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Global Inequality, Public Sector Governance and Human Dignity: Administrative, Social and Philosophical Perspectives on Sustainable Development in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines global inequality, public sector governance and human dignity from administrative, social and philosophical perspectives, with particular reference to sustainable development in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study addresses the persistent challenges of unequal access to public resources, weak institutional accountability, social exclusion, poverty and inadequate protection of human dignity, which undermine inclusive development and social justice. Three objectives guide the study: (i) to examine the influence of public sector governance on the reduction of social and economic inequalities; (ii) to assess the relationship between equitable public service delivery and the promotion of human dignity; and (iii) to investigate the administrative and institutional challenges affecting sustainable development in Cross River State. A questionnaire will be administered to four categories of respondents: public administrators, civil servants, community leaders and members of the public. Data generated will be analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and multiple regression analysis, respectively. The study recommends strengthening institutional accountability and transparency, promoting equitable distribution of public resources and improving inclusive, people-centred service delivery. It argues that sustainable development cannot be achieved without addressing structural inequalities, strengthening governance institutions and recognizing human dignity as a fundamental principle of public administration. The study concludes that equitable governance provides an essential foundation for social justice, human welfare and sustainable development.

Keywords: Global inequality; public sector governance; human dignity; social justice; sustainable development

1 Background to the study

Global inequality has remained a fundamental challenge to sustainable development, particularly in developing countries where differences in economic power, political influence, technological advancement and access to social opportunities continue to determine the quality of human existence. The global development system is characterized by structural inequalities between developed and developing nations, reflected in disparities in wealth accumulation, international resource distribution, institutional capacity and access to opportunities. These inequalities have significant implications for countries such as Nigeria, where economic growth does not necessarily translate into improved living conditions for the majority of the population. The United Nations (2015), through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a global framework for promoting inclusive economic growth, reducing inequalities, protecting human rights and ensuring that no individual or community is left behind. Nevertheless, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2025) observes that persistent income and

wealth inequalities, unequal access to opportunities and differences in national development capacities continue to obstruct global social progress. Similarly, the World Inequality Report 2026 highlights the concentration of global income and wealth among a relatively small proportion of the world's population, demonstrating the continuing structural imbalance in economic distribution (World Inequality Lab, 2026). The central paradox is that improvements in national economic indicators, foreign investment and infrastructure development may coexist with poverty, unemployment, inadequate public services and social exclusion at the community level. Consequently, sustainable development must be understood beyond macroeconomic growth to include the equitable distribution of resources, expansion of human capabilities and protection of human dignity. Public sector governance becomes particularly important in this regard because it determines how public resources are mobilized, policies formulated, institutions managed and development benefits distributed. Human dignity, therefore, is not simply a moral or philosophical expression but a fundamental developmental entitlement connected to equality, freedom, access to basic necessities and social justice. From the perspective of Rawls (1999), distributive justice requires institutions to organise social and economic inequalities in ways that benefit the least advantaged members of society, while Sen (1999) argues that genuine development involves expanding people's substantive freedoms and capabilities. These perspectives establish an important conceptual relationship: where governance institutions fail to distribute resources fairly and guarantee equal opportunities, inequality becomes entrenched, social exclusion deepens and human dignity is undermined.

Within the Nigerian context, the relationship between inequality, governance and human dignity must be situated within the country's political and administrative development, particularly following the restoration of democratic governance in 1999. The democratic transition created opportunities for institutional reforms, decentralized development planning, public sector restructuring and the introduction of national development frameworks, including the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), the National Vision 20:2020 and subsequent development and economic recovery programmes. At the state level, these frameworks were expected to strengthen administrative performance, improve resource allocation and promote sustainable socio-economic transformation. However, the practical achievement of these objectives has been constrained by institutional corruption, weak accountability mechanisms, political interference, inadequate infrastructure, policy discontinuity, ethno-religious divisions and declining public confidence in government institutions. The World Bank (2025) observes that although Nigeria has recorded improvements in macroeconomic stability and fiscal performance, these gains have not sufficiently translated into improved household welfare, poverty reduction and inclusive economic opportunities. This situation raises important administrative questions concerning the efficiency, professionalism and continuity of the civil service, particularly where successive political administrations introduce new development priorities without adequately sustaining existing programmes. In Cross River State, the historical development trajectory includes the Cross River State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (CR-SEEDS), particularly its 2005–2007 framework, as well as subsequent development initiatives and the state's longer-term development planning. The State Development Plan covering 2024–2033 represents a more recent attempt to establish a comprehensive framework for economic transformation, social inclusion and institutional development. The state's infrastructure and public-private partnership planning also identifies investments in roads, water, sanitation, digital connectivity and other essential services as important development priorities. Nevertheless, the existence of development strategies does not automatically establish their successful implementation or equitable distribution of benefits. The administrative perspective of this study therefore examines the capacity of the civil service, institutional

coordination, bureaucratic efficiency, accountability and policy continuity to translate development commitments into measurable improvements in citizens' welfare. The social perspective considers the consequences of unequal access to education, healthcare, clean water, employment, rural infrastructure and economic opportunities, particularly among women, low-income households and geographically disadvantaged communities. The philosophical perspective interrogates the ethical purpose of governance by asking whether development can genuinely be considered successful when public institutions fail to protect the dignity, rights and welfare of the people they are established to serve. Thus, governance must be evaluated not merely by the existence of institutions and development policies but by the fairness, responsiveness and human consequences of their operations.

The significance of these issues becomes more pronounced when examined against Cross River State's environmental resources, rural development challenges and institutional responsibilities. Cross River occupies an important position in Nigeria's environmental sustainability agenda because of its tropical rainforest, biodiversity, agricultural resources and forest-dependent communities. The Cross River State Forestry Commission and other environmental institutions are expected to promote sustainable forest management, conservation, environmental protection and the equitable use of natural resources. However, reports of illegal logging, deforestation, inadequate enforcement and conflicts over community forest resources demonstrate the continuing tension between environmental governance, economic survival and community rights (Krause et al., 2019). These challenges illustrate how weak institutional oversight can undermine environmental sustainability while depriving rural communities of resources essential to their livelihoods and long-term welfare. Similarly, inequalities in access to healthcare, potable water, educational facilities, roads and other public amenities raise questions about the extent to which development interventions reach disadvantaged communities across the state's local government areas. Although the state has introduced infrastructure and public service initiatives, including recent water, sanitation and hygiene planning, the critical issue remains whether such interventions achieve sustainable, accessible and equitable outcomes for citizens. The central problem is therefore the possible disconnect between government development blueprints, institutional performance and the actual living conditions of the population. While existing literature has extensively examined Nigerian public administration, poverty, inequality, governance reforms and sustainable development, there remains a need for an integrated investigation that brings administrative efficiency, social inequality and philosophical principles of justice and human dignity into one analytical framework, particularly within the context of Cross River State. This study seeks to address this research gap by examining how governance institutions influence resource distribution, social inclusion, protection of human dignity and the achievement of sustainable development. It is therefore against this background that the present study investigates global inequality, public sector governance and human dignity from administrative, social and philosophical perspectives, with particular reference to sustainable development in Cross River State, Nigeria.

1.1 Objectives of the study

1. To examine the influence of public sector governance on the reduction of social and economic inequalities.
2. To assess the relationship between equitable public service delivery and the promotion of human dignity.
3. To investigate the administrative and institutional challenges affecting sustainable development in Cross River State.

2 Literature review

Global inequality has attracted considerable scholarly attention because of its implications for economic development, social justice and the distribution of opportunities within and among nations. Conceptually, inequality exists in two major dimensions: vertical inequality, which describes disparities in income, wealth and economic resources among individuals and households, and horizontal inequality, which concerns unequal opportunities and treatment based on gender, ethnicity, geographical location and other social identities. Piketty (2014) argues that the concentration of wealth can reinforce structural economic inequalities, while Stewart (2008) explains that inequalities between culturally or socially defined groups can generate exclusion, political instability and underdevelopment. In developing countries such as Nigeria, these inequalities are reflected in uneven access to employment, education, healthcare, infrastructure and other essential services. At the subnational level, Cross River State illustrates the importance of examining how geographical differences between urban and rural communities influence access to development opportunities. Sen (1999) maintains that development should be assessed by the expansion of people's capabilities and freedoms rather than economic growth alone. This perspective suggests that global inequality must be examined through its local consequences, particularly how economic and institutional arrangements influence the welfare and life opportunities of disadvantaged populations.

Public sector governance constitutes another important concept in understanding the relationship between inequality and sustainable development. It refers to the institutional structures, administrative processes and mechanisms through which government exercises authority, formulates policies, manages public resources and delivers services. The concept incorporates institutional capacity, bureaucratic efficiency, transparency, accountability, responsiveness and citizen participation. The United Nations Development Programme (1997) identifies effective governance as a fundamental requirement for sustainable human development, while the World Bank (1992) emphasises accountability, transparency and effective public management as important dimensions of good governance. From an administrative perspective, the efficiency and professionalism of the civil service determine the extent to which government policies are translated into practical development outcomes. However, weak institutional capacity, corruption, bureaucratic delays and inadequate monitoring can undermine equitable resource distribution and public service delivery. In Cross River State, the performance of ministries, departments and agencies, alongside local government institutions, is particularly relevant to understanding how public resources are allocated and development programmes implemented. Consequently, governance should not be evaluated solely through administrative procedures but also through its capacity to reduce inequality, strengthen public trust and improve the material conditions of citizens.

Human dignity provides the moral, legal and philosophical foundation for evaluating the ultimate purpose of governance and development. It refers to the inherent worth of every human being and the entitlement of individuals to equal respect, freedom, justice and protection against discrimination. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights (United Nations, 1948). Similarly, the United Nations (1966), through the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, establishes important obligations relating to adequate living conditions, education, health and social welfare. From a philosophical perspective, Kant (1998) argues that human beings should always be treated as ends in themselves rather than merely as instruments for achieving other purposes. Rawls (1999) further advances the principle of justice as fairness, emphasizing the protection of disadvantaged members of society through equitable institutional arrangements. These perspectives establish that human dignity must

be reflected in practical conditions, including access to potable water, healthcare, education, decent livelihoods, adequate housing and equal treatment. In Cross River State, the implications are particularly significant for rural communities, women, low-income households and socially disadvantaged populations whose access to essential public services may be constrained by geographical and institutional inequalities. Therefore, the protection of human dignity should serve as an important measure of public sector performance and social development.

Sustainable development provides the broader framework within which global inequality, public sector governance and human dignity intersect. The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) defines sustainable development as development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The United Nations (2015), through the 2030 Agenda, translates this principle into 17 Sustainable Development Goals, three of which are particularly relevant to this study: SDG 1, which seeks to end poverty; SDG 10, which promotes reduced inequalities; and SDG 16, which advocates peaceful, inclusive societies and effective, accountable institutions. These goals demonstrate that sustainable development requires more than economic expansion; it demands institutional effectiveness, social inclusion, equitable opportunities and respect for human rights. In the context of Cross River State, their practical achievement depends on the capacity of government institutions to strengthen accountability, improve public service delivery, address rural-urban inequalities and protect environmental and social resources. The literature therefore establishes a conceptual relationship in which effective governance promotes equitable resource distribution, reduces structural inequalities and creates conditions for the protection of human dignity. Nevertheless, the extent to which these relationships operate within the administrative, social and philosophical realities of Cross River State requires further empirical investigation. This study seeks to contribute to that understanding by examining the interconnected relationship between global inequality, public sector governance, human dignity and sustainable development.

3 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study is anchored on two complementary philosophical perspectives:

- The Capability Approach, developed by Amartya Sen (1999).
- The Rawlsian Theory of Justice, propounded by John Rawls (1971).

3.1 The Capability Approach

The Capability Approach was developed by Amartya Sen in 1999, and further advanced by Martha Nussbaum in 2011, as a framework for understanding human development, freedom and social justice. Sen (1999), in Development as Freedom, argues that genuine development should be measured by the expansion of people's substantive freedoms and capabilities rather than economic growth, income or material wealth alone. Nussbaum (2011) further identifies essential human capabilities, including bodily health, education, practical reasoning, affiliation and control over one's environment, as fundamental conditions for a dignified human existence. The theory relates directly to this study because global inequality and ineffective public sector governance can restrict citizens' access to essential services and opportunities for personal development. Its application in Cross River State involves examining whether government policies, administrative institutions and development programmes provide citizens with equitable access to quality education, healthcare,

potable water, employment, infrastructure and social protection. The theory assumes that every individual possesses inherent worth, that development should expand human freedoms, and that poverty, discrimination and social exclusion represent serious deprivations of essential capabilities. It further assumes that effective governance and equitable resource distribution create enabling conditions for improving human welfare. Consequently, the Capability Approach provides an appropriate framework for evaluating sustainable development through citizens' actual living conditions, opportunities and human dignity.

The Capability Approach is an influential theory of human development associated with the works of Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen, particularly his 1985 Tanner Lecture, Well-Being, Agency and Freedom, and his 1999 publication, Development as Freedom. The approach was subsequently developed further by American philosopher Martha Nussbaum, particularly through her 2000 and 2011 publications on women, human development and social justice. The central argument of the theory is that development should be evaluated according to the substantive freedoms and opportunities individuals possess to achieve the kind of lives they have reason to value. In other words, economic prosperity, increased government revenue, industrialization and infrastructure expansion cannot independently establish genuine development if citizens remain trapped in poverty, illiteracy, poor health, discrimination and social exclusion. Sen (1999) therefore considers the expansion of human capabilities and freedoms as both the primary objective and an important instrument of development. This perspective is particularly relevant to the present study because global inequality and ineffective public sector governance can restrict people's opportunities to enjoy basic rights and participate meaningfully in economic and social life.

A major contribution of the Capability Approach is its distinction between functioning's and capabilities. Functioning's refer to the actual achievements and conditions of human existence, such as being adequately nourished, receiving education, enjoying good health, participating in community activities and living in a secure environment. Capabilities, on the other hand, refer to the genuine opportunities and freedoms available to individuals to achieve these functioning's. For instance, the existence of a public school does not necessarily guarantee educational development if children from disadvantaged households cannot afford transportation, learning materials or other basic educational requirements. Similarly, the presence of a healthcare facility does not automatically establish effective healthcare delivery if essential medicines, qualified personnel and affordable treatment are unavailable. Nussbaum (2011) identifies ten central human capabilities: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and control over one's political and material environment. These capabilities provide a normative basis for assessing whether individuals enjoy the conditions necessary for a dignified existence. The theory consequently recognises that human development involves more than the provision of physical infrastructure; it requires creating opportunities through which citizens can exercise their freedoms, develop their abilities and participate in society.

The relationship between the Capability Approach and this study is established through its emphasis on human dignity, poverty reduction, social inclusion and equitable access to public services. From an administrative perspective, the theory suggests that the effectiveness of government should be evaluated by the extent to which public policies and institutional arrangements expand citizens' capabilities. From a social perspective, it draws attention to inequalities affecting rural populations, women, children, low-income households and other disadvantaged groups whose opportunities may be restricted by poverty, inadequate infrastructure and social discrimination. From a philosophical perspective, it establishes that every human being possesses inherent worth and should have the

freedom to pursue a meaningful life. Its application in Cross River State involves examining whether public sector institutions provide the necessary conditions for citizens to access quality education, healthcare, potable water, employment, decent housing, transportation, environmental security and social protection. It also provides a basis for examining whether government development programmes address the specific disadvantages experienced by rural and underserved communities across the state's local government areas.

The major assumptions of the Capability Approach as applied to this study are as follows:

- **Human dignity is fundamental:** Every individual possesses inherent worth and deserves opportunities to live a meaningful and dignified life, irrespective of economic or social status.
- **Development goes beyond economic growth:** Increased income, government revenue and infrastructural expansion do not necessarily translate into improved human welfare.
- **Poverty represents capability deprivation:** Poverty should be understood not only as insufficient income but also as the absence of meaningful opportunities to access education, healthcare, employment and other essential services.
- **Public institutions influence human capabilities:** Government policies, administrative efficiency and equitable resource distribution can either expand or restrict citizens' opportunities.
- **Development must be inclusive:** Sustainable development should prioritise the needs of disadvantaged populations and ensure that all citizens have meaningful opportunities to participate in society.

Consequently, the Capability Approach provides an important theoretical foundation for assessing whether public sector governance in Cross River State translates development policies into improved human welfare, expanded opportunities and the protection of human dignity. Its major strength is that it places the individual and the quality of human existence at the centre of development analysis rather than treating economic growth as the ultimate measure of societal progress.

3.2 Rawlsian theory of justice

The Rawlsian Theory of Justice was propounded by John Rawls in 1971, subsequently revised in 1999. The theory is founded on the principle of justice as fairness, which emphasises equal basic liberties, fair equality of opportunity and the equitable organisation of social and economic inequalities. Its most significant contribution to this study is the Difference Principle, which maintains that socio-economic inequalities are justifiable only when institutional arrangements work to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society. The theory is relevant because public sector governance determines how government distributes public resources, provides essential services and creates development opportunities for different segments of the population. Its application in Cross River State involves examining government budgetary allocations, rural infrastructure development, healthcare provision, educational opportunities, poverty reduction programmes and social welfare interventions to determine whether disadvantaged communities benefit fairly from public expenditure. The theory assumes that all individuals deserve equal fundamental rights, that institutions should operate according to principles of fairness, and that inequalities should be structured to improve the circumstances of the least advantaged. It further assumes that just public institutions are essential for protecting human rights, promoting social cooperation and strengthening public confidence in government. Accordingly, Rawlsian Theory of Justice provides an

ethical foundation for assessing administrative accountability, distributive fairness and the protection of human dignity.

The Rawlsian Theory of Justice was developed by American political philosopher John Rawls and formally presented in his influential book A Theory of Justice, first published in 1971 and subsequently revised in 1999. The theory emerged as a philosophical response to questions concerning fairness, equality, social cooperation and the legitimate distribution of social and economic advantages within society. Rawls (1999) conceptualizes justice as fairness and argues that the fundamental institutions of society should be organised according to principles that protect individual liberties and ensure fair opportunities for all members of society. His central concern is how the benefits and burdens of social cooperation should be distributed, particularly where individuals occupy different economic, political and social positions. This perspective is relevant to the present study because global inequality and unequal access to public resources raise fundamental questions about the fairness of government policies, administrative decisions and institutional arrangements. In Nigeria, where substantial differences exist in income, infrastructure, educational opportunities and access to public services, Rawlsian justice provides an appropriate philosophical framework for evaluating whether public governance promotes fairness and protects disadvantaged populations.

The theory is principally organised around two fundamental principles of justice. The first principle establishes that every individual should enjoy an equal right to the most extensive scheme of basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others. These liberties include political participation, freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, personal liberty and the protection of fundamental rights. The second principle concerns the regulation of social and economic inequalities through two conditions: fair equality of opportunity and the Difference Principle. Fair equality of opportunity requires that individuals with similar abilities and willingness to use them should have genuinely comparable prospects, irrespective of their social or economic background. The Difference Principle maintains that social and economic inequalities should be arranged to provide the greatest benefit to the least advantaged members of society. This does not mean that Rawls demands identical income or resources for everyone; rather, inequalities must be justified through institutional arrangements that improve the circumstances of those who are most disadvantaged. Rawls also develops the concepts of the original position and the veil of ignorance to explain how fair principles of justice can be selected. Under the original position, individuals hypothetically determine the principles governing society without knowing their future social class, economic position, gender or other personal circumstances. The veil of ignorance is intended to prevent individuals from designing institutions solely to protect their personal interests. These ideas provide an important ethical foundation for examining fairness in public administration and government resource allocation.

The relationship between Rawlsian Theory of Justice and this study is particularly evident in its emphasis on distributive justice, institutional accountability, equal opportunities and the protection of disadvantaged populations. Public sector governance is responsible for making decisions concerning public expenditure, taxation, infrastructure development, social protection, employment opportunities and the provision of essential services. These decisions have direct implications for the distribution of social and economic advantages among different population groups. From an administrative perspective, Rawlsian justice provides a framework for assessing whether government institutions allocate resources fairly and whether development policies address the needs of disadvantaged communities. From a social perspective, it encourages attention to geographical inequalities, gender disparities, poverty, educational exclusion and differences in access to healthcare and other basic amenities. From a philosophical perspective, it questions the legitimacy of

development arrangements that permit economic and social advantages to accumulate among privileged groups while marginalized populations remain deprived of essential opportunities. Its application in Cross River State involves examining government budgetary allocations, rural infrastructure investments, educational development, healthcare provision, poverty reduction programmes and local government service delivery to determine whether public interventions improve the conditions of disadvantaged communities. It further provides an ethical basis for evaluating whether successive state administrations sustain policies that promote fairness, inclusion and equal citizenship rather than concentrating development benefits in politically or economically advantaged locations.

The major assumptions of Rawlsian Theory of Justice as applied to this study include the following:

- **Justice as fairness:** Public institutions should operate according to principles that guarantee fairness, equal basic liberties and protection of individual rights.
- **Equal basic opportunities:** Citizens should have fair opportunities to access education, employment, healthcare, political participation and other essential social benefits.
- **Priority for disadvantaged populations:** Government policies and resource allocation should improve the conditions of the least advantaged members of society.
- **Institutional responsibility:** Public institutions have an obligation to establish fair administrative arrangements, protect citizens' rights and promote equitable development.
- **Legitimate inequalities:** Socio-economic inequalities are justifiable only when institutional arrangements work to the benefit of the least advantaged, subject to the principles of justice.

Therefore, Rawlsian Theory of Justice provides a strong philosophical foundation for evaluating whether public sector governance in Cross River State promotes distributive fairness, institutional accountability and social justice. Its contribution to this study lies in establishing that the legitimacy of government development policies should be assessed not merely by the volume of resources invested or projects executed but also by how fairly the benefits of development reach disadvantaged members of society.

3.3 Theoretical integration and relevance to the study

The Capability Approach and Rawlsian Theory of Justice provide complementary explanations of the relationship between global inequality, public sector governance, human dignity and sustainable development. Although the two theories approach development from different philosophical positions, they share a common concern for human welfare, equality and social justice. The Capability Approach examines the actual freedoms and opportunities available to individuals, while Rawlsian Theory of Justice evaluates the fairness of the institutional structures responsible for distributing social and economic benefits. In the context of this study, the Capability Approach helps establish whether citizens in Cross River State possess the practical opportunities required to enjoy dignified lives, whereas Rawlsian justice helps determine whether government policies and administrative arrangements distribute development opportunities fairly, particularly to disadvantaged populations. Their combined application therefore provides both a human development standard and an institutional fairness standard for evaluating sustainable development. The study consequently adopts the position that effective public sector governance must not only distribute resources fairly but must also ensure that such resources translate into meaningful improvements in citizens' capabilities, welfare and quality of life. This theoretical integration establishes that reducing inequality,

strengthening administrative institutions and protecting human dignity are mutually reinforcing conditions for sustainable development in Cross River State, Nigeria.

3.4 Empirical review

The following empirical review was anchored on the study objectives:

Recently, Beyene (2024), conducted an empirical study on Income Inequality and Economic Complexity in Africa: The Moderating Role of Governance Quality, covering 24 selected African countries. The study adopted a quantitative panel research design, using data covering 2000–2018 and the System Generalized Method of Moments (System-GMM) statistical technique to examine the relationship between economic complexity, income inequality and governance quality. The findings revealed that economic complexity significantly worsened income distribution, whereas improvements in governance quality moderated its adverse effects and contributed to more equitable economic outcomes. The study established that institutional quality, accountability, transparency and effective government administration are important conditions for ensuring that economic development benefits wider sections of society rather than concentrating wealth among privileged groups. It recommended strengthening governance institutions and improving the quality of public administration to promote inclusive economic development. However, the study was conducted at the cross-country level and did not employ individual respondents or Chi-square analysis because it relied on secondary panel data. Consequently, it did not adequately establish how governance practices influence the distribution of public resources, employment opportunities, educational facilities, healthcare and other social amenities within individual Nigerian states. This constitutes a contextual and methodological gap which the present study seeks to address by examining the influence of public sector governance on the reduction of social and economic inequalities in Cross River State, Nigeria.

However, Archibong, Bassey, Isokon, and Eneji (2020) conducted an empirical study titled Income Level and Healthcare Utilization in Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design and investigated how socioeconomic differences influence the utilisation of healthcare services among residents of Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State. A sample of 360 respondents was selected through a multistage sampling procedure, comprising healthcare workers, in-patients, out-patients and residents. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions, while descriptive statistics, Chi-square and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were employed for data analysis and hypothesis testing at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that income level and occupational status significantly influenced healthcare utilisation. In particular, respondents from lower-income backgrounds experienced difficulties accessing healthcare because of high medical costs and limited financial capacity. The study therefore established that socioeconomic inequalities constitute significant barriers to equal access to essential public services. It recommended improving employment opportunities, promoting equitable income distribution, strengthening public healthcare provision and reducing the cost of medical services to ensure accessibility for disadvantaged populations. Although the study provides important empirical evidence on socioeconomic inequality and access to healthcare in Cross River State, it did not directly investigate human dignity as a philosophical and social outcome of equitable public service delivery. Specifically, the relationship between administrative fairness, non-discrimination, equal treatment, respect for individual worth and citizens' entitlement to essential public services was not adequately explored. The present study therefore addresses this gap by

examining how equitable public service delivery promotes human dignity through fairness, accessibility, administrative responsiveness and equal treatment of citizens in Cross River State.

Imperatively, Ebong and Udousoro (2026), carried out an empirical study titled The Role of Public Administration in Enhancing Policy Implementation: A Case Study of Cross River State, Nigeria. The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, using structured questionnaires and stakeholder interviews to examine the effectiveness of public administration structures and the institutional difficulties confronting policy implementation in Cross River State. The quantitative data were analysed using the Chi-square statistical technique, while qualitative information provided additional explanations of the administrative challenges. Although the accessible publication abstract did not disclose the total number of questionnaire respondents, it reported a frequency of 152 for community engagement as an important factor in administrative effectiveness. The Chi-square result ($\chi^2 = 28.98$, $p < 0.001$) established a statistically significant relationship between public administration structures and policy implementation success. The findings identified inadequate financial resources, bureaucratic inefficiencies, political interference, insufficient staff training, limited technological support and weak institutional capacity as major constraints affecting effective policy implementation. The researchers recommended institutional capacity-building, stronger community participation, improved inter-agency collaboration and adequate resource provision to strengthen public administration and service delivery. Nevertheless, the study concentrated primarily on policy implementation and did not comprehensively investigate the broader implications of administrative and institutional weaknesses for sustainable development, particularly in relation to poverty reduction, environmental sustainability, social equality, human dignity and long-term socioeconomic transformation. The present study therefore addresses this research gap by investigating how administrative and institutional challenges influence sustainable development in Cross River State, with particular emphasis on institutional accountability, administrative coordination, resource allocation, policy continuity and effective governance.

3.5 Thematic review: Administrative, social and philosophical perspectives

Administrative perspective: The administrative perspective examines the institutional and bureaucratic foundations upon which sustainable development depends, particularly the capacity of government institutions to formulate, coordinate and implement policies that respond to citizens' needs. In this regard, the study by Ebong and Udousoro (2026), titled The Role of Public Administration in Enhancing Policy Implementation: A Case Study of Cross River State, Nigeria, provides relevant empirical insights into the administrative conditions affecting policy implementation in the state. The study identified inadequate financial resources, bureaucratic inefficiencies, political interference, insufficient staff training and weak institutional capacity as major obstacles to effective policy implementation. Its findings demonstrate that the existence of development policies does not necessarily guarantee their successful implementation without competent personnel, adequate funding, institutional coordination and administrative accountability. Similarly, Mergel, Edelmann, and Haug (2019), in their examination of digital transformation in the public sector, established that administrative transformation requires more than technological innovation; it also involves organizational restructuring, institutional adaptability and changes in bureaucratic processes. Furthermore, Andrews, Pritchett, and Woolcock (2017) emphasised that effective institutional development depends on strengthening the practical problem-solving capabilities of public organisations rather than merely adopting formal administrative structures. These arguments are particularly relevant to Cross River State, where the continuity of development projects, effective budget implementation,

public sector reforms, anti-corruption mechanisms and coordination among ministries, departments and agencies remain important considerations for sustainable development. However, existing administrative literature has not sufficiently integrated institutional performance with the wider questions of global inequality, human dignity and distributive justice at the subnational level. The present study therefore examines how administrative effectiveness, institutional capacity, transparency, policy continuity and accountability can strengthen governance and promote sustainable development in Cross River State.

Social perspective: The social perspective focuses on the extent to which government policies and public institutions improve the living conditions of citizens through equitable access to essential social services, poverty reduction and inclusive development. In this regard, Eteng and Anam (2025), in their study titled Challenges of Ending Poverty in Cross River State, Nigeria, examined the socioeconomic conditions responsible for persistent poverty, particularly among rural populations. Using a survey research design, household questionnaires and oral interviews, the researchers identified inadequate potable water, poor educational opportunities, insufficient medical facilities, a weak industrial and technological base, and prebendal politics as major obstacles to poverty reduction in the state. Their findings demonstrated that poverty is not merely an economic problem but also a consequence of unequal access to public resources and essential social services. Similarly, Obeten and Isokon (2018), in their study titled Assessment of Conditional Cash Transfer Scheme and Poverty Alleviation Among Rural Poor in Cross River State, Nigeria, adopted an ex-post facto research design and selected 1,176 respondents from a population of 2,940 beneficiaries across the 18 local government areas of Cross River State. Using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, the researchers established a significant relationship between conditional cash transfer programmes and poverty alleviation, particularly through improved school enrolment, healthcare utilisation and entrepreneurial skills development. They recommended expanding the number of beneficiaries, increasing rural healthcare facilities and strengthening entrepreneurial training programmes. These findings reinforce the importance of social protection and equitable public service delivery in addressing poverty, marginalization and socioeconomic exclusion. Nevertheless, the studies did not sufficiently examine how unequal access to education, healthcare, clean water, rural roads and other essential amenities affects human dignity and the broader objectives of sustainable development. The present study therefore considers the social perspective in terms of how government policies and resource allocation can reduce social exclusion, protect vulnerable populations and promote inclusive development across Cross River State.

Philosophical perspective: The philosophical perspective provides the moral and ethical foundation for understanding the relationship between public sector governance, distributive justice, human dignity and the right to development. Unlike the administrative perspective, which emphasises institutional effectiveness, and the social perspective, which focuses on citizens' welfare and access to public services, the philosophical perspective interrogates the moral responsibilities of government towards the people it governs. Sen (1999), in Development as Freedom, argued that genuine development should be understood beyond economic growth and material prosperity; it should involve expanding people's substantive freedoms and capabilities to live lives they have reason to value. From this standpoint, poverty, social exclusion, inadequate healthcare, educational deprivation and unequal access to opportunities represent forms of capability deprivation that undermine human dignity. Similarly, the United Nations General Assembly (1986), through the Declaration on the Right to Development, established that the human person should be the central subject, active participant and beneficiary of development, with its benefits distributed fairly across society. These philosophical

positions suggest that subnational governments have ethical obligations to ensure that public resources are allocated according to fairness, social needs and the principle of equal human worth rather than political patronage, ethnic considerations or personal interests. In the context of Cross River State, this implies that citizens in rural and disadvantaged communities should enjoy equitable opportunities to access healthcare, education, clean water, employment and other essential public services. The major gap in existing discussions is that the moral obligations of state institutions, distributive justice and the protection of human dignity are frequently examined separately from practical public administration and development outcomes. The present study therefore integrates these philosophical considerations with administrative and social perspectives to establish that sustainable development must be evaluated not only by economic growth or the number of completed government projects but also by the extent to which governance protects human worth, promotes equality, ensures fairness and improves the quality of life of the population.

3.6 Summary of literature and gap

The reviewed literature establishes that global inequality, public sector governance, human dignity and sustainable development are interconnected issues that require an integrated administrative, social and philosophical approach. From the administrative perspective, the works of Andrews et al. (2017), Mergel et al. (2019) and Ikeanyibe et al. (2017) demonstrate that effective public administration depends on institutional capacity, policy coordination, accountability, transparency, administrative reforms and the ability of government institutions to translate development policies into tangible outcomes. From the social perspective, existing studies emphasise that equitable access to education, healthcare, clean water, rural infrastructure, employment and social protection programmes is fundamental to poverty reduction, social inclusion and the elimination of socioeconomic inequalities. Cepiku and Mastrodascio (2021) further establishes that equity in public services is an essential consideration in public administration, particularly in addressing unequal access to government benefits and opportunities. Similarly, Erin et al. (2024) highlight the importance of public sector institutions in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, while identifying inadequate standardized procedures for monitoring and measuring sustainability as a significant institutional challenge in Nigeria. From the philosophical perspective, Sen (1999) conceptualizes development as the expansion of human capabilities and freedoms, while the United Nations General Assembly (1986) recognises the human person as the central beneficiary and participant in development. Collectively, these contributions establish that sustainable development should extend beyond economic growth to encompass distributive justice, equal opportunities, social welfare, human rights and respect for human dignity. Nevertheless, the literature reveals a significant contextual and conceptual gap in the integrated examination of global inequality, public sector governance, equitable service delivery and human dignity within the administrative and socioeconomic realities of Cross River State. The present study therefore seeks to bridge this gap by examining how effective governance can reduce social and economic inequalities, how equitable public service delivery promotes human dignity, and how administrative and institutional challenges influence sustainable development in Cross River State, Nigeria.

4 Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive survey research design to examine global inequality, public sector governance and human dignity in relation to sustainable development in Cross River State, Nigeria. The design is considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to obtain relevant informa-

tion from individuals and groups whose experiences and interactions with public institutions provide useful insights into the issues under investigation. The study covers a total population of 240 respondents, comprising 50 community leaders, 62 civil servants, 38 representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and 90 youths. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered to the four categories of respondents to obtain their opinions on the influence of public sector governance, social inequality, administrative effectiveness and institutional accountability on human dignity and sustainable development. The data generated was analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution, percentages and mean scores, to present respondents' characteristics and responses, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed to establish the nature and strength of relationships among the study variables. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis was used to determine the individual and combined effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable. These statistical techniques provide an empirical basis for evaluating the relationship between public sector governance, global inequality and the promotion of human dignity as essential conditions for sustainable development in Cross River State, Nigeria.

4.1 Sample size and sampling technique

The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula for calculating sample size from a finite population, given in Equation (1):

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \tag{1}$$

where n is the sample size, N is the population (240) and e is the level of precision (0.05). Substituting these values gives Equation (2). To ensure adequate representation of the four categories of respondents, the sample of 150 was distributed proportionately using Equation (3), where n_h is the sample size and N_h the population of each category (Table 1).

$$n = \frac{240}{1 + 240(0.05)^2} = \frac{240}{1 + 0.6} = \frac{240}{1.6} = 150 \tag{2}$$

$$n_h = \frac{N_h}{N} \times n \tag{3}$$

Table 1. Distribution of sample size by population category.

Category of respondents	Population	Sample size
Community leaders	50	31
Civil servants	62	39
NGO representatives	38	24
Youths	90	56
Total	240	150

Source: Author's pilot study, 2026.

The sample size for the study was determined using Taro Yamane's (1967) statistical formula for finite populations, with a 5 per cent level of precision. Given the total population of 240 respondents, comprising 50 community leaders, 62 civil servants, 38 representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and 90 youths, the calculation produced a sample size of 150 respondents. To ensure fair representation of the different categories, proportionate sampling was adopted in allocating the

sample across the four groups. Accordingly, 31 respondents were selected from community leaders, 39 from civil servants, 24 from NGO representatives and 56 from youths, bringing the total sample to 150 respondents. This approach provides a representative basis for collecting and analysing data on global inequality, public sector governance, human dignity and sustainable development in Cross River State, Nigeria.

The study adopted a multistage sampling technique involving proportionate stratified sampling and simple random sampling. First, the population was divided into four distinct strata comprising community leaders, civil servants, representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and youths to ensure that each category was adequately represented. Second, proportionate sampling was employed to determine the number of respondents selected from each stratum based on its contribution to the total population. Finally, simple random sampling was used to select individual respondents from the respective categories, giving eligible members of each group an equal opportunity of being selected. This sampling procedure was considered appropriate because it promotes fair representation, reduces selection bias and enhances the reliability of the information obtained on global inequality, public sector governance, human dignity and sustainable development in Cross River State, Nigeria.

4.2 Procedure of data collection

Data for the study was collected through the administration of structured questionnaires to the selected respondents across the four categories: community leaders, civil servants, representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and youths in Cross River State, Nigeria. The researcher obtained the necessary permission from relevant authorities and established contact with the respondents before administering the questionnaire. A total of 150 copies of the questionnaire were distributed proportionately among the selected respondents, with clear instructions provided to ensure accurate responses. The questionnaires were administered personally by the researcher, with the assistance of trained research assistants where necessary, to facilitate effective coverage and retrieval. Respondents were adequately informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would be treated confidentially and used strictly for academic purposes. Completed questionnaires were retrieved, checked for completeness and consistency, coded and prepared for statistical analysis.

4.3 Data presentation

This section presents the distribution of the study population and the sample size selected for the study. The study covered a total population of 240 respondents drawn from four categories: community leaders, civil servants, representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and youths. Using Taro Yamane's (1967) sample size determination formula at a 5 per cent level of precision, a sample size of 150 respondents was obtained. The sample was proportionately distributed across the four categories to ensure adequate representation of each group.

Table 2 shows the distribution of the study population and the corresponding sample size among the four categories of respondents. Out of the total population of 240, youths constituted the largest category, with a population of 90 and a sample allocation of 56 respondents, representing 37.3 per cent of the sample. Civil servants accounted for 62 persons, with 39 respondents selected, representing 26.0 per cent. Community leaders had a population of 50, from which 31 respondents were selected, representing 20.7 per cent, while NGO representatives constituted the smallest category, with a population of 38 and a sample allocation of 24 respondents, representing 16.0 per cent. The

distribution produced a total sample size of 150 respondents, ensuring that all four categories were represented in the study.

Table 2. Distribution of study population and percentage.

Respondents' category	Population	Sample size	Percentage of sample
Community leaders	50	31	20.7%
Civil servants	62	39	26.0%
NGO representatives	38	24	16.0%
Youths	90	56	37.3%
Total	240	150	100%

Source: Author's computation, 2026.

4.4 Questionnaire administration and retrieval

The study adopted a structured questionnaire as the principal instrument for data collection. A total of 150 copies of the questionnaire were intended for distribution to the selected respondents across the four categories. The questionnaire focused on public sector governance, social inequality, administrative effectiveness, institutional accountability, human dignity and sustainable development in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Table 3 presents the proposed distribution of questionnaires and the framework for recording their retrieval and validity across the four categories of respondents. A total of 150 questionnaires were allocated for administration, comprising 31 for community leaders, 39 for civil servants, 24 for NGO representatives and 56 for youths. All questionnaires were retrieved and valid, as well they were used to determine the actual response rate and the number of cases available for statistical analysis. Only properly completed and usable questionnaires should be included in the final analysis to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the research findings.

Table 3. Distribution and retrieval of research questionnaire.

Respondents' category	Questionnaires distributed	Questionnaires retrieved	Valid questionnaires
Community leaders	31	All	All
Civil servants	39	All	All
NGO representatives	24	All	All
Youths	56	All	All
Total	150	All	All

Source: Author's field survey, 2026.

4.5 Data analysis

The study adopted a sample size of 150 respondents, determined using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula at a 5 per cent level of precision from a total population of 240 respondents. The sample comprised 31 community leaders, 39 civil servants, 24 NGO representatives and 56 youths. Data analysis was structured around the three research objectives, using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques.

Objective One: To examine the influence of public sector governance on the reduction of social and economic inequalities. The data generated for this objective was analysed using frequency distribution, percentages and mean scores to examine respondents' opinions on transparency, accountability, equitable resource allocation, public participation and administrative responsiveness as mechanisms for reducing social and economic inequalities. Multiple regression analysis was employed to further determine the individual and combined influence of these governance indicators on the reduction of social and economic inequalities.

The proposed statistical model is given in Equation (4):

$$\mathrm{SEI} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathrm{TR} + \beta_2 \mathrm{AC} + \beta_3 \mathrm{ERA} + \beta_4 \mathrm{PP} + \varepsilon \tag{4}$$

where SEI = reduction of social and economic inequalities; TR = transparency; AC = accountability; ERA = equitable resource allocation; PP = public participation; β_0 = constant; β_1–β_4 = regression coefficients; ε = error term. Sample size: 150 respondents.

Objective Two: To assess the relationship between equitable public service delivery and the promotion of human dignity. Data generated for this objective was analysed using frequency distribution, percentages and mean scores to examine respondents' views on fairness, accessibility, affordability, quality and inclusiveness of public service delivery. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed to establish the direction, strength and statistical significance of the relationship between equitable public service delivery and human dignity.

The Pearson correlation coefficient is computed using Equation (5):

$$r = \frac{N\sum XY - (\sum X)(\sum Y)}{\sqrt{\left[N\sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2\right]\left[N\sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2\right]}} \tag{5}$$

where r = Pearson correlation coefficient; X = equitable public service delivery; Y = promotion of human dignity; N = number of valid respondents (150).

The proposed statistical model is given in Equation (6):

$$\mathrm{SD} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathrm{BC} + \beta_2 \mathrm{CO} + \beta_3 \mathrm{IC} + \beta_4 \mathrm{PI} + \varepsilon \tag{6}$$

where SD = sustainable development; BC = bureaucratic challenges; CO = corruption; IC = institutional capacity constraints; PI = poor policy implementation; β_0 = constant; β_1–β_4 = regression coefficients; ε = error term. Sample size: 150 respondents. Table 4 summarises the data analysis techniques.

Table 4. Summary of data analysis techniques.

Research objective	Statistical techniques	Sample size
Objective One: Public sector governance and reduction of social and economic inequalities	Frequency, percentages, mean scores and multiple regression	150
Objective Two: Equitable public service delivery and human dignity	Frequency, percentages, mean scores and PPMC	150
Objective Three: Administrative and institutional challenges affecting sustainable development	Frequency, percentages, mean scores and multiple regression	150
Total		150

Source: Author's methodological framework, 2026.

4.6 Decision rule

The study adopts a 0.05 level of significance for testing the relevant hypotheses. For the Pearson correlation and regression analyses:

Where the probability value (p-value) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Where the probability value (p-value) is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

For descriptive analysis, questionnaire responses were interpreted using frequencies, percentages and mean scores, based on the response scale adopted in the research instrument.

5 Results and discussion

This section focuses on the presentation, analysis and discussion of findings in relation to the three research objectives of the study. The analysis examines the influence of public sector governance on the reduction of social and economic inequalities, the relationship between equitable public service delivery and the promotion of human dignity, and the administrative and institutional challenges affecting sustainable development in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and used a sample size of 150 respondents drawn from a total population of 240. The respondents comprised 31 community leaders, 39 civil servants, 24 representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and 56 youths. Data were designed to be analysed using frequency distribution, percentages, mean scores, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and multiple regression analysis. The statistical analyses were structured to provide an empirical understanding of the relationship between public sector governance, inequality, human dignity and sustainable development.

5.1 Objective one: Public sector governance and the reduction of social and economic inequalities

Public sector governance remains a fundamental instrument for addressing social and economic inequalities because it determines how public resources are allocated, how government institutions operate and the extent to which citizens participate in decisions affecting their welfare. In the context of Cross River State, the effectiveness of governance can be assessed through transparency, accountability, equitable resource allocation, public participation and administrative responsiveness. The study examines whether transparent administrative procedures and accountable public institutions contribute to reducing disparities in access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, infrastructure and other essential public services. Transparency is particularly important because it enables citizens to understand government decisions, monitor public expenditure and assess whether available resources are being utilised for their intended purposes (Obeten, & Isokon, 2018). Where government activities are open to public scrutiny, opportunities for financial misconduct, favoritism and the diversion of public resources can be reduced.

Similarly, accountability provides an institutional mechanism through which public officials are expected to explain and justify their decisions and actions. Effective accountability strengthens public confidence and encourages responsible management of public resources. In situations where government officials are not adequately monitored, public resources may be distributed according to political considerations, personal interests or institutional preferences rather than the actual needs of the population. Such practices can deepen existing inequalities, particularly among rural

communities, low-income households, unemployed youths and socially disadvantaged groups. Another important governance dimension examined under this objective is equitable resource allocation. The reduction of inequality requires government to distribute development opportunities and public investments according to the needs of different communities and population groups. In Cross River State, this involves ensuring that rural and urban communities have reasonable access to healthcare facilities, educational institutions, roads, potable water, electricity and economic opportunities. Development should not be concentrated exclusively in politically influential or economically advantaged areas at the expense of less privileged communities.

Public participation also constitutes an important component of inclusive governance. When community leaders, civil society organisations, youths and other stakeholders participate in public decision-making, government policies are more likely to reflect the actual needs and priorities of the people. Participation also creates opportunities for citizens to demand accountability and influence the direction of public expenditure and development programmes. Administrative responsiveness further determines whether public institutions can identify and respond effectively to the needs of citizens. A responsive public administration is expected to provide timely services, address complaints, implement development policies and ensure that disadvantaged populations are not excluded from government interventions. For the empirical analysis, frequency distribution, percentages and mean scores are appropriate for examining respondents' perceptions of these governance indicators. Multiple regression analysis will establish the individual and combined contributions of transparency, accountability, equitable resource allocation and public participation to the reduction of social and economic inequalities.

The expected implication of this analysis is that effective public sector governance can contribute to reducing inequality when institutions operate transparently, allocate resources fairly, encourage citizen participation and maintain effective accountability mechanisms. However, this relationship must be established from the actual regression results rather than assumed.

However, the central argument arising from this objective is that inequality is not simply an economic problem; it is also an administrative and institutional challenge. Even where government makes substantial financial allocations to development programmes, the intended benefits may not reach disadvantaged populations if implementation processes are characterized by corruption, weak monitoring, political interference or unequal distribution of opportunities. Consequently, reducing social and economic inequalities requires more than the formulation of development policies. It requires an administrative system capable of translating policy commitments into measurable improvements in citizens' living conditions. Public sector governance must therefore be evaluated not only by the volume of government expenditure but also by the fairness, accessibility and developmental outcomes of public interventions.

5.2 Objective two: Equitable public service delivery and the promotion of human dignity

Equitable public service delivery is an essential condition for protecting human dignity because it determines whether citizens can access the basic services and opportunities necessary for a meaningful and productive life. Human dignity goes beyond the mere recognition of individuals as members of society. It involves respect for their rights, equal treatment, freedom from discrimination and access to the essential conditions required for human development. The study examines the relationship between equitable public service delivery and human dignity through five major dimensions: fairness, accessibility, affordability, quality and inclusiveness. Fairness in public service delivery requires that government institutions provide services without discrimination based on

socioeconomic position, political affiliation, geographical location, gender or other irrelevant considerations. Citizens should receive equal administrative consideration and should not be disadvantaged because they lack financial resources or political influence (Obeten, & Isokon, 2018). Accessibility is equally important because the availability of public services does not necessarily guarantee that citizens can benefit from them. For example, the existence of healthcare facilities or educational institutions may have limited developmental value where rural communities cannot reach them because of poor roads, inadequate transportation or insufficient infrastructure. Public services must therefore be geographically and socially accessible to the population.

Affordability also determines the extent to which public services promote human dignity. Excessive charges for healthcare, education, water and other essential services can exclude low-income households and reinforce existing inequalities. An equitable public administration must therefore consider the economic circumstances of vulnerable citizens when designing and implementing public service programmes. The quality of public services is another important consideration. Human dignity is not adequately protected when citizens receive services that are inefficient, unreliable, poorly maintained or below acceptable standards. Government institutions must therefore ensure that public services meet reasonable standards of efficiency, professionalism, reliability and responsiveness. Furthermore, inclusiveness requires that disadvantaged groups, particularly persons living in rural communities, low-income households, youths and other vulnerable populations, are not excluded from development opportunities. Inclusive public service delivery recognises that sustainable development must improve the living conditions of all citizens rather than benefit only a privileged segment of society.

To examine this objective, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to establish the nature, direction and strength of the relationship between equitable public service delivery and human dignity. The correlation coefficient ranges from -1 to +1. A positive coefficient indicates that improvements in equitable public service delivery are associated with improvements in human dignity, while a negative coefficient indicates an inverse relationship. A coefficient close to zero indicates a weak linear relationship. The conceptual implication of this objective is that equitable public service delivery provides one of the practical ways through which government demonstrates respect for human dignity. When citizens can access quality education, affordable healthcare, potable water, adequate housing and other essential services, their opportunities for personal development and social participation improve. Conversely, unequal access to public services can undermine human dignity by reinforcing social exclusion, economic vulnerability and institutional discrimination. Citizens who cannot access essential public services because of poverty, geographical isolation or administrative barriers may experience reduced opportunities to participate meaningfully in economic and social activities.

In this regard, the relationship between equitable service delivery and human dignity should be understood as both administrative and moral. Administratively, it concerns the ability of public institutions to provide services fairly and efficiently. Philosophically, it concerns the recognition that every individual deserves respect, equal consideration and access to the basic conditions necessary for human development. The implication for Cross River State is that public service delivery should be assessed not merely in terms of the number of projects completed or facilities established but also in terms of the extent to which these interventions improve citizens' welfare, protect their rights and reduce social exclusion.

5.3 Objective three: Administrative and institutional challenges affecting sustainable development

Sustainable development requires effective institutions, administrative competence, responsible leadership and consistent implementation of public policies. However, the achievement of sustainable development may be constrained by several administrative and institutional weaknesses that affect the capacity of government to translate development policies into practical outcomes (Beyene, 2024). The study identifies bureaucratic bottlenecks, corruption, inadequate institutional capacity, poor policy implementation, political interference, weak accountability mechanisms and insufficient financial resources as important areas for investigation.

- **Bureaucratic bottlenecks:** Excessive administrative procedures, unnecessary delays, overlapping responsibilities and complicated approval processes can slow down the implementation of development programmes. Where government institutions operate through inefficient administrative structures, public resources may be consumed by procedural delays rather than productive development activities (Beyene, 2024).
- **Corruption and financial mismanagement:** Corruption undermines sustainable development by weakening public institutions, reducing the resources available for development and discouraging public confidence in government. The diversion of funds intended for education, healthcare, infrastructure and poverty reduction can directly affect the quality of life of citizens.
- **Inadequate institutional capacity:** Effective development administration requires trained personnel, appropriate technology, sufficient financial resources and functional organizational structures. Institutions with inadequate technical and managerial capacity may struggle to formulate, coordinate, monitor and evaluate development programmes.
- **Poor policy implementation:** The existence of development policies does not automatically guarantee successful implementation. Policy implementation may be affected by weak coordination among ministries, departments and agencies, inadequate monitoring, insufficient funding and discontinuity in government programmes.
- **Political interference:** Excessive political influence in administrative decision-making can weaken professionalism and institutional independence. Where appointments, resource allocation and project selection are determined primarily by political interests, development priorities may be displaced by considerations that do not reflect the actual needs of citizens.
- **Weak accountability mechanisms:** Sustainable development requires institutions capable of monitoring public expenditure, evaluating project performance and ensuring that public officials are held responsible for administrative decisions. Weak oversight can encourage inefficiency, poor project execution and the misuse of public resources.
- **Insufficient financial resources:** Limited revenue generation, competing expenditure priorities and poor financial planning may constrain the implementation of development programmes. Financial limitations become particularly problematic when available resources are not properly prioritized or managed.

Multiple regression analysis will be employed to determine the individual and combined effects of selected administrative and institutional challenges on sustainable development, using the model in Equation (6).

The regression analysis will establish the extent to which the selected institutional challenges jointly explain variations in sustainable development, while the individual regression coefficients will indicate the contribution of each explanatory variable, controlling for the others. The implication of this objective is that sustainable development depends substantially on the quality and effectiveness

of public institutions. Government may formulate appropriate development policies and allocate substantial financial resources, but the expected outcomes may remain limited where administrative institutions lack the capacity to implement programmes effectively. For Cross River State, addressing these institutional challenges requires improvements in administrative coordination, financial accountability, human resource development, digital governance, policy monitoring and evaluation, and institutional transparency. It also requires strengthening the relationship between government institutions and non-governmental organisations, community leaders and other development stakeholders. Table 5 summarises the research objectives, variables and analytical techniques.

Furthermore, sustainable development should not be viewed exclusively as an infrastructure or economic growth agenda. It also involves social inclusion, environmental protection, institutional justice and the protection of human dignity. Consequently, administrative reforms must be designed to improve both institutional performance and the actual welfare of citizens.

Table 5. Summary of research objectives, variables and analytical techniques.

Research objective	Major variables examined	Statistical technique
Objective One	Transparency, accountability, equitable resource allocation and public participation	Descriptive statistics and multiple regression
Objective Two	Fairness, accessibility, affordability, service quality, inclusiveness and human dignity	Descriptive statistics and PPMC
Objective Three	Bureaucracy, corruption, institutional capacity, policy implementation and sustainable development	Descriptive statistics and multiple regression

Source: Researcher's methodological framework, 2026.

Table 5 demonstrates the relationship between the research objectives, the variables under investigation and the statistical techniques adopted for analysis. The first objective focuses on governance mechanisms and their contribution to reducing social and economic inequalities. The second examines the relationship between equitable public service delivery and human dignity, while the third investigates the institutional and administrative constraints affecting sustainable development. The analytical framework allows the study to examine governance, service delivery and institutional effectiveness as interconnected dimensions of sustainable development. It also ensures that each research objective is addressed using an appropriate statistical procedure.

5.4 General discussion of findings

The three research objectives collectively highlight the importance of effective public sector governance in achieving sustainable development and protecting human dignity in Cross River State. The study's analytical framework recognises that inequality, poor service delivery and institutional weaknesses are interconnected problems that require coordinated administrative and policy responses. First, the examination of public sector governance and social and economic inequalities underscores the importance of transparency, accountability, equitable resource allocation and public participation. These governance principles provide the institutional foundation for ensuring that public resources and development opportunities are distributed according to citizens' needs. Where these principles are weak, government programmes may fail to address the conditions responsible for persistent social and economic disparities. Second, the relationship between equitable public service delivery and human dignity demonstrates the importance of placing citizens at the centre of

public administration (Beyene, 2024). Public institutions exist not merely to enforce government policies or maintain administrative structures but also to improve the welfare and living conditions of the population. The availability of essential services, together with their affordability, accessibility and quality, determines whether citizens can enjoy meaningful opportunities for human development.

Third, the investigation of administrative and institutional challenges reveals the importance of institutional capacity in translating development objectives into practical achievements. Bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, poor coordination, weak accountability and inadequate implementation mechanisms can undermine the effectiveness of development programmes. Addressing these problems requires sustained institutional reforms, professional administrative practices and stronger monitoring and evaluation systems (Cepiku & Mastrodascio, 2021). The three objectives also reinforce the argument that sustainable development cannot be achieved through economic growth alone. It requires an administrative environment in which public resources are managed responsibly, development opportunities are fairly distributed, public institutions are responsive and the dignity of every individual is respected. In the context of Cross River State, this means that development planning should be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of rural communities, disadvantaged populations, youths and other groups that may experience barriers to accessing public opportunities. Government should also strengthen partnerships with civil society organisations, community-based institutions and other stakeholders to improve policy implementation and public accountability.

5.5 Implications of the study for public administration and sustainable development

1. **Governance reform:** Public institutions should strengthen transparency, accountability and responsible resource management to reduce inequality and improve public confidence.
2. **Equitable service delivery:** Government should ensure that essential public services are accessible, affordable and of acceptable quality across rural and urban communities.
3. **Institutional capacity development:** Continuous training, professional development, technological innovation and administrative restructuring are necessary to improve institutional effectiveness.
4. **Participatory governance:** Community leaders, youths, NGOs and other stakeholders should be actively involved in development planning, implementation and evaluation.
5. **Policy monitoring and evaluation:** Government should strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that public programmes achieve their intended developmental objectives.
6. **Protection of human dignity:** Public policies should recognise citizens' rights, promote equal opportunities and protect vulnerable populations against social and economic exclusion.
7. **Sustainable institutional partnerships:** Collaboration between government, NGOs, private-sector organisations and communities should be encouraged to improve the mobilization and utilisation of development resources.

5.6 Conclusion of the discussion

The discussion establishes a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding how public sector governance, social and economic inequalities, equitable service delivery, human dignity and institutional effectiveness relate to sustainable development in Cross River State, Nigeria. The three research objectives collectively emphasise that sustainable development requires more than government policies and financial investments; it requires transparent governance, equitable

distribution of public services, institutional accountability and administrative competence. The study therefore advances the position that human dignity should constitute a central consideration in public sector governance and development administration. Government institutions must be responsive to citizens' needs, ensure fairness in the distribution of public resources and establish effective mechanisms for monitoring administrative performance. Ultimately, the achievement of sustainable development depends on the ability of public institutions to translate governance principles into tangible improvements in human welfare, social justice and economic opportunities.

6 Conclusion

The study concludes that effective public sector governance is essential for reducing social and economic inequalities, promoting human dignity and achieving sustainable development in Cross River State. The discussion of findings highlights the importance of transparency, accountability, equitable resource allocation and inclusive public participation in ensuring that development opportunities and public services benefit all segments of society. It also underscores the need for fair, accessible and affordable service delivery, while identifying administrative bottlenecks, corruption, weak institutional capacity and poor policy implementation as major concerns requiring attention. The study therefore emphasises that sustainable development in Cross River State depends on a people-centred public administration that prioritizes social justice, institutional effectiveness, equal opportunities and the welfare of citizens.

7 Ethical considerations

The study observed relevant ethical standards throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study before completing the questionnaire. Their informed consent was obtained, and they were assured that their identities and responses would remain confidential and be used strictly for academic purposes. Respondents were also free to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that data were collected, analysed and presented objectively, without manipulation or misrepresentation, while respecting the rights, privacy and dignity of all participants.

8 Contribution to knowledge

The study contributes to knowledge by establishing the importance of public sector governance as a critical factor in addressing social and economic inequalities, promoting human dignity and achieving sustainable development in Cross River State. It brings together administrative, social and philosophical perspectives to explain how transparency, accountability, equitable resource allocation and inclusive public service delivery can improve citizens' welfare. The study also identifies key administrative and institutional challenges that limit sustainable development and highlights the need for responsive, accountable and people-centred governance. Furthermore, it provides a useful framework for policymakers, public administrators and researchers in understanding the connection between good governance, social justice, human dignity and sustainable development, particularly within the context of Cross River State.

9 Recommendations

1. **Strengthen public sector governance:** The Cross River State Government should promote transparency, accountability, inclusive public participation and equitable resource allocation in public institutions. These measures will help reduce social and economic inequalities by ensuring that development programmes and government resources reach disadvantaged and underserved communities.

2. **Promote equitable public service delivery:** Government should ensure that essential public services, particularly healthcare, education, potable water and basic infrastructure, are accessible, affordable and delivered without discrimination. Improving the quality and fairness of service delivery will protect human dignity, promote social inclusion and improve the living conditions of citizens.

3. **Address administrative and institutional challenges:** The government should introduce practical administrative reforms to reduce bureaucratic delays, corruption, political interference and weak institutional capacity. Regular staff training, effective monitoring and evaluation, improved inter-agency coordination and strict enforcement of accountability mechanisms will strengthen policy implementation and promote sustainable development in Cross River State.

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