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Governance and Sustainable Development in the 21st Century Nigerian Business Environment

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Abstract
This study is a conceptual review of issues of sustainable development in the 21st century Nigerian business environment with a focus on governance. The paper highlights youth unemployment and poverty as factors of bad governance hindering sustainable development in Nigeria. The work revealed that bad governance in Nigeria has made the business environment unattractive to investors local and foreign, resulting in brain drain and further increasing the level of poverty and youth unemployment. It concluded that despite the nation's rich natural resources, and strategies put in place to ensure sustainable development, the Nigerian business environment is unattractive to investors due to bad governance and its chain effects on the national economy. The study recommended a truly autonomous legal/judiciary system that can checkmate the activities of the executive tier of government in Nigeria; and all stakeholders of the Nigerian business environment must see governance as a grass root concept to enable all to discharge their responsibilities with a high sense of duty/commitment, to the sustainable development of the nation.

Keywords: Business environment, governance, poverty, sustainable development, unemployment

Introduction

Recent economic indicators reveal that Nigeria remains distant from realising sustainable development, primarily due to the absence of effective legal and policy frameworks needed to drive such progress. These institutional deficiencies are largely attributed to poor governance, which adversely affects business sustainability across the country. As highlighted by BP Chaliha College (2024), essential national strategies that promote socially responsible economic growth while safeguarding the environment and natural resources for future generations are significantly lacking. Although Nigeria adopted the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, aimed at eradicating poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring inclusive prosperity, progress remains minimal nearly a decade later (Bose *et al.*, 2024). Rather than witnessing improvement, the nation is currently experiencing widespread protests against poor governance. Moreover, despite being Africa's largest economy and ranking among the largest globally, Nigeria continues to be classified among the world's poorest nations

. This paradox is not rooted in a scarcity of resources, but in systemic mismanagement, misallocation, and misappropriation (Emmanuel *et al.*, 2018; Oxfam International, 2024).

Consequently, governance failures have perpetuated widespread poverty and soaring youth unemployment resulting in insecurity. The persistent socio-economic hardships endured by the populace raise pressing concerns regarding the efficacy of current leadership and institutional practices in achieving the nation's development aspirations. The recent "End Bad Governance Protest" is conclusive evidence of these facts.

Although Nigeria recorded economic growth in the years preceding the COVID -19 pandemic, this progress did not translate into significant poverty reduction or the creation of

adequate employment opportunities for its burgeoning youth population (Federal Ministry of Youth & Sports Development, 2021). Youth unemployment has continued to rise, and according to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), approximately 63% of Nigerians, equivalent to 133 million people are multi-dimensionally poor, lacking access to adequate healthcare, nutrition, housing, and sanitation. These alarming statistics have raised deep concerns among stakeholders regarding not only the nation's present socio-economic state but also the feasibility of achieving sustainable development. The adverse impact of poor governance on Nigeria's sustainable development trajectory is profound. Governance failures have rendered the business environment increasingly unattractive to both domestic and international investors. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), often described as engines of economic growth, struggle to survive under such conditions, with many forced to shut down. Factors such as insecurity, insurgencies, environmental degradation, pipeline vandalism, and ethno-religious tensions coupled with the absence of coherent policy frameworks have significantly hindered Nigeria's sustainable development ambitions (Kola, 2020; Rasaki & Olusola, 2021; Zeb-Obipi, 2024).

Poverty and unemployment, though rooted in political and economic challenges, directly affect business profitability and market dynamics by influencing consumer purchasing behaviour (Indeed, 2024). A stable and conducive environment for business fosters economic sustainability. While existing literature (Nyewusira & Nweke, 2014; Touray, 2016; Emmanuel *et al.*, 2018; Inyang, 2019) predominantly addresses political and socio-economic dimensions, this study uniquely examines the intersection of governance and business in Nigeria, offering critical insights into the country's path toward achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Statement of the Problem

The recent nationwide protest held from 1st to 10th August 2024—widely referred to as the "Hunger Protest" or "End Bad Governance Protest" serves as a stark reflection of the growing public discontent with the state of governance in Nigeria. These demonstrations were not isolated expressions of civil unrest but rather symptomatic of deeper structural issues, notably the failure of governance systems to address chronic poverty, rising unemployment, and economic stagnation. Citizens across the country have voiced their frustrations over the inability of successive governments to implement effective policies that promote equitable growth, safeguard livelihoods, and ensure a viable future for the nation.This crisis of governance has significantly undermined the prospects for sustainable development in Nigeria. The very notion of sustainability is threatened when the majority of the population lacks access to basic needs and economic opportunities. Youth unemployment remains alarmingly high, and the business environment particularly for small and medium enterprises has become increasingly hostile due to insecurity, corruption, weak institutions, and policy inconsistencies. These conditions not only stifle entrepreneurial innovation but also discourage local and foreign investment, thereby weakening the nation's economic foundation.

In this context, the future of Nigerian citizens appears uncertain, and the confidence of key stakeholders in the economy has been severely eroded. The persistent governance failures have created a climate of despair and disillusionment. Therefore, this study is necessitated by the urgent need to critically examine the relationship between governance practices and sustainable development within the 21st-century Nigerian business environment, offering insights for policy reform and economic revitalisation.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to ascertain the effect of bad governance on the 21st century Nigerian business environment. Given that, the specific objectives were to:

1. Examine how poverty as a function of bad governance affects businesses in Nigeria
2. Ascertain how youth unemployment as a function of bad governance affects businesses in Nigeria
3. The combined effects of the above on businesses in Nigeria

Conceptual and Theoretical Review

Concept of Sustainable Development

Kates, Parris, and Leiserowitz (2005) define sustainable development as a set of guiding principles and values aimed at meeting present needs without jeopardising the capacity of future generations to meet theirs. They categorise sustainability into three core elements: what is to be sustained, namely nature, life support systems, and communities; what is to be developed by people, the economy, and society; and the time frame, which ranges from the immediate to the indefinite future. Specific components identified include the Earth, biodiversity, and ecosystems under nature; ecosystem services and environmental resources as life support systems; and diverse cultures and communities within society. The Brundtland Report (1987) defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs". The implication of this according to Dickson (2022, p. 66) is that "the present generation through formulation and implementation of projects, programmes and policies should leave to the next generation a stock of quality of life assets no less than those they inherited." Therefore, development priorities encompass human well-being (e.g., education, equality, and health), economic growth (e.g., productivity and consumption), and institutional capacity (e.g. governance and social capital).

This framework integrates environmental, social, economic, and institutional dimensions of human development. Similarly, Kaimuri and Kasimbei (2017), along with Byjus (2023), argue that sustainable development remains an evolving concept with expanding dimensions, all rooted in long-term impact. Therefore, sustainable development, when supported by well-formulated and effectively implemented policies, plays a critical role in improving the quality of life and ensuring lasting well-being for a nation's citizens. Contrary to what some authors believe, Rabie (2016) thought that development goes beyond economic activities and growth, and includes the social aspect of human life that governs people's way of thinking and living. Supporting this view, Abuiyada (2018) described the development as a "hybrid term for a myriad of strategies adopted for socio-economic and environmental transformation from current states to described ones". Explaining what that means, he said that in addition to the reduction or elimination of poverty, and inequality, and the provision for employment, development should guarantee basic human rights and empower all citizens of a country. Thus, the Institute of Development Studies (2024) emphasized the reduction or elimination of poverty, unemployment and inequality in a country as vital elements of development.

Challenges to Sustainable Development in Nigeria's 21st Century

Scholars such as Kola (2020) listed the lack of good governance and corruption among the 21st-century challenges of sustainable development in Nigeria. He argued that with insecurity and various forms of insurgencies in Nigeria, environmental degradation due to deforestation,

vandalizing of petroleum pipelines and polarization of the entire populace along the line of ethnic and religious frontiers, the nation's human and material resources are been wasted daily. He called on Nigerian leaders to wake up and embark on proactive and stringent measures to develop the economy through good governance. For the veracity of this opinion and similar opinions on sustainable development in Nigeria, Oweiba*et al* (2024) analysed Nigeria's developmental issues and found significant gaps in addressing key challenges such as youth unemployment and poverty. In a related development, Dode (2025, p. 72) posits that several dimensions of inequalities in such areas as economic, social, political and cultural impact negatively on the development aspiration of Nigeria. Similarly, Dickson and Atakpa (2025, p. 81) opine that "increased interdependence in the economic, social, technological, cultural, political and ecological spheres driven by globalisation"has far-reaching implications for achieving sustainable development in the peripheral states

Therefore, Lawrence, Ihebuzor and Lawrence (2020) evaluated the critical factors of sustainable development in Nigeria and pointed out factors of poor governance such as poor funding of education in the budgets and neglect of learning environment and facilities as issues depriving Nigeria of attaining her Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) over the years. They concluded that though sustainable development may be elusive, it was not out of reach. They explained that the government, through proper budgeting and appropriation of funds, could handle issues of sustainable development for the overall improvement of the national economy. A similar stance was taken by Zeb-Obipi (2024) who stated that the inadequacies in the management of the Nigerian economy have led it far from attaining its quest for sustainable development and; that sustainability could be possible through good governance. Without a doubt, paying attention to the issues of governance in Nigeria is an effective way of driving the nation's goal of sustainable development.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws its theoretical foundation from Dependency Theory, which emerged in the mid-20th century through the intellectual contributions of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), particularly under the leadership of Raul Prebisch. The theory was developed as a critique of the classical and neoclassical economic models, which, according to scholars like Andre Gunder Frank, Theotonio Dos Santos, Enrique Cardozo, Edelberto Torres-Rivas, and Samir Amin, failed to account for the persistent underdevelopment in countries of the Global South. Dependency theory argues that the global economic system is structurally unequal, with developed (core) countries exploiting the resources and labour of developing (peripheral) countries. According to Reyes (2024), the proponents of this theory advanced three major policy proposals for developing countries: First, rather than relying heavily on monetary policy, developing states should manage their exchange rates and strengthen government spending to stimulate internal growth; second, the state must play a proactive role in shaping economic policy and guiding development, rather than leaving growth to market forces alone; and third, to reduce dependence on foreign goods and external markets, countries should protect domestic industries through tariffs and quotas while encouraging local production.

In the context of the study, dependency Theory provides a valuable lens for understanding the ongoing challenges. Despite decades of economic reforms, Nigeria remains heavily dependent on oil exports and imports of finished goods. This dependency hinders sustainable development, as local industries are underdeveloped, infrastructure remains inadequate, and governance often aligns with external interests rather than national priorities. The theory suggests that effective governance in Nigeria should prioritize: First, strategic economic

planning, led by the state, to shift from extractive to productive economic activities; second, protection and support of local industries, using tools like tariffs and targeted subsidies; and third, reduction of external dependency, by investing in education, technology, and infrastructure that supports self-sufficiency. In essence, the theory reinforces the argument that sustainable development in Nigeria cannot be achieved without a deliberate reorientation of governance, one that resists external economic domination and promotes internal capacity building and inclusive growth.

The State of Governance in Nigeria

Governance has been defined as the process of decision-making and its implementation (Mehraj & Shamin, 2020). It is the "manner in which vested authority uses its power to achieve the institution objectives, including its power to design, implement and innovate, the organization's policies, rules, systems, and processes, and to engage and involve its stakeholders" (Institutional Social Security Association- ISSA, 2024). It is the way a country is managed in terms of its economy, policies and legal issues (United Cities and Local Government- UCLG, 2021). From the standpoint of Dickson and Akpan (2025, p. 156), governance refer s to "the structures, processes, and mechanisms through which power and authority are exercised in the society …it encompasses how decisions are made, how policies are implemented, and how various actors interact and cooperate." Hence, governance is related to the efficient and effective administration of a system; as well as the national reforms and the development of the economy (Mehraj & Shamin, 2020). Atkinson et al. (in Dickson, 2022, p 562) argues that Governance stresses the interaction between the state and other actors involved in policy development…" Hence, the role of governance in the sustainable development of any nation cannot be overemphasized.

Good governance aims to minimize corruption, respond actively to the needs of the people, and listen to the voices of all, inculcating all of these in the decision-making process (UCLG, 2021). This reiterated the view of Kola (2020) who defined governance as "the ability of government to make use of its power in the management and distribution of social and economic resources of a nation, enhancing the well-being of its citizens transparently". They clearly stated that "governance is a major contributing factor to any nation in the world". Worldwide Government Indicators (2024) show that countries with more effective governance tend to achieve higher levels of economic growth by obtaining better ratings and attracting more investment. Such countries, according to the indicators, can offer high-quality public services, put foreign resources to better use, encourage higher levels of human capital accumulation, accelerate technological innovation/ advancement, and increase the productivity of government/ spending. Sadly, this description is far from the Nigerian situation.

Alozie (2017) clearly stated that "bad governance in Nigeria has remained the major drive for mass poverty, unemployment, youth restiveness, and economic paralysis" in the country. Despite her rich endowment of natural resources, and the strategies put in place to improve national growth and development, the Nigerian economy has continued to show "abysm al growth", and wallow in abject poverty due to bad governance (Alozie, 2017 & Ojabello, 2024) which Coker and Gworge-Genyi (2014) described as an "albatross on the sustainable development of Nigeria, the bane of peace and security in the country. Obilor (2023) noted that poverty, corruption inadequate financial resources, autonomy, lack of participation by community members, inadequate use of grassroots institutions and priority misplacements remain challenges of governance in community development in Nigeria. These have also hindered the sustainability of the nation, without the implementation of a workable solution in sight. How disheartening! The situation has become unbearable and Nigerians are at the heart of a nationwide protest to "end

bad governance". They have decided to take the "bull by the horns". They can only hope that this will change the narratives.

Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Youth unemployment has been described as a situation whereby a young person (15- 35 years) has no gainful employment but has the potential, willingness and energy (Cable News, 2023). While efforts have been made to curb it over the years, it has steadily increased as shown below;

Table 1: Nigeria Youth Unemployment Rate (2014-2024)

Year	Youth Unemployment Rate (%)
2014	10.19
2015	10.64
2016	11.31
2017	11.90
2018	12.33
2019	12.59
2020	12.55
2021	10.00
2022	6.81
2023	5.84
2024	6.50 (Q2)

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2024); **Proshare** (2023).

Though Table 1 shows a decline in the youth unemployment rate from 2020–2024, this does not mean an improvement in the situation, but rather a mere revision in unemployment measurement methodology, where individuals working at least one hour per week are considered employed as against the previous measurement of 20 hours per week (Proshare, 2025).

Youth unemployment is a significant challenge in Nigeria and has been attributed to bad governance. This is because despite recognizing the fact that youth unemployment is a major threat to sustainable development and putting it as an item in its action plan for 2021 -2024, implementation of this action plan by the Federal Government of Nigeria remains unseen. Hence, the high rate of youth unemployment (Federal Ministry of Youths and Sport Development, 2021). While applauding the strides made by the government in the areas of policy alignment and strategic planning in this respect, Oweiba et al (2024) drew attention to the lack of implementation of effective policies. They advocated for a more robust policy implementation, enhanced stakeholder engagement, and targeted strategies to handle specific challenges. These, they noted as functions of good governance for sustainable development in the country. Therefore youth unemployment in Nigeria can be drastically reduced by addressing the issues of bad governance, for the sustainable development of the country.

Poverty in Nigeria

Poverty is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that reflects various forms of deprivation experienced by individuals, households, or entire communities (Touray, 2016; Ajakaiye, 2000; Ramphoma, 2014). According to Ajakaiye and Adeyeye (2000), poverty may be examined through several lenses, including the absence of access to productive resources, the inability to secure basic goods and services, and social exclusion mechanisms. These dimensions

suggest that poverty can be interpreted not only from an economic standpoint where deprivation is linked to insufficient material resources—but also through social and political perspectives, involving ineffective governance, poor infrastructure, limited employment opportunities, and exploitative taxation systems. Furthermore, the World Bank (as cited in Dickson, 2025, p. 68) defines rural poverty as a condition marked by pronounced deprivation among populations in rural areas. This involves limited income, restricted access to essential services such as education, healthcare, clean water, and adequate housing, as well as constrained opportunities for upward mobility.

Nigeria is a poor country. It has been reported that about 133 million people (63%) living in Nigeria are multi-dimensionally poor, experiencing over one-quarter (¼) of all deprivations (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). A more comprehensive report by the National Bureau of Statistics (2025) describes the level of poverty in Nigeria thus; "The Federal Government of Nigeria through the National Bureau of Statistics today launched the results of the 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) Survey. This survey was a collaborative effort between the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the National Social Safety-Nets Coordinating Office (NASSCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI). The survey, which sampled over 56,000 households across the 36 states of the Federation and the FCT, was conducted between November 2021 and February 2022 and provides multidimensional poverty estimates at the senatorial district level.

Highlights of the 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index survey reveal that: 63% of persons living within Nigeria (133 million people) are multidimensionally poor. The National MPI is 0.257, indicating that poor people in Nigeria experience just over one-quarter of all possible deprivations. 65% of the poor (86 million people) live in the North, while 35% (nearly 47 million) live in the South. Poverty levels across States vary significantly, with the incidence of multidimensional poverty ranging from a low of 27% in Ondo to a high of 91% in Sokoto. Over half of the population of Nigeria are multidimensionally poor and cook with dung, wood or charcoal, rather than cleaner energy. High deprivations are also apparent nationally in sanitation, time to healthcare, food insecurity, and housing.

In general, the incidence of monetary poverty is lower than the incidence of multidimensional poverty across most states. In Nigeria, 40.1% of people are poor according to the 2018/19 national monetary poverty line, and 63% are multidimensionally poor according to the National MPI 2022. Multidimensional poverty is higher in rural areas, where 72% of people are poor, compared to 42% of people in urban areas. The National MPI is reported with a linked Child MPI, which provides additional information on Multidimensional Child Poverty in Nigeria. According to the report, two-thirds (67.5%) of children (0–17) are multidimensionally poor according to the National MPI, and half (51%) of all poor people are children. The highest deprivations are in the indicator of child engagements—where over half of poor children lack the intellectual stimulation that is pivotal to early childhood development.

Child poverty is prevalent in rural areas, with almost 90% of rural children experiencing poverty. Across the geo-political zones, the child MPI shows higher poverty in the northeast and northwest (where 90% of children are poor) and lower poverty in the southeast and southwest (74% and 65.1% respectively). The incidence of Child MPI is above 50% in all States and greater than 95% in Bayelsa, Sokoto, Gombe and Kebbi. Four million Nigerians - 2.1% of the population -live with a child aged 15 ~~1~~7 who is the first generation in that household to have completed primary school.' Clearly, these statistics show that poverty is an epidemic in Nigeria."

Poverty in Nigeria is not occasioned by a lack of resources, as the country is endowed with rich natural and human resources, but emanates from a lack of good governance which has hindered the nation's sustainable development (Emmanuel *et al*, 2018). Relating poverty to bad governance and its negative influence on sustainable development, Nyewusira and Nweke (2014) asserted that "poverty eradication, changing consumption and production patterns, and protecting and managing the natural resources base for economic and social development are overacting objectives of and essential requirements for sustainable development". However, they noted that sustainable development cannot be engendered in Nigeria due to governance structure of the country which was mainly based on a "prebendalist leadership class and a rentier economy, sustained by a defective federal system". They strongly posited that good governance was the major way out of poverty in Nigeria. A similar conclusion was reached by Ejumudo (2015); and Oweiba et al (2024).

Discussion of Findings

The role of business in the sustainable development of any economy cannot be overemphasized. Major issues of the Nigerian economy such as poverty and youth unemployment which have hindered sustainable development over the decades have been linked to a lack of good governance and an unstable business environment. Despite a series of programmes and institution framework policies put in place to enhance youth employability, it is discouraging to know that the youth unemployment rate has consistently increased (FMYSD, 2021). Youth unemployment rate stood at 35%, in 2020, with a further 28% unemployed; these falling under "Not in Employment, Education, or Training" (NEET)-FMYSD, 2021. Government policies and institutional frameworks that were at one time or another set to enhance youth employability include the N-power initiative, the Economic Recovery, and Growth Plan (ERGP), the National Youth Policy (NYP), the National Policy on Labour Migration, and the National Social Protection Policy (FYMSD, 2021). The Nigerian government has also partnered with international organizations like UNICEF to implement social protection programmes targeting vulnerable youths (Cable News, 2023). There are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to help countries identify priorities for early actions along 17 SDGs (including poverty and youth unemployment) as measured by the SDG index (SDG Academy, 2016).

Despite the series of policies, programmes and institutional framework as highlighted above, poverty and other ills that plague the Nigerian economy and its business environment continue to be on the rise, with sustainable development not within sight. This is because as argued by Rasaki and Olusola (2021) policy implementation is still lacking. Adequate investment in health and education, as well as diversification of the Nigerian economy, are still issues of governance which require proactive measures, yet unresolved. As a result, poverty and youth unemployment, among others, have continued to pose serious threats to the Nigerian business environment. As stated earlier, these factors are economic/ political, yet they impact how businesses make a profit and increase their efficiency. Poverty and unemployment affect consumer buying behaviour which in turn affects market behaviour (Indeed 2024).

Bad governance in Nigeria has affected local and international businesses. For example, corruption which was listed by Kola (2020) as an element of bad governance, has increased the cost of business dealings, as many companies may need to pay bribes to secure contracts, permits and other essential services, thus reducing profitability and making the Nigerian business environment unattractive to potential investors Research by Fodel (2021) indicates that international flaws such as ineffective public administration are a major reason why total payments to public officers during contract bidding has remained a practice in Nigeria. He noted

that such a form of corruption has a significant and negative effect on the medium and long-term growth of enterprises in Nigeria. He recommended transparency as a measure of curbing corruption in this regard and called on the Nigerian government to own up to its responsibilities in this area.

Fodol (2021) also lamented the high taxes and unofficial levies by the Nigerian government on businesses that are already struggling in an unstable environment. The results of his empirical work show that while taxes may be used to finance public expenditures and benefit businesses in a way, high taxes, no doubt lead to lower profits and poor business performance which can stifle business growth and performance. His study supported that of Ajakaiye and Adeyeye (2000) who had earlier concluded that exploitation by a government through direct and indirect taxes was one of the major issues of the Nigerian economy. Ogunro (2014) emphasized the role of frequent changes in government policies and regulations in the unstable business environment in Nigeria. He opined that as part of man's activities, the business could only thrive in a conducive and sustainable environment which depends on the availability of the structure, (legal or otherwise) set up by the government. He said that the fear of policy instability/ uncertainty due to the collapse of many businesses witnessed in Nigeria at a time, especially in the small scale industry, and the relation of big ones to other countries. Even companies that are struggling to survive find it challenging to plan long-term investments due to the fear of the unpredictable regulatory framework of the Nigerian government.

Ogunro (2014) also opined that inadequate infrastructural development due to bad governance has increased operational costs and hindered business operations in Nigeria. He specified the absence of power supply, bad roads, insufficient water and simulation services and other critical infrastructure needs to drive economic growth and explained how the absence of these had negatively impacted the Nigeria business environment.

Insecurity and insurgencies, especially with the activities of Boko Haran, have become issues of governance to reckon with in the Nigerian business environment. The high incidence of kidnapping and banditry has not only affected the safety of employees but also that of potential investors (Ogunro, 2014; Fodol, 2021). This has also affected foreign investment as most foreign investors have blacklisted Nigeria. Nigeria's weak legal systems have impacted business in the country, as inefficient and corrupt legal/ judicial systems pose difficulties in enforcing contracts and protecting intellectual property rights. This has undermined the confidence of investors whether local or foreign. Speaking extensively on this subject, Oliyobi et al (2020) specifically noted how Nigeria's weak legal has affected SMEs' operations in the country. They highlighted the weaknesses of the legal system in providing needed backing and a conducive business environment a fair playing platform for SMEs in Nigeria. Financial governance provides a strong foundation for companies and ensures greater stability, compliance with all the rules and regulations, as well as ethical conduct. It assists organisations in processing their financial data efficiently and having strong monitoring practices (Pearson, 2024). Unfortunately, access to credit for business has continued to be an issue in Nigeria. In addressing the factor of credit access in business. Phan et al (2023) mentioned factors related to borrowers and lenders, and related to institutional elements. They explained the role of governance in this regard, saying that without credit access, it was difficult for businesses especially SMEs that are essential to the growth of any economy, not able to overcome liquidity problems and explore better investment opportunities, thus not able to improve the nation's economy owing from the above, it could be said that poor governance has led to weak financial sector where businesses in Nigeria have to struggle to access affordable credit. This has restricted the growth potential of small and

medium-scale enterprises which act as catalysts to the growth and development of the Nigerian economy.

Bad governance has led to a brain drain in Nigeria's situation where poor living conditions and a lack of opportunities have prompted skilled professionals to eliminate (popularly known as "Japa syndrome") many Nigerian youth who are qualified in various fields of medicine, education and the likes. This has resulted in a shortage producing a negative effect on business operations and productivity (Olumoyo & Abiri, 2023).Closely associated with a weak legal system is poor enforcement of environmental regulations. Bildiriu (2021) clearly stated that the government had a major role in environmental quality directly and indirectly. He concluded that good governance contributes to the improvement of the environment as it regulates the emission level and pollution level through property rights and effective judicial systems among others. Research by Inyang (2019) devastated by ecological cost and oil spillage indicates that unemployed youths in south-south Nigeria have formed militia groups to seek redress against the government and the multinational corporations operating in the area. This has made the region that was once attractive to foreign investors to be unstable in terms of business activities. The research concluded that sustainable development cannot be obtained in such a region. Thus, environmental degradation in Nigeria due to poor governance has affected businesses dependent on natural resources. This has in turn impacted the health and quality of life of the Nigerian economy.

Conclusion

Sustainable development in Nigeria is not within sight. The Nigerian business environment is more unstable than ever. It is not appealing to investors whether local or foreign. This is mainly attributed to issues of governance in the country. Poverty and youth unemployment in Nigeria are not a result of resources but due to misallocation and misappropriation of such resources, with the political elites out of touch with the daily hassles of the masses. While different policy measures have been put in place to ensure a conducive environment for business and other economic activities, the Nigerian business environment has continued to be plagued with corruption, inconsistent policies, poor infrastructure, insecurity, weak legal system, limited access to finance, high taxes, unofficial levies, brain drain, and environmental degradation. Consequently, economic setbacks have hindered sustainable economic development in Nigeria. More worrisome is the fact that there are no policy measures to checkmate governance or government structure in Nigeria. Needless to say, good governance in Nigeria is the solution to a stable business environment, providing employment for the youths and eradicating or at least reducing poverty to the barest minimum. Therefore, the Nigerian government must conscientiously build a new political and economic system for the benefit of not just a privileged few, but all the citizens of Nigeria.

4. Recommendations

The study recommends:

1. The Nigerian government should focus on acquiring 4th industrial revolution technologies, and make the same available in all levels of education in Nigeria to prepare its future generation for self-sustenance. This, no doubt, will improve business and other economic activities, provide employment, especially for the youths, and reduce/ eradicate poverty, for sustainable economic development.

2. An autonomous legal system. This will checkmate the ruling class of the Nation, ensure adequate policy measures and enforce the implementation of all workable policies to eradicate poverty in Nigeria.
3. The government should tackle the issue of price control, especially for essential goods like food, fuel, and electricity, as well as stabilizing the Naira to curb inflation and improve the standard of living of its citizens. These will empower small and medium-scale enterprises, which will in turn lead to sustainable development of the country.

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