehensive and sustained efforts are needed to ensure long-term development success. Therefore, prioritizing good governance, Nigeria can create an enabling environment for economic growth, social development, and environmental sustainability, ultimately positioning the nation to achieve its SDG commitments.

Recommendations

To enhance the role of good governance in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria, several key recommendations must be implemented.

1. First, Nigeria must strengthen its anti-corruption framework to ensure accountability and transparency in governance. Despite the existence of anti-corruption agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), corruption remains a significant barrier to sustainable development (Ojo, 2020). To address this, there is a need for stricter enforcement of anti-corruption laws, greater independence for anti-graft agencies, and the adoption of digital

governance tools to minimize opportunities for corrupt practices in public service delivery (Ajayi, 2021). Implementing blockchain technology in public procurement and financial transactions can enhance transparency and reduce fund misappropriation, thereby fostering sustainable development.

2. Second, Nigeria must improve institutional capacity and policy continuity to ensure effective SDG implementation. The frequent changes in leadership and inconsistent policy frameworks have hindered long-term development planning (Akpan & Eze, 2021). To address this, the government should institutionalize long-term development strategies that are insulated from political transitions. Strengthening the capacity of public institutions through training, technological adoption, and efficient resource allocation will enhance their ability to implement SDG-focused policies effectively (Bello, 2023). Additionally, creating independent SDG monitoring bodies can help track progress, evaluate governance effectiveness, and ensure accountability at all levels of government.

Third, inclusive governance should be promoted by increasing citizen participation in decision-making processes. Nigeria's governance structure has often been criticized for being elitist, with limited representation of marginalised groups such as women, youth, and rural communities (Olawale, 2022). Strengthening participatory governance mechanisms, such as town hall meetings, digital governance platforms, and community engagement initiatives, can enhance accountability and policy responsiveness (Adamu & Sanni, 2021). Ensuring that governance policies address the needs of all demographics will contribute to equitable development and foster national progress toward SDG targets, particularly in reducing inequalities (Nnamdi & Usman, 2023).