

# ROLE OF COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

<sup>1</sup>Hangeior Apollonia A., <sup>2</sup>Ofoma Chinedu Valentine and <sup>3</sup>Nwakpa Timothy Valentine

<sup>1</sup>Department of Public Administration, Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Public Administration Federal University Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria

<sup>3</sup>Department of Public Administration Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *The rising urban challenges characterized by worsening infrastructure, poor service delivery, cybercrimes and human insecurity amidst influx of people into the cities has compelled state actors, researchers and development practitioners to shift their focus to collaborative governance in search of solution. This therefore underscores the objective of this paper which is to explore the role of collaborative governance in advancing sustainable urban development. Utilizing secondary sources of data, the study contends that collaborative governance could promote sustainable urban development particularly as it concerns solid waste collection and disposal; urban regeneration; public service delivery and legitimacy. However, it is also demonstrated in the paper that the approach (collaborative governance) could be undermined by divergent interests of stakeholders. Concluding around the above findings, the paper recommends that: relevant government agencies as the leading actors should put in place a mechanism that ensures stakeholder mapping and inclusion as well as clarification of their roles and expectations; and clear establishment of objectives; there should be trust building through transparent process and effective communication; and there must be clear procedures for resolving crisis or disagreement among others.*

**Key words:** *Collaborative governance, sustainable urban development, solid waste collection and disposal, urban regeneration and public service delivery.*

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## 1. Introduction

The increasing level of complexity of urban environment with its accompanied growing tendency of ‘wicked problems’ characterized by ambiguous definitions, contradictory values, intricacy driven solving process and dynamic limitations (Roberts, 2000) has necessitated the idea of collaborative governance as a panacea to address these ‘wicked problems’ in urban areas

(Emerson et al., 2012; Head and Alford, 2015). This illuminates the increasing recognition among public organizations over the efficacy of collaborative governance in addressing complex public challenges since no individual public organization can singlehandedly address the issue (Bryson, Crosby & Stone 2006; Duit and Galaz 2008; Weber and Khademian, 2008). Understanding the concept as an arrangement involving state and non-state actors, Bradford (2016) argues that collaborative governance presents an institutional mechanism through which urban areas could strengthen their governance structures and by extension solving complex problems. Currently, the adoption of collaborative governance by urban political authorities has gone beyond the Western countries to include non-Western nations such as China (Yang et al, 2021). Public services are naturally inter-organizational, hence, demands collaborative governance involving not just state actors but also the citizens for value generation (Osborne, Radnor and Nasi 2013) in that the adoption of collaborative

governance by public organization results in the involvement of community actors in executing a strategic learning process designed to frame public value, its drivers and the strategic resources required to influence the outcomes for community (Ansell and Gash, 2007). This process aids in the formulation of 'robust' policies which suggests an outcome-based perspective, involving co-production, co-design and co-assessment of public policies from community actors aimed at achieving community resilience and sustainable development (Bovaird 2007; Osborne 2021; Torfing and Ansell 2017).

In contrast, it is argued that collaborative governance is not impeccable as the adoption of the idea could produce new or peculiar governance challenges arising from public management (Ansell and Gash 2008; Provanand Kenis 2008; Moynihan et al. 2011; Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012; Bryson, Crosby and Stone, 2015) such as collaborative-process challenges (harmonizing divergent opinions and interests and building trust); substantive problem-solving issues (consisting of politically and technically challenging task of defining the challenge a collaboration is meant to work on, initiating a collaborative response and designing indicators of success and multi-relational accountability problems) (Waardenburg et al. 2018); multi-relational accountability challenge (contradictions between the traditional and new mediums of accountability of public agencies and the society as whole) (Maurits et al., 2020). Despite the recommendation by scholars for deepening of collaborative governance in public sector organizations to address emerging issues, some challenges could arise in the course of its process, precisely in the aspect of coordination, as the coordination aspect of collaborative governance is usually complex and problematic to governments since individual organization has peculiar set of interests and values (Christensen et al., 2016; Denzau and North, 2000; Weare et al., 2014). This issue of coordination is even more complex in times of crises as they often exacerbate factors (such as culture of self-interest and lack of trust among actors) responsible for the difficulty in coordination (Parker et al., 2020). Another dimension of complexity in the implementation of collaborative governance is ensuring sustainable outcomes which should be determined and assessed in consonance with the consensus from community actors (Carmine, Greta and William, 2021).

Notwithstanding the interrogation of collaborative governance by the above scholars and some others, there is need to further deepen the relevance of collaborative governance in urban world. This assertion is accentuated in the submission by Yange et al. (2021); Jiannan, Yixin and Haozhi (2023) that there is implementation of collaborative governance in both Western and non-Western cities which illuminates the justification for further studies on the subject since there are different collaborative governance models adopted in various organizational and cultural background. Similarly, Avoyan (2022); Torfing et al (2020); Ulibarri et al (2023) observe that there is limited research enabling the people to determine the needed and adequate requirements for green transition in various cases of collaborative governance. Supporting it from a wider perspective, Carmine, Greta and William (2021) infer that literature on practice of collaborative governance is still evolving despite of the significant research on the concept. Consequently, this paper broadly aims to explore the role of collaborative governance in promoting sustainable urban development. Accordingly, the study proceeds to conceptualize collaborative governance and sustainable urban development. The next section of the study focuses on the discourse which is to interrogate the role of collaborative governance in advancing sustainable urban development while the remainder of the paper centres on divergent interests of stakeholders as a major obstacle and conclusion.

## **2. Methods**

This paper utilized secondary sources of data such as journal articles, newspapers, books and official publications from notable organizations. To be specific, the data were got mostly from reputable journal outlets indexed in SCOPUS and Web of Science (WoS) such as those domiciled in Taylor and Francis, Sage and Elsevier. Where available, Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) of the articles were provided for easier trace and verification.

## **3. Literature review**

### **3.1 Collaborative Governance: Concept and Issues**

Collaborative governance is viewed as a collective decision-making framework that is based on consensus building together with deliberate processes involving public organizations and common citizens or non-governmental players (Ansell and Gash, 2008). For Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh (2012), collaborative governance is a process and arrangement designed for public policy formulation and management which result in the constructive engagement of people from public and private sectors aimed at addressing a public issue that could

have been insurmountable. And that is why its efficacy to address wicked problems depends on its ability to involve and align different relevant actors who engage in innovative thinking for solutions (Bryson, Cunningham and Lokkesmoe, 2002).

The objective of the collaborative governance actors is to address their divergent positions amicably and promote consensus over definition of issues, shared objectives and provisional solutions (Gray, 1989). Meanwhile, collaborative engagement occurs within an institutional framework that is largely self-regulated, which the relevant involved actors create and modify hierarchically (Scharpf, 1994). While the organizational structure aids in organizing and stabilizing the engagement, divergent opinions could encourage mutual learning as well as exchange of ideas, resulting in the development of novel solutions that defy conventional wisdom and accepted practices in a given situation (Bommert, 2010). In addition to helping to tackle wicked problems, collaborative governance may also improve coordination, strengthen democracy, and mobilize social resources for a public sector, severely constrained by resources (Fung and Wright, 2003). Interrogating it from a standpoint of capacity to fill a lacuna, Batory and Svensso (2019) and Papadopoulos (2013) infer that collaborative governance could be adopted as a reaction to the increasing gap in communication between the government and the people, together with the constructive criticism against the public institutions, policymaking and bureaucratic process (Batory and Svensson 2019; Papadopoulos 2013).

The drawbacks of collaborative governance arenas include the potential for selective participation bias, challenges in ensuring that consensus solutions are implemented, and difficulties in holding players accountable for governance errors (Sørensen and Torfing 2021); because the implementation of collaborative governance involves complex engagement between several allied actors. Meanwhile, this interaction requires diverse forms of management strategies and network structures so as to succeed to a certain extent (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000). A rigorous and well thought out collaborative program could still perform abysmally mostly as a result of diverse stakeholder interests and absence of appropriate models to assist leadership so as to improve strategic learning process among relevant stakeholders, resolve conflict, foster trust, seek common perspective, and identify and assess results (Klijn, 2008). Agreement between actors stands as one of the critical preliminary ways of approaching any problem-oriented collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012). Typically, there is a foundational structure of interests which establishes the framework that enables collaboration address a particular challenge. This framework could comprise of protruding values, objectives and dedications, but with certain incomparable ones (Provan and Kenis, 2008). Notwithstanding, collaboration is compatible with conflict (Crosby, 'tHart and Torfing 2017). Therefore, the main problem is changing hostile disagreement into positive conflict which widens actors' goals and enhances solutions (Waardenburg, Groenleer, de Jong & Keijser, 2020).

This paper is therefore led to understand that collaborative governance is an effective governance approach that could be adopted to solve societal issues including those complex and confusing challenges (wicked problems) that have defied measures by political actors. The active participation of different actors (government officials, community members, private sector and professional associations etc) in governance process which is the driving force of collaborative governance illuminates a robust brainstorming and synergy among stakeholders whose outcomes may sustainably stand strongly against any societal problem. The mobilization of resources suggests the level of impact the implementation of collaborative governance could have on the society. While these submissions appear cogent, it suffices to acknowledge the interrogations around the challenges associated with the idea as it not faultless. For instance, the argument about diverse actors' interest remains very valid as a critical factor that could undermine any model of collaborative governance.

## **3.2 Sustainable Urban Development**

Over the years, strategies regarding sustainable cities have evolved from delaying urbanization to acknowledging the critical role cities could play in the advancement of socio-economic development. This resulted in the paradigm shift which considers cities as a challenge to the one that views them as a critical aspect of the solution, explaining the first and counter submissions of Habitat Conference 1 and 11 respectively that urbanization process is a challenge which may be addressed by enhancing living standard in rural areas to prevent migration to cities; and that urbanization process is sacrosanct and an irreversible trend which one of its objectives is the creation sustainable urban settlement in an urban world. To buttress this, Sustainable Development Goals approved in 2015 is by its cardinal objectives committed to cities together with human settlements so as to improve their level of inclusivity, safety and sustainability (Gonzalez, 2022). The above stresses the place of

sustainable urban development which is typically considered as a crucial political ideological change in policy and planning of cities, understanding it as a way to go in this modern era.

However, some scholars contend that policies lack precise and strong contents, resources and results; and that the rhetorical change to sustainable is not linked to action. Rather, the justifications for policy decisions are predicated on the idea of perpetual economic expansion which detrimentally impacts the environment and social justices (Hilding-Rydevik et al., 2011; Beal, 2012; and Raco, 2014). This contradiction and the increasing recognition of fuzzy "sustainability" as a wider met-ideology in cities politics has led to a discourse on the actually meaning of the concept, what it could and has to be (Mebratu, 1988; Wheeler and Beatley, 2014; Wilson, 2015). Therefore, sustainability is seen as an unquestionable normative goal and a concrete requirement that can manage the ecological problem and uneven growth. If the right combination of technological advancement, political mobilization, and utopian thought is done (Kemp et al., 2005; Jordan, 2008; Griggs et al., 2013; Lundstrom et al. 2013; Metzger and Olsson, 2013). Meanwhile, studies on urban sustainability policies demonstrate deep findings on what constitutes sustainability and what does not, grouped as "weak" or "strong" (Gibbs, 1998; Neumayer, 2013) different from green or other pattern of typologies (McManus, 1996), typically concentrating beyond the interaction between the economy and environment to include social justice (Holden, 2012). Nonetheless, there is a great deal of analytical and normative dissemination resulting from disagreements regarding the "true" meaning of "a sustainable city" (Campbell, 1996; Engelman, 2013; Shaw, 2013). Therefore, addressing scholarly chaos is arguably sacrosanct (Huge et al. 2013).

In the face of the above mixed reactions, this paper views sustainable urban development as a process of striking a balance between the development of urban areas and environmental preservation while ensuring that every resident has equal access to job opportunities and infrastructural facilities such as housing and transportation (Bera, 2020).

#### **4. Collaborative governance and sustainable urban development: The discourse**

Collaborative governance has become more popular recently than traditional downstream policy planning and execution due to its ability to bring together the resources, knowledge, and efforts of various stakeholders to handle complicated social issues (Doberstein, 2016; Scott and Thomas, 2017; Coleman et al., 2023). Fundamentally, collaborative governance means bringing communities, businesses, and governmental institutions together to address complex issues such as solid waste crisis (Guo and Li, 2022; Coleman et al., 2023), because the framework is made up of diverse stakeholders influenced by the system, shaping the degree of their contributions (Scott and Thomas, 2017; Ahn and Baldwin, 2022). These dynamics influence how each actor performs and behaves (Guo and Li, 2022). Leveraging the dynamics of collaborative governance such as leadership, responsive organizational structures, knowledge, trust, resource availability and understanding could lead to strengthening the effectiveness of stakeholders (Guo and Li, 2022) as it creates avenue which enables stakeholders to have a shared understanding of cumbersome challenges, encouraging collaboration and agreement on solutions (Ansell et al., 2020). Furthermore, it promotes fairness in distribution of benefits accompanying solutions to common problems (Ahn and Baldwin, 2022). This measure is commonly adopted in healthcare and energy sectors, demonstrating its capacity to solve solid waste collection and disposal problems in third world nations where there are inadequate resources and infrastructure and poor technical capacity (Frankowski, 2019; Fasona et al., 2019; Madimutsa, 2020; Ahn & Baldwin, 2022; Esposito De Vita et al., 2023).

Therefore, it could be understood that employing collaborative governance towards solid waste infrastructure in urban areas could strengthen usage, maintenance and environmental sanitation; which is critical in promoting sustainable waste collection and disposal. This is more cogent and apt when juxtaposed with the need for effective solid waste system across the globe especially in developing nations. This could be further justified in the context of rapid increase rate of waste generation which would go higher in the coming decades (Mor and Ravindra, 2023). For instance, world waste generation is estimated to reach 3.40 million tonnes by 2050, with developing nations having a significant percentage (Hoornweg and Bhada-Tata, 2012). As waste generation increases, collection and disposal continue to pose a challenge, making urban governance in developing nations more challenging (Kushwaha et al., 2023). This is amidst the escalating world urban population which has made urban areas in Africa and Asia hubs of massive waste generation (UN-Habitat,

2020). The foregoing explains the place of collaborative governance particularly public-private partnerships deployed in certain countries such Ghana, Nigeria and Palestine; community participation initiatives adopted in South Africa and Indonesia; and community involvement in Zambia (Dhokhikah et al., 2015; Yeboah-Assiamah et al., 2017; Saadeh et al., 2019; Daka and Madi mutsa, 2020; Serge, 2021). Strengthening this argument, Abdulai, Fuseini & File (2024: 11) demonstrate that “Collaborative governance is potent for tackling intricate environmental challenges by fostering joint decision-making and actions, resulting in contextually relevant and inclusive solutions. In our study, collaborative governance of solid waste infrastructure exhibited three pivotal elements: principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action. The principled engagement was evident through local representatives engaging and rallying community support for participation in collaborative governance initiatives this involved community involvement in clean-up activities and adherence to the pay-as-you-dump arrangement. Shared motivation materialized as a consensus among communities, the Municipal Assembly, and Zoomlion Ghana Limited regarding the importance of regular waste collection and transportation to maintain cleanliness and prevent disease outbreaks. Despite their varying capacities and roles, all stakeholders aligned towards this shared goal, pooling efforts to clear waste accumulation and ensure infrastructure sustainability”.

Moreover, collaborative governance is becoming more recognized as a proactive policy tool and most likely a superior approach to urban development, as horizontal coordination, public involvement, and discussion are essential components of successful urban regeneration (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Van Bortel and Mullins, 2009; Wang and Ran, 2021). In recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on the need to balance the interests and desires of all parties involved in urban regeneration and to advocate for the inclusion of local residents' voices (Sagan and Grabkowska, 2012) because the approach when appropriately adopted does not only represent inclusivity in governance but also justice. Impliedly, implementing collaborative governance for urban regeneration to achieve inclusivity and justice in urban governance has far reaching impact on cities especially as regards to peaceful atmosphere because some urban security challenges are driven by exclusivity, frustrations and deprivations.

It is believed that collaborative governance is capable of enhancing the potential participation of various stakeholders in raising the quality of public service delivery (Roberts et al, 2016) supported by the public as it is a reflection of interests and inputs of broad range of players. Enhancing the quality of public service delivery could start with collaborative governance, emanating from federal government down to the urban area. It impacts more positively on a city propelled by digitalization as its implementation would result in faster decision making, preventing repetition of work and ensuring that activities of public servants are more focused on the citizens than internal crisis (Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015; Bohling, 2019; Mosley, Jennifer and Wong, 2021). The success of inclusive approach in shaping digitalization of public service quality through collaborative governance aligns with the public service concept, which holds that the government, as a community service provider, should be in charge of providing services in the form of public administration and public services. Digitalization of public service quality is a community-based government service that uses information technology. Expectedly, digitization should streamline the service process by eliminating the current bureaucratic routes. The inclusive elements of collaborative governance aims to address public grievances, improve public access to government-owned information sources, and provide the community with equal access to public services provided by local governments. It is envisioned that a standardization of service quality that the urban community can enjoy will result from the digitization of public service quality. The success recorded by inclusive approach of collaborative governance in impacting digitalization of quality public service agrees with the idea of public service tenets such as fairness and non-discrimination. Inclusive approach is a representation of public services driven by sense of humanity, caring about the needs, physical conditions and different people in the cities to access digital based public services (Aidi et al, 2024). Getting people involved through collaborative governance could result in effective public service, strengthening the synergy between parties in achieving integrated public services (Abinda et al, 2022 in Aidi et al, 2024).

Voorberg, Bekkers, & Tummers (2015) and Daugberg & Fawcett (2017) contend that it has been demonstrated thus far that public involvement in collaborative governance may contribute to increased levels of legitimacy for the practice as long as the scope of participation is not overly restricted. “The main rationale shared by most research ‘implicitly hold[s] onto the democratic norm that legitimacy can be strengthened when citizens and other relevant stakeholders have the opportunity to have their views heard and taken into account, when they receive sound and trustworthy accounts of the governance process, and when governance outputs address their interests and needs” (Sorensen et al. 2020, 3–4 and Warren, 2009). This further suggests its promotion of democratic ideals since it opens up the floor of communication among relevant city stakeholders including the

citizens whose voice could not be loud under a dictatorial or any other form of government. However, it may be imperative to stress that opening up a conversation space for all relevant urban players in a system could be challenging and complex probably due to different perceptions or interests that could arise. This is just as Peters (2015) argues that while a democratic and inclusive viewpoint is commendable, it may be difficult to attain transparency, consensus, decision-making, and coordination in a collaborative paradigm. While this challenge is acknowledged to be cogent, it does not outweigh the benefits accruing from it, specifically from the inclusivity which helps in identifying the diverse needs and opinions of urban people, guaranteeing more fair and workable solutions to issues.

## **5. Divergent interests and objectives as a major obstacle to collaborative governance in achieving sustainable urban development**

Finding a common understanding of objectives and strategy is a crucial first step in every problem-oriented collaborative governance project (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012) as actors could have diverse goals and needs, which significantly undermines the capacity to establish a consensus (Harrison et al., 2021). There is an underlying structure of interests that usually establishes the framework for cooperation in order to address a certain issue. While there could be certain values, objectives, and commitments that overlap in this setting, there may also be some that are very different. Usually, it is more challenging to find a common ground where they are more partners (Provan and Kenis 2008).

The above background sets the tone for discussion of differences in opinions, values, goals and interests of stakeholders (government, private sector, NGOs, and community members) driven by either genuine intentions or selfish motives. Whichever way it emanates, the point being made here is that divergences in interests and objectives of stakeholders in collaborative governance could pose a serious challenge to achieving sustainable urban development as collaboration which is the cornerstone of the approach is greatly undermined and consensus becomes very difficult to achieve. It must be stressed that the situation is more complex to manage when the divergent interests are propelled by selfish motives. Supporting this submission, Hsi-Hsien, Muqing, Miroslaw, & Vahid (2016) infer that crisis is unavoidable in major transportation urban projects because various actors express diverse, mostly contradictory concerns and demands, and these could result in project failures if not properly handled or managed.

However, it is necessary to note that incompatibility does not exist between collaboration and conflict (Crosby, 't Hart, and Torfing 2017). "Thus, the main challenge lies in turning antagonistic conflict into constructive conflict that broadens participants' objectives and improves solutions" (Waardenburg et al, 2020: 389).

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper is a concerted effort made to unpack the role of collaborative governance in promoting sustainable urban development. In the course of the study, collaborative governance and sustainable urban development were extensively conceptualized, making it glaring to understand the correlation between the two variables. While there are strong arguments revealing the efficacy of collaborative governance in advancing sustainable urban development particularly in the areas of solid waste collection and disposal; urban regeneration; legitimacy and public service delivery; the imperfection of the approach (collaborative governance) was also demonstrated precisely as it concerns divergent interests of collaborative governance actors. Therefore, the paper submits that collaborative governance has a significant role in improving sustainable urban development but there is need for it to be strengthened especially to address its inherent challenges such as divergent interests. Consequently, the study recommends as follows:

1. Relevant government agencies as the leading actors should put in place a mechanism that ensures stakeholder mapping and inclusion as well as clarification of their roles and expectations and clear establishment of objectives.
2. There should be trust building through transparent process and effective communication.

3. There must be clear procedures established for resolving crisis or disagreement.
4. There is need for flexibility especially in planning to enable adjustment(s) when the need arises.
5. There should be continuous assessment of collaboration or partnership progress.

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