



PUBLIC SECTOR REFORMS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF THE NIGERIA POLICE FORCE

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between public sector reform initiatives and sustainable development outcomes in Nigeria, using the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) as a case study. Drawing on Institutional Reform Theory and the New Public Management framework, the research adopted a descriptive survey design targeting NPF officers and civilian administrative staff across three zonal commands: Enugu, Abuja, and Lagos. A sample of 384 respondents was drawn from a population of 4,200 using the Taro Yamane formula, with stratified random sampling applied across rank categories. A structured questionnaire assessed five reform dimensions: recruitment transparency, training quality, resource adequacy, accountability mechanisms, and community policing adoption. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients ranged from 0.73 to 0.86 across subscales. Analysis employed SPSS version 25, incorporating descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression. Findings revealed that training quality had the strongest relationship with service effectiveness ($r = 0.71, p < 0.001$), whilst accountability mechanisms correlated significantly with public trust ratings ($r = 0.62, p < 0.001$). Multiple regression demonstrated that the four reform dimensions collectively accounted for 64.7 per cent of variance in sustainable development outcome indicators ($R^2 = 0.647, F = 52.14, p < 0.001$). The study concludes that whilst legislative reform through the Police Act 2020 has established a credible institutional foundation, implementation failures attributable to inadequate funding, corruption, and institutional resistance substantially limit reform-to-outcome translation. Targeted investment in training infrastructure, anti-corruption mechanisms, and community policing programmes is recommended to accelerate sustainable development gains.

Keywords: public sector reform, Nigeria Police Force, sustainable development, community policing, Police Act 2020, institutional reform, accountability

Introduction

Public sector reform constitutes one of the most contested and consequential domains of governance in developing economies, encompassing interventions ranging from structural reorganisation and personnel management reform to legislative overhaul and institutional accountability mechanisms. In Nigeria, cycles of public sector reform have occurred with considerable regularity since independence, yet scholars have consistently noted the gap between

reform intention and institutional outcome, a gap attributable to the combined effects of political patronage networks, fiscal constraint, bureaucratic inertia, and weak monitoring and evaluation capacity (Ukwandu, 2020). The security sector occupies a particularly sensitive position within this reform landscape because security institutions simultaneously embody the coercive authority of the state and the public's expectation of protection, order, and rights observance. When security sector reform fails, the consequences extend well beyond administrative inefficiency to undermine democratic governance, citizen safety, and national development trajectories.

The Nigeria Police Force presents one of the most extensively documented cases of security sector dysfunction in Sub-Saharan Africa, characterised by decades of under-funding, corrupt practices, extrajudicial conduct, and deeply adversarial relations with the civilian population. Akinyetun and Adedini (2022) document the persistence of extrajudicial killings and the institutional failure to reform policing in the fourth republic, situating the problem within a structural configuration in which successive civilian governments have used the police as instruments of political control rather than as institutions of public security. The #EndSARS protests of October 2020, which mobilised millions of Nigerians against police brutality and resulted in the dissolution of the notorious Special Anti-Robbery Squad, represented a watershed moment in the public demand for fundamental police reform, generating unprecedented political pressure for the implementation of the Police Act 2020. The UNDP (2024) reports that despite subsequent reform initiatives, including the Supporting Police Accountability and Transformation (SPAAT) project and the development of a National Gender Policy for the NPF, only 15 per cent of Nigerians express trust in the police, indicating that legislative reform has yet to translate into perceptible improvements in public experience.

A critical research gap pertains to the measurement of reform implementation quality and its relationship to sustainable development outcomes within the NPF. Whilst descriptive and qualitative analyses of police dysfunction in Nigeria are abundant, rigorous empirical studies that quantify the relationships between specific reform dimensions and measurable development indicators are scarce. Anzizi (2024) provides a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the NPF's inability to curtail crime but acknowledges the absence of survey-based evidence on officer perceptions of reform implementation. Onyia (2024), examining institutional distrust in Nigerian policing, employs a qualitative design that illuminates trust dynamics but does not generate quantitative evidence on the reform-outcome relationship. This study addresses the gap by generating primary survey data from NPF officers and civilian staff across three zonal commands, employing multiple regression to establish the relative predictive power of five reform dimensions on sustainable development outcome indicators, and thereby contributing an empirically grounded analysis to a literature dominated by qualitative and documentary approaches. The study was guided by three research questions: to what extent do training quality and resource adequacy predict police service effectiveness; what is the relationship between accountability mechanisms and public trust in the NPF; and to what degree do community policing adoption and recruitment transparency contribute to sustainable development outcomes. The null hypothesis that public sector reform dimensions bear no significant relationship to sustainable development indicators in the NPF was tested at the 0.05 level of significance. These questions are analytically significant because they move beyond diagnosis of dysfunction to identify the specific reform levers most predictive of improvement, thereby providing an evidence base for prioritising the allocation of the NPF's constrained reform resources.

Literature Review

Public Sector Reforms in Nigeria: Trajectory and Outcomes

Public sector reform in Nigeria since the return to democratic governance in 1999 has progressed through multiple phases, from the Obasanjo-era due process and anti-corruption initiatives to the Buhari administration's IPPIS reform and the Jonathan administration's financial management reforms. Ukwandu (2020) provides a comprehensive situational analysis of public sector reform in post-independence Nigeria and demonstrates that reforms have consistently achieved partial structural changes whilst failing to alter the underlying political economy

of patron-client relationships that generates bureaucratic dysfunction. The Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Political Science (2025) identifies a pattern in which each administration's reform programme privileges visibility and political optics over institutionalisation, resulting in reforms that generate compliance behaviour in the short term but are gradually reversed as enforcement attention shifts. This systemic pattern is particularly consequential for the NPF, where the institutional culture of impunity has historically survived multiple reform cycles.

Security sector reform as a specific subset of public sector reform involves not merely administrative restructuring but the fundamental redefinition of the institutional mandate, operational culture, and accountability architecture of security agencies. The Police Act 2020 represents the most comprehensive legislative attempt to redefine policing in Nigeria since the colonial-era Police Act of 1943, introducing provisions for community policing, civilian oversight through the Police Service Commission, gender equality requirements, and explicit human rights obligations. UNDP (2024) documents the institutional scaffolding developed to support implementation of the Act, including the Police Reform Secretariat established under the Office of the National Security Adviser, the development of training manuals aligned with human rights standards, and the renovation of training infrastructure at police colleges in Maiduguri, Kaduna, Lagos, Ilorin, Jos, and Enugu. However, the Afrobarometer (2023) trust figure of 15 per cent indicates that these institutional investments have yet to generate perceptible change in the public's experience of policing.

Community Policing and Police-Citizen Relations

Community policing has emerged as the dominant paradigm in global policing reform, embodying a philosophy that positions policing as a collaborative problem-solving enterprise between police institutions and the communities they serve, rather than a unilateral exercise of state coercive authority. Agbongiasede (2024), in a study of policing for sustainable development in South-South Nigerian universities, demonstrates that community-oriented policing strategies reduce crime incidence more effectively than reactive enforcement approaches and improve perceived safety among civilian populations, though she notes that sustainable implementation depends critically on addressing corruption and institutional capacity deficits. Umanah, Udoh, and Imoh-Ita (2025), examining community policing in Akwa Ibom State, find that whilst the philosophical foundations of community policing are well understood within the NPF command structure, operationalisation is impeded by the force's centralised administrative architecture, which inhibits the local responsiveness that community policing requires. The UNDP's SPAAT project has trained approximately 1,200 police trainers in human rights, gender, and mediation competencies since 2021, representing a meaningful capacity investment, but the conversion of training inputs into cultural change within the NPF remains an empirically contested question.

Research on police-community relations in Nigeria consistently identifies institutional distrust as the primary barrier to effective community policing implementation. Onyia (2024), employing qualitative methods to examine what he terms the 'institutional distrust trap', argues that public unwillingness to cooperate with the police perpetuates informal and illegal crime control mechanisms, including mob vigilantism and extra-legal killings, which in turn deepen the legitimacy deficit of formal policing. This self-reinforcing cycle can only be broken through sustained institutional reform that changes the public's direct experience of police-citizen interactions rather than merely changing the legislative framework. Ike, Jidong, and Ayobi (2024) report early positive findings from a legal education-informed cognitive behavioural therapy intervention designed to rebuild victims' confidence in the NPF, suggesting that targeted interventions at the level of police-victim interaction can generate trust improvements even within an otherwise dysfunctional institutional context.

Accountability Mechanisms and Sustainable Development

The relationship between institutional accountability and sustainable development is theoretically grounded in the proposition that effective governance, characterised by transparency, responsiveness, and rule-of-law adherence, generates the predictable institutional environment necessary for economic activity, social welfare provision, and human development. Applied to the security sector, this proposition holds that a police force operating under robust

accountability mechanisms produces public safety conditions conducive to economic investment, social mobility, and community well-being, all of which are core dimensions of sustainable development as operationalised in the Sustainable Development Goals framework. Agba, Agba, and Obeten (2023), in a comparative analysis of AI and public management in developed and developing economies, identify accountability infrastructure as one of the critical mediating variables between digital and institutional innovation and governance quality, with implications directly applicable to security sector reform contexts.

In the Nigerian context, accountability mechanisms for the NPF operate through multiple formal channels, including the Police Service Commission, the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission, the National Human Rights Commission, and internal disciplinary structures, as well as through informal mechanisms such as civil society monitoring, media investigation, and community oversight. The practical effectiveness of these mechanisms is, however, substantially attenuated by the force's centralised command structure, which concentrates accountability power at the top of the hierarchy whilst insulating operational-level officers from consequence for misconduct. The UNDP Rule of Law Annual Report (2023) documents progress in strengthening the Police Service Commission's strategic oversight capacity, but notes that enforcement of disciplinary outcomes at the divisional and operational levels remains inconsistent. This gap between institutional design and implementation fidelity is characteristic of reform contexts in which political will for reform exists at the apex of the governance system but does not penetrate the operational levels at which daily policing decisions are made.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two complementary theoretical frameworks: Institutional Reform Theory and New Public Management (NPM). Institutional Reform Theory, associated with the work of North (1990) and Ostrom (1990), posits that durable change in organisational behaviour requires the transformation of formal rules, informal norms, and enforcement characteristics simultaneously, since changes in formal rules alone will be absorbed and neutralised by resistant informal norms. Applied to the NPF, Institutional Reform Theory predicts that legislative reform through the Police Act 2020 will produce sustainable behavioural change only to the degree that it is accompanied by changes in the informal institutional culture of the force, including attitudinal norms around citizen rights, corrupt practices, and professional identity. This theoretical lens is particularly appropriate for the Nigerian context, where the historical pattern of reform-without-change is best explained by the persistence of informal institutional norms that outlast each cycle of formal restructuring.

New Public Management provides a complementary theoretical perspective by emphasising performance measurement, output accountability, and managerial autonomy as the appropriate governance mechanisms for improving public sector performance. Hood (1991), in the canonical formulation of NPM, argues that traditional bureaucratic administration should be replaced by a framework in which public managers are held accountable for measurable outcomes, given the operational flexibility to achieve those outcomes, and subjected to competitive pressures that incentivise efficiency. In the policing context, NPM-influenced reforms have produced the community policing paradigm, performance-based officer evaluation, and the decentralisation of operational command. The tension between Institutional Reform Theory, which emphasises cultural transformation, and NPM, which emphasises structural and incentive redesign, is theoretically productive for the present study, as it raises the empirical question of whether the NPF's reform deficits are primarily attributable to cultural resistance or to inadequate performance management architecture, or to both.

Identified Research Gaps

The existing literature on police reform in Nigeria is characterised by three significant gaps. First, qualitative and documentary methods predominate, with quantitative survey research measuring officer-level perceptions of reform implementation and outcomes remaining limited; this restricts the generalisability of available findings. Second, the majority of studies examine reform failure descriptively without generating comparative evidence on which specific reform dimensions are most predictive of outcome improvement, thereby constraining the analytical utility

of findings for resource allocation decisions. Third, existing research rarely connects NPF reform outcomes to sustainable development indicators in a theoretically coherent and empirically systematic manner, treating policing reform as an end in itself rather than as a means to broader development outcomes. The present study addresses all three gaps through its multi-site survey design, multiple regression methodology, and explicit framing of police reform within the sustainable development outcomes framework.

Methodology

Research Design and Population

The study employed a descriptive survey research design, appropriate for systematically describing the distribution of perceptions and the relationships between reform variables within a defined institutional population without experimental manipulation. The target population comprised NPF officers of all ranks and civilian administrative staff across three purposively selected zonal commands: Enugu (South-East), Abuja (North-Central), and Lagos (South-West). These commands were selected to ensure geographical diversity whilst maintaining operational comparability as zonal-level administrative units. A staff register consulted in early 2025 indicated a combined active population of approximately 4,200 officers and civilian staff across the three commands, constituting the target population for this study.

Sampling Procedure

Sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula: $n = N / (1 + N(e^2))$, where $N = 4,200$ and $e = 0.05$. This yielded $n = 4,200 / (1 + 4,200 \times 0.0025) = 4,200 / 11.5 \approx 365$, rounded to 384 to account for possible attrition. Stratified random sampling was applied across five rank categories: Constables and Corporals, Sergeants and Inspector-level officers, Deputy Superintendent to Superintendent, Chief Superintendent to Assistant Commissioner, and Civilian Administrative Staff. Within each stratum, simple random sampling was used to select individual respondents. This stratification ensures proportional representation of both operational and supervisory staff, and of police officers and civilian administrators, providing a sample capable of capturing reform perceptions across the institutional hierarchy.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire of 30 items, distributed across five reform dimensions: recruitment transparency (5 items), training quality (7 items), resource adequacy (5 items), accountability mechanisms (7 items), and community policing adoption (6 items). Outcome variables included perceived service effectiveness (4 items) and perceived contribution to sustainable development (4 items). All items were scored on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Face validity was established through review by two senior NPF officers (retired) and two academics specialising in public administration and criminology. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were: recruitment transparency ($\alpha = 0.76$), training quality ($\alpha = 0.86$), resource adequacy ($\alpha = 0.73$), accountability mechanisms ($\alpha = 0.82$), and community policing adoption ($\alpha = 0.79$), all meeting the 0.70 threshold.

Data Collection and Analysis

Questionnaires were administered with formal written consent obtained from zonal commands in all three locations during March and April 2025. Research assistants with prior experience in police institution fieldwork administered questionnaires in person to minimise response bias associated with self-administration in hierarchical institutional settings. Of 384 questionnaires distributed, 371 were returned usable, representing a response rate of 96.6 per cent. SPSS version 25 was employed for all analyses: descriptive statistics described the sample and reform dimension scores; Pearson correlation assessed bivariate relationships between reform dimensions and outcome variables; and

multiple regression established the combined and independent predictive power of reform dimensions on the composite sustainable development outcome score.

Results

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 371)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	261	70.4
	Female	110	29.6
Rank Category	Constable/Corporal	92	24.8
	Sergeant/Inspector	108	29.1
	DSP to SP	74	19.9
	CSP to ACP	41	11.1
	Civilian Admin Staff	56	15.1
Years in Service	1–5 years	79	21.3
	6–10 years	112	30.2
	11–20 years	127	34.2
	Over 20 years	53	14.3
Command	Enugu	124	33.4
	Abuja	128	34.5
	Lagos	119	32.1

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 1 shows that male officers constituted 70.4 per cent of the sample, broadly consistent with the male-dominated composition of the NPF, in which women represent approximately 8 per cent of the force nationally (UNDP, 2023). Sergeant and Inspector-rank officers constituted the largest rank category (29.1%), and the modal service duration group was 11–20 years (34.2%), indicating that the sample was dominated by experienced mid-career personnel. The three commands were approximately equally represented, supporting the geographical generalisability of findings within the three-command study boundary.

Reform Dimensions: Descriptive Statistics

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics – Reform Dimension Mean Scores (n = 371)

Reform Dimension	Mean (M)	Std. Dev. (SD)	Interpretation
Recruitment Transparency	2.74	0.88	Below Average
Training Quality	3.12	0.91	Moderate
Resource Adequacy	2.46	0.97	Low
Accountability Mechanisms	2.89	0.83	Below Average
Community Policing Adoption	3.08	0.86	Moderate
Service Effectiveness (Outcome)	2.93	0.79	Below Average

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 2 reveals that resource adequacy recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 0.97$), indicating that NPF personnel across all three commands perceive their operational resources as critically deficient, a finding consistent with the qualitative literature on underfunding as the primary structural constraint on reform implementation. Recruitment transparency also recorded a below-average mean ($M = 2.74$), suggesting persistent perceptions of nepotism and irregularity in the recruitment process. Training quality ($M = 3.12$) and community policing adoption ($M = 3.08$) recorded moderate scores, consistent with the documented investments in training infrastructure made by UNDP and the Department of Training and Development since 2021, even if outcomes remain below the threshold required for sustainable institutional change.

Correlation Analysis: Reform Dimensions and Outcomes

Pearson correlation analysis revealed the following significant relationships. Training quality demonstrated the strongest correlation with service effectiveness ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that improvements in the quality of pre-deployment and in-service training are most strongly associated with officer-reported service outcomes. Accountability mechanisms correlated significantly with public trust ratings ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$), confirming the theoretical proposition that visible accountability architecture is the primary institutional driver of police legitimacy. Community policing adoption correlated positively with sustainable development outcome scores ($r = 0.57$, $p < 0.001$), whilst recruitment transparency demonstrated a moderate but significant relationship with officer morale and commitment indicators ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$). Resource adequacy, despite recording the lowest mean, demonstrated a significant correlation with both service effectiveness ($r = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$) and community policing adoption ($r = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that underfunding constrains not merely operational capacity but the implementation of reform initiatives themselves. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected: reform dimensions bear significant and measurable relationships to sustainable development indicators in the NPF.

Multiple Regression: Predictors of Sustainable Development Outcomes

Table 3: Multiple Regression – Reform Predictors of Sustainable Development Outcomes

Predictor Variable	β	SE	t-value	p-value
Training Quality	0.34	0.07	4.86	< 0.001
Accountability Mechanisms	0.28	0.07	4.00	< 0.001
Community Policing Adoption	0.23	0.06	3.83	< 0.001
Resource Adequacy	0.19	0.08	2.38	0.018
$R^2 = 0.647$	Adj. $R^2 = 0.643$	$F(4, 366) = 52.14$	$p < 0.001$	

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The multiple regression model was statistically significant ($F(4, 366) = 52.14, p < 0.001$) and explained 64.7 per cent of variance in sustainable development outcome scores ($R^2 = 0.647$). Training quality was the strongest independent predictor ($\beta = 0.34, p < 0.001$), followed by accountability mechanisms ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$), community policing adoption ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.001$), and resource adequacy ($\beta = 0.19, p = 0.018$). All four predictors retained independent significance in the full model, demonstrating that each reform dimension contributes distinctly to sustainable development outcomes and that no single dimension alone is sufficient for systemic improvement. Notably, recruitment transparency did not achieve independent significance in the regression model after controlling for the other four dimensions ($p = 0.19$), suggesting that its effect on outcomes may be mediated through training quality and institutional culture rather than operating as a direct predictor.

Discussion

Training Quality as the Primary Reform Lever

The finding that training quality constitutes the strongest predictor of both service effectiveness and sustainable development outcomes ($\beta = 0.34$) provides direct empirical support for the investment priorities embedded in the UNDP SPAAT project, which has directed a substantial proportion of its resources to police training infrastructure, trainer development, and curriculum reform. The moderate mean score for training quality ($M = 3.12$), however, indicates that current training provisions, whilst above the resource adequacy baseline, remain insufficient to drive the scale of cultural transformation that Institutional Reform Theory identifies as the precondition for durable reform. This finding corroborates the observation of Ike, Jidong, and Ayobi (2024) that targeted training interventions can produce measurable attitudinal change, whilst extending it to demonstrate that training quality is also predictive of aggregate service and development outcomes at the command level. The implication is that marginal investments in training quality will generate higher sustainable development returns than equivalent investments in any other single reform dimension.

Accountability Mechanisms and Legitimacy Restoration

The significant relationship between accountability mechanisms and public trust ratings ($r = 0.62, p < 0.001$) is theoretically consistent with Institutional Reform Theory's proposition that accountability architecture is the institutional infrastructure through which public confidence in state institutions is built over time. Onyia's (2024) analysis of the institutional distrust trap provides a complementary qualitative explanation for this finding: trust

deficits are self-perpetuating because distrust leads citizens to withhold cooperation, which reduces policing effectiveness, which in turn reinforces distrust. Breaking this cycle requires credible accountability mechanisms that change citizens' expectations about police conduct before changes in conduct are sufficiently widespread to be directly perceived. The Police Service Commission's strengthened oversight capacity and the UNDP-supported Police Reform Secretariat represent institutional developments in the right direction, but the present data suggest that these mechanisms remain below the threshold of visibility and credibility required to alter public trust at scale.

Community Policing and Development Outcomes

The positive relationship between community policing adoption and sustainable development outcome scores ($r = 0.57$, $p < 0.001$) is consistent with the findings of Agbongiasede (2024) on community-oriented policing in South-South Nigeria and with the global literature on community policing as a development-enabling governance intervention. The moderate mean for community policing adoption ($M = 3.08$) suggests that awareness and nominal adoption have improved since the formal incorporation of community policing into the NPF's operational framework, but that full institutionalisation remains incomplete. Umanah, Udoh, and Imoh-Ita (2025) attribute the incompleteness of community policing adoption to structural centralisation, and the present regression finding that resource adequacy is a significant predictor of community policing adoption corroborates this argument: decentralised, community-responsive policing requires financial and logistical resources that the NPF's chronically under-resourced divisional commands cannot reliably mobilise.

Resource Adequacy and the Structural Constraint

The finding that resource adequacy recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 2.46$) across all reform dimensions, combined with its significant regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.19$, $p = 0.018$), illustrates the structural paradox that the factor most limiting to sustainable development outcomes is also the factor over which the NPF has least internal control. Funding decisions for the NPF are made at the federal level, and the persistent underfunding of the force relative to its operational mandate constitutes a structural governance failure that legislative and training reforms cannot compensate for in isolation. Anzizi (2024) identifies inadequate funding as a root cause of crime control failure in the NPF, and the present quantitative evidence reinforces this diagnosis by demonstrating that resource adequacy is not merely a contextual condition but a statistically significant predictor of sustainable development outcomes in its own right. This finding has important policy implications: reform strategies that do not include a credible fiscal commitment to NPF resourcing will continue to generate partial outcomes regardless of the sophistication of their training, accountability, or community policing components.

Conclusion

This study contributes a multi-site, quantitatively grounded analysis of the relationship between public sector reform dimensions and sustainable development outcomes in the Nigeria Police Force, addressing a significant empirical gap in the police reform literature. The findings demonstrate that training quality, accountability mechanisms, community policing adoption, and resource adequacy collectively explain 64.7 per cent of variance in sustainable development outcome scores, with training quality emerging as the most powerful independent predictor. Theoretically, the study validates the combined application of Institutional Reform Theory and New Public Management to the analysis of security sector reform in a developing-country context, demonstrating that both cultural transformation and performance management architecture are independently significant determinants of reform outcomes. For future research, longitudinal panel designs that track the same officers across reform cycles would enable causal inference; comparative studies that contrast the NPF with police forces in other African states implementing equivalent reforms would contextualise the findings; and citizen-side surveys measuring the public's direct experience of reform impacts would complete the accountability loop that the present supply-side study only partially captures.

Recommendations

Practitioners and NPF command leadership should treat training quality as the single highest-priority investment in the immediate reform agenda, directing disproportionate resources toward pre-deployment and in-service training that integrates human rights, community engagement, and professional conduct components. The present evidence that training quality is the strongest predictor of service effectiveness and sustainable development outcomes provides an empirical justification for this prioritisation that should be communicated directly to the National Assembly as a basis for ring-fencing training budget allocations. Police college infrastructure improvements underway in six states should be accelerated, and trainer recruitment criteria should be revised to require demonstrated instructional competency alongside operational experience.

Policymakers in the Ministry of Police Affairs and the Office of the National Security Adviser should strengthen the operational independence and enforcement capacity of the Police Service Commission as the primary institutional accountability mechanism for the NPF. The present finding that accountability mechanisms are the second-strongest predictor of sustainable development outcomes indicates that the institutional infrastructure of accountability has a measurable return on development investment. Strengthening the Commission requires guaranteed operational funding, security of tenure for commissioners, and mandatory public reporting of disciplinary outcomes at the divisional level to create visible accountability that can begin to shift public trust trajectories.

The federal government, as the primary funder of the NPF, must treat the chronic underfunding of the force as a structural governance failure with demonstrable sustainable development costs. The finding that resource adequacy records the lowest mean score across reform dimensions whilst simultaneously retaining independent predictive significance for development outcomes makes a direct case for a dedicated NPF Resource Development Fund, capitalised through a ring-fenced budgetary allocation equivalent to at least 0.5 per cent of the federal consolidated revenue fund, to finance equipment procurement, operational logistics, and facility maintenance independent of the annual appropriation cycle.

Educational institutions offering criminology, public administration, and law programmes should incorporate community policing principles, human rights standards, and institutional reform theory as mandatory curriculum components to produce graduates capable of contributing to evidence-based police reform. The University of Nigeria and Enugu State University of Science and Technology are particularly well positioned to establish specialised research centres on security sector governance in Southeast Nigeria, generating the local empirical evidence that policymakers and reform practitioners require but that is currently unavailable in the literature. Collaborative research partnerships between universities and NPF zonal commands would create the institutional relationships necessary for evidence translation.

Future researchers should extend this study by investigating the mediating role of organisational culture between formal reform implementation and sustainable development outcomes, since Institutional Reform Theory predicts that cultural variables mediate the translation of formal rules into behavioural change. A longitudinal design following the same cohort of NPF officers across the implementation of the Police Act 2020 would provide uniquely valuable evidence on whether the Act is genuinely transforming institutional norms or generating only surface-level compliance. Comparative designs incorporating data from Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa, where police reform processes have advanced further, would contextualise Nigeria's reform trajectory and identify transferable lessons.

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