# Beyond Project Delivery: Reimagining Aid Governance for Sustainable Community Development in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The uncertainty surrounding foreign-assisted projects and programmes, despite the influx of development aid, stems from governance and institutional policies, which have undermined efforts to achieve sustainable development in developing countries like Nigeria. World Bank-assisted projects have played a significant role in achieving sustainable community development in areas such as healthcare services, education, infrastructure, social services, and poverty alleviation. The benefits of foreign aid have been influenced by unfavourable policies, resulting in the discontinuity of projects and programmes after donor exit. This study examines how foreign aid governance can be reinvented through World Bank-assisted projects and programmes, thereby providing a framework to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of foreign aid in achieving sustainable community development. Good Governance Theory (GGT) was adopted as the theoretical framework, focusing on the basic principles of transparency, accountability, responsiveness, participation, and institutional effectiveness. The study employed a qualitative research design, drawing on secondary data from government policy documents, World Bank project reports, and academic journals on foreign-aided projects and programmes, and analysed the collected data thematically. Findings revealed that sustainable community development outcomes are driven by good institutional mechanisms, inclusive participation, effective resource management, inter-agency collaboration, and that the lack of these inhibits the sustainability of community projects. The study contributes to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 16 and 17 by strengthening local governance institutions and policies, and institutionalising community partnership and participation across the phases of community projects and programmes. Thus, enhancing transparency and accountability mechanisms, and ensuring policy continuity among political administrators. The study concludes that sustainable community development should prioritise good governance and local ownership, rather than merely meeting project and programme implementation targets. The study recommends that the government, development agencies, and international organisations adopt a governance-based framework for the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of foreign-aided projects to ensure sustainable community development.

**Keywords**: Aid governance, Community development, Sustainable development, World Bank-assisted projects, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

Aid to developing countries is perceived as a legitimate need, as external funding, in case of proper administration and utilisation, which can accelerate investments into development hubs, helps vulnerable communities and poor citizens overcome poverty, and creates strong institutions and structures that would allow local communities to take ownership and care of the development projects and programmes (Habermas, 2023). Foreign aid financing is often channelled to nations with weak leadership and governance structures, resulting in a large share of aid funds being mismanaged or misappropriated. Despite some contributions from foreign aid in sectors such as health, education, and infrastructure, it has not advanced sustainable community development. According to Jega and Garba (2025), these challenges include institutional weakness, policy misalignment, and donor conditionalities that do not transfer control of the project to local communities.

Foreign aid has been an integral part of Nigeria's developmental narrative since independence. Concessional loans, grants, and technical assistance from multilateral and bilateral organisations have been utilised to fill gaps and weaknesses in important sectors such as health, education, water, energy, and social infrastructure (Molokwu et al., 2022). As one of Africa's largest economies, Nigeria has become a major target for the international donor community, receiving aid from the World Bank, the African Development Bank, USAID, the Commonwealth Development Corporation, and the United Nations (UN) agencies (World Bank, 2021).

Since Nigeria joined the World Bank in 1961, the World Bank has been one of the leading development partners active in the country, having extended concessional loans through the International Development Association (IDA) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). The World Bank has assisted Nigeria through various programmes such as the FADAMA I, II, III, Community and Social Development

Projects (CSDPs), NG-CARES, the deployment of mini-grids and solar home systems, which brought electricity coverage to over 5.5 million Nigerians and created thousands of local employment opportunities between 2018 and 2024 (World Bank, 2025).

The challenges of the sustainable development trajectory are that donor-financed projects, such as World Bank projects, do a reasonably good job. Meanwhile, supervision, technical aid and funds are ongoing, with experience showing a drop in activity when donors leave, and local institutions and communities take over. Infrastructure deteriorates, services become less effective, and community structures set up to provide services become less efficient, undermining the development benefits expected from aid (Asongu and Nwachukwu, 2019). It has been associated with low institutional ownership, poor handover planning, inadequate local financial and technical capacity, corruption, and governance architecture focused on disbursement and project delivery rather than long-term systems to achieve outcomes (Chinnah, 2025). This study fills that gap by shifting the analysis beyond project delivery to the governance structure that supports sustainability. Thus, against this backdrop, the general objective of this study is to investigate the administration of aid governance on achieving sustainable community development beyond project delivery following the donor's exit in Nigeria, while the specific objectives are to:

- Ascertain the influence of aid governance practices on sustainable community development outcomes in Nigeria.
- Explore approaches for reimagining aid governance beyond project delivery to achieve sustainable development initiatives in Nigeria.
- Identify the institutional challenges affecting aid governance towards achieving sustainable community development initiative outcomes in Nigeria.

## 2. Literature Review

*Foreign Aid and Community Development*

Foreign aid is a double-edged sword which enables development but also feeds dependency. The authors believe that while aid can help build institutional capacity, boost economic growth, and contribute to overall development goals, the drawbacks of weak domestic governance systems, donor conditionalities, and geopolitical considerations undermine its effectiveness (Asongu and Nwachukwu, 2019). Foreign aid can improve institutional capacity, stimulate economic growth, and contribute to overall development. The negative effects of weak domestic governance systems, donor conditionalities, and geopolitical considerations weaken the effectiveness of aid, and these issues provide a framework for evaluation (Fagge, 2022). Foreign-aided development projects have long been seen as vehicles to bridge the financing, technical, and infrastructural deficits that hinder community development in low- and middle-income countries (Chukwudi and Owoh, 2024).

The amount of money being donated to African economies with poor governance and weak institutional leadership remains significant (Abasilim, Gberevbie and Osibanjo, 2019). The quantity of aid and the quality of recipient institutions are often misaligned, causing donor money to fail to reach or benefit the intended recipients (Jega and Garba, 2025). In Nigeria, foreign aid has helped bring about clear improvements in several areas, including health, education, water supply, and physical infrastructure. The overall effectiveness is still hampered by a lack of institutional development, a lack of coherence between recipient-country policies and their donor counterparts, and the imposition of conditions by donor countries that limit recipient communities' ability to adapt projects to local realities (Jambadu, Monstadt and Pilo, 2024).

In addition to its developmental functions, foreign aid has been an instrument of soft power and diplomacy for donor states, enabling project selection and design to be based not only on recipient communities' needs but also on the strategic objectives of donor states and organisations. The donors, organisations, and institutions deliberately distribute their aid through non-governmental organisations (NGOs) rather than governments, as in certain cases, governments are perceived to have poor governance and inadequate institutional structures to administer and utilise the aid funds released to them. Therefore, making the diversion of aid funds possible, as using NGOs would reduce the risk of such diversion (Moyo, 2009).

*Aid Governance and Project Sustainability.*

Overdependence on aid may lead to poor governance and weak institutions. Excessive dependence on and use of aid may undermine governments' accountability and transparency by altering the financial linkages between taxation and the provision of public goods, thereby reducing people's incentives to demand accountability,

transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness from their institutions (Gberevbie, Oyeyemi, and Nchekwube, 2014). Projects and programmes funded by donor institutions or organisations have created an ad hoc implementation mechanism, with many administrative systems and additional reporting obligations, thus placing a burden on fragile institutional systems. Over-dependency can also affect a country's institutional policies, leading to a coincidence of agendas between donor and development priorities. The Nigerian experience has demonstrated that poor performance in international governance rankings, such as the CPI and IAI indices, poses a danger to development performance and to public confidence in institutions that facilitate development driven by foreign aid (UNDP, 2023). This implies that governance gaps are not a sideshow to the provision of aid but are a constraint on the realisation of sustainable community benefits from aid projects.

Experience in the health sector indicates that sustained post-donor-funding operations of a programme depend on the government and the community's active involvement in programme design and management, as well as on a genuine commitment to investing in the programme in the long term and a shared vision of the programme being supported (Casimiro et al, 2024). Stakeholder engagement research on community development-funded projects reveals parallels: Participation in isolation is ineffective for sustainability unless it is structured, meaningful, and immune to elite capture (Oduor, Lango, and Karuu, 2025). The experience outlined in this body of work suggests that stakeholder involvement should be treated as a governance process intentionally designed and resourced, rather than as a formal process during implementation.

Institutional capacity building, continuity, and policies have been considered important yet often-overlooked post-donor sustainability factors. Most unsuccessful community development projects are externally driven interventions introduced without adequate adaptation to local institutional and political contexts. Institutions that can learn from their experiences through continuous monitoring, evaluation, and adaptive planning will be needed to sustain community engagement (Hart, 2023). The broader policy framework in Nigeria exacerbates this, as development paths have performed poorly, partly due to policy discontinuity between successive administrations, in which projects are passed on from one administration to the next and are either deprioritised or forgotten, leading to the accumulation of thousands of abandoned public projects nationwide. To tackle the trend, the need for binding national development planning frameworks that make the government accountable for maintaining policy continuity has been argued (Adekalu, 2017).

*The World Bank-Assisted Projects in Nigeria*

The World Bank has been the most noted and consistent external development partner in Nigeria, making disbursements of funds through concessional credits and grants through the International Development Association (IDA) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). Currently, the Community and Social Development Projects (CSDPs) are ongoing, and the NG-CARES project and programmes are being undertaken by the Community and Social Development Agency (CSDA) in collaboration with the World Bank (World Bank, 2024). The development project method engages local communities in the decision-making process, giving them the power to select priority projects such as health, education, and infrastructure (water, roads, rural electricity), among other social infrastructure, to achieve the desired result (Obinna and Nnamdi, 2020).

Infrastructure development in rural areas under the CSD project, funded by the World Bank, includes the construction of health and education facilities, roads, rural electrification, and water supply systems, thereby supporting sustainable community development (Adegboye and Olaniyi, 2021). The FADAMA I, II, and III projects have been deliberately structured to encourage grassroots involvement in project identification, planning, and implementation (World Bank, 2023). The goal of these programs is to enable the local communities to identify needs and, by doing so, act. The FADAMA III agricultural project across states in Nigeria focuses on economic and infrastructural contributions to community development, supported by effective expenditure control, inclusive participation, and increased agricultural productivity and income levels among farmers (World Bank, 2021).

World Bank approved a USD 750 million credit for the Distributed Access through Renewable Energy Scale-up (DARES) programme to provide electricity services to more than 17.5 million Nigerians who were previously unserved or underserved by mini-grid services and standalone solar systems (World Bank, 2023). The latter followed the earlier Nigeria Electrification Project (2018-2024), which supported the deployment of 125 mini-grids, providing electricity access to more than 5.5 million Nigerians and, consequently, generating thousands of jobs nationwide (World Bank, 2025). The Bank also approved a 1.57-billion-dollar financing package comprising three connected operations: the HOPE-GOV programme to address governance issues in financial and human-resource management, which impede education and health service delivery; the HOPE-PHC

programme, which aims to strengthen primary healthcare (PHC) for the more than 40 million Nigerians; and the Sustainable Power and Irrigation for Nigeria (SPIN) project, designed to create climate resilience through improved dam safety and irrigation systems (World Bank, 2024; Ibeawuchi, Okwara and Okangba, 2023).

*Theoretical Framework*

This study is underpinned by Good Governance Theory (GGT), which was developed and popularised by the World Bank and other multilateral development institutions since the early 1990s, when it was recognised that development aid to countries with poor institutions was often counterproductive. The World Bank describes good governance in terms of traditions and institutions by which authority is exercised in a country; how governments and public bodies are selected and held to account; the ability of institutions to develop and apply effective policies; and how citizens and the state value the institutions that govern their relationships (Harrison, 2005; Ekundayo, 2017; UNODC, n.d.).

According to Good Governance Theory, building the capacity of institutions that receive, manage, and sustain development resources is more important than the amount of financial or technical resources. Some key principles of the framework include the rule of law, transparency, accountability, participation, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, equity, and consensus orientation (Uddin and Ashrafun, 2007; Andrew, 2008). These principles have been integrated into the Bank's Theory of Change (ToC) as a vital element for the sustainability of the projects it supports, and now as a safeguard measure, rather than a peripheral activity, of good governance reform (Björk and Johansson, 2001; Peter, 2010).

The sustainability of World Bank projects in Nigeria is explored using the analytical framework of Good Governance Theory, which is utilised beyond project delivery. The theory is not about disbursement, construction or service roll-out as indicators of success, but how the governance framework of each project, including transparent financial management, accountable implementing structures, meaningful involvement of communities, responsive institutional design, and effective, policy-continuous local institutions, is strong enough to ensure sustainability of outcomes after donor supervision and funding ends. This framing takes the study beyond a project-management focus on what went wrong and into a governance focus on why sustainability is often lost after donors leave. It offers recommendations to enhance the institutional environment for sustainable community development in Nigeria.

## 3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative documentary research design, which is appropriate for a topic that requires tracing governance practices across foreign-aided project programme documents and independent literature. The secondary data were sourced from the World Bank, UNDP, international organisations, the Community and Social Development Project Agency, NG-CARES, FADAMA, the Nigeria Electrification Project/DARES, and HOPE-GOV/HOPE-PHC/SPIN project appraisal and implementation reports. These programmes were selected as the largest, documented, multi-sectoral World Bank interventions in Nigeria since 2015. The selected documents were used because they focused on Nigeria and were compared with evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa, addressing aid governance related to World Bank programmes. Nineteen (19) peer-reviewed articles were used, fourteen (14) World Bank and United Nations documents, five (5) Nigerian government policy documents and three (3) governance index reports. The collected data were open coded according to the principles of good governance theory (institutional capacity, participation, transparency/accountability, policy continuity, coordination), grouped and analysed thematically according to the objectives, and mapped programme by programme. This methodology is widely accepted in qualitative research. The researcher has chosen to use it because it is widely used in qualitative research, especially in studies examining institutional and policy documents.

## 4. Results and Discussions

*Governance Practices and Sustainable Development Outcomes*

The results show that the longer assisted community projects remain in place in Nigeria, the more dependent these projects are on the governance mechanisms used to manage resources rather than on the number of resources made available. The involvement of stakeholders proved to be a predictor of the post-implementation performance. Community engagement frameworks should be more than symbolic. They should mobilise communities as partners in the development agenda, as building community engagement frameworks is an instrument for achieving sustainable outcomes, not an outcome (Ogunde, 2025). Delays and cost overruns were linked to effective resource management, with transparent budgeting and disciplined

financial tracking. Correlated effective resource management with fewer delays and cost overruns, which included transparent budgeting and disciplined financial tracking (Hart, 2024).

Plans for institutional capacity building and training of personnel, functional administrative systems, and adequate logistics at the implementing agency level also positively influenced project survival as they transitioned from donor-funded delivery to locally managed operations. The effectiveness of externally funded programmes in achieving lasting changes depends on the credibility of governance institutions, as weak absorptive capacity limits the realisation of aid benefits in terms of lasting institutional outcomes (Maekawa, 2024).

Inter-agency cooperation among government ministries, donors, and community structures eliminated duplication of effort and created greater coherence in service provision. The lack of such cooperation led to overlapping services, weakening accountability. Where systems of monitoring and evaluation were in place, they raised awareness of implementation issues. In Nigeria, it is often neither timely nor institutionally coordinated to facilitate adaptive planning; the projects reviewed had monitoring and evaluation mainly focused on donor rather than local learning priorities (Ogunbode, 2025). This implies that aid effectiveness in terms of outputs and project results should give way to a governance framework within which projects operate, one that critically examines the influence of foreign aid volumes on sustainable development outcomes (Fentahun, 2023).

*Reimagining Aid Governance Beyond Project Delivery*

There is a need to move from a project-delivery approach to a governance-based approach that emphasises outcome sustainability and the sustaining of institutional structures to ensure sustainable community development in Nigeria (Edih and Ndudi, 2025). The quality of governance should serve as a guideline for the basic principles of effective aid towards achieving sustainable community development, including institutional capacity, participatory legitimacy, transparency, and policy consistency, with quality of governance as an end goal rather than simply a condition for successful project and programme implementation. Institutional capacity building for local community leaders should not only occur during the intensive delivery period but also begin at the project design phase, including technical and administrative capacity building and operational funds to ensure that institutional efforts and support will survive after the donor exits (Bukar, Hindatu and Umar, 2025).

Institutionalising local community participation and partnership by initiating community project management committees (CPMCs) with their mandate, budgeting for maintenance and contract commitments for assessing responsibilities after the end of the project and programme. Therefore, it is not goodwill that enables community engagement over the long haul, but institutional structures (Hart, 2024). Strengthening transparency and accountability by making financial disclosures public, conducting independent social audits, and creating grievance forums can help maintain the trust that underpins community cooperation, which was identified as a corrosive effect of opacity throughout the findings (Edi and Ndudi, 2025).

One of the key challenges in maintaining consistency across administrations is that projects are sensitive to political transitions (Whitty, 2024). Community development programmes can be protected from the disruptive impact of leadership changes through legal and institutional safeguards, binding memoranda of understanding, multi-year budgetary commitments, and statutory domestication of development priorities, all of which help mitigate the dynamics of politicisation (Asongu and Nwachukwu, 2019; Gberevbie et al., 2014). Evidence suggests that improving outcomes in Nigeria's aid sector is a governance issue, not merely a technical or financial one. Reimagining aid governance beyond project delivery means reframing what donors, governments, and implementing partners consider success, instead of the number of facilities built by donor partners at handover, but the extent to which local institutions, communities, and policy environments are left better able to sustain development gains on their own.

*Institutional Challenges Affecting Sustainable Community Development in Nigeria*

Institutional and structural weaknesses resurface in development projects and programmes with otherwise good governance design. Lack of project and programme continuity, delayed approvals, poor accountability, transparency issues, and inappropriate handover processes were most acute during the transition from a temporary project office to a permanent government structure (Chinnah, 2025).

Political interference and elite capture of project location, staffing, and resource allocation decisions, influenced by patronage rather than technical or community-based need, and leadership transitions marked

by the abandonment of predecessor-linked projects and programmes (Whitty, 2024). Community project maintenance financing is a distinct and under-examined challenge that is lacking in programmes, with a poor maintenance budget line that cannot survive the post-exit period, reflecting a general bias toward funding new construction over asset existence and sustainability (Asongu and Nwachukwu, 2019).

Community partnership, participation, and ownership indicate that communities, especially youth, help select and co-finance projects and programmes, which were reported as more consistently functional post-exit than projects designed and delivered for the benefit of communities (Chukwudi and Owoh, 2024; Ezebuilo et al., 2025). This implies that consultation between donors and development agencies is not a sufficient mechanism for community partnership, participation, and ownership of projects and programmes.

The novel contributions of this study span from the post-project delivery governance sustainability (PPDGS), which explains the good governance theory specifically during donor exit, thus contributing to the exit-point conditions, statutory (not merely administrative) institutional continuity, and co-financing or revenue-linked participation, with binding legal/financial conditionality rather than voluntary participation, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation. This study provides practical evidence that donor organisations, government agencies, and beneficiary communities can apply at the design and appraisal stages of future community-development-driven financing in Nigeria. In a nutshell, this study also contributed to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 16 and 17, with SDG 16 calling for efficient, effective, accountable, transparent, and strong institutions at all levels, and SDG 17 entails effective partnerships among donors, governments, and communities during implementation, to ensure sustainable institutions and structures that would outlast the donor exit.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigates how the governance of foreign aid could move beyond the mere implementation of aid projects to achieve sustainable development in Nigerian communities. Though these projects have improved infrastructure, social service provision, poverty reduction, and community livelihoods, their long-term sustainability is hindered by governance and institutional problems following the withdrawal of donor aid. Using the good governance theory and a qualitative assessment of secondary data, the study found that transparency, accountability, stakeholder involvement, institutional capability, resource management, interagency coordination, and monitoring and evaluation are indispensable for achieving sustainable development outcomes. For example, the World Bank-assisted programmes have shown that sustainability after donor exit is not determined by the amount of aid, project design quality, or delivery success, but by whether governance continuity is structurally undermined by statutory institutional ownership, co-financed community participation, and financial conditions before donor exit. The study concludes that sustainable community development entails a transition from a project-based to a governance approach to foreign aid, and that improvements in local governance institutions, the institutionalisation of community participation, transparency, and accountability, and policy continuity must become integral parts of foreign-assisted development programmes. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- The Federal and State governments should strengthen the existing institutional structures involved in project implementations through good policy reforms to maintain project continuity and cooperation among donor governments, stakeholders, and communities.
- Community participation and partnership should be institutionalised from the onset of the project to the end to foster effective ownership, accountability and transparency.
- Government should ensure adequate project funding with proper financial management, through project monitoring, evaluation, and auditing to enhance accountability in the use of project resources.
- Governance-oriented frameworks should be used to implement foreign-aided projects. At the same time, more resources should be invested in capacity building and institutional development for project and programme sustainability after donor exit.

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