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URBAN MOBILITY GOVERNANCE FAILURE AND INCLUSIVE TRANSPORT OUTCOMES: EVIDENCE FROM NIGERIA'S KEKE TRICYCLE SCHEME

Ikechukwu Ogeze Ukeje, Ph.D
Department of Public Administration, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria
Email: ikechukwu.ukeje@funai.edu.ng

Chijioke .I. Ojiako, Ph.D
Department of Public Administration, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria
Email: ci.ojiako@unizik.edu.ng

Ogbulu Udu
Department of Political Science, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria
Email: udokaogbulu3@gmail.com

Hope Chinenyenwa Nwaigwe, Ph.D
Department of Political Science, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria
Email: nwaigwe.chinenyenwa@funai.edu.ng

Collins Moses Igwe, Ph.D
Department of Public Administration, Federal University, Oye, Nigeria
Email: collins.igwe@fuoye.edu.ng

Abstract

Urban transport interventions in many cities of the Global South increasingly aim to address unemployment, mobility gaps, and social inclusion. However, the effectiveness of such initiatives often depends more on governance quality than on policy design. This study examines Nigeria's Keke

Tricycle Empowerment Scheme (KTES) as a case of urban mobility governance failure, assessing how institutional and political dynamics shaped its implementation and outcomes. Drawing on Social Capital Theory and a multi-stakeholder urban mobility governance framework, the study investigates the roles of political patronage, institutional capacity, transparency, accountability mechanisms, and stakeholder participation in program delivery. Using qualitative field evidence and policy analysis, the findings reveal that although the scheme was designed to enhance income generation, promote gender inclusion, and improve urban mobility, weak institutional oversight and politicized beneficiary selection distorted implementation processes. These governance failures resulted in elite capture, loan repayment challenges, socio-economic precarity, and the exclusion of vulnerable groups. The study demonstrates that transport-based livelihood schemes do not automatically produce inclusive or sustainable mobility outcomes. Instead, their effectiveness depends on governance integrity, institutional coordination, and participatory implementation structures. By linking urban mobility interventions to governance performance, the paper contributes to urban transport planning scholarship and offers policy recommendations for strengthening accountability and inclusive planning in informal transport systems across developing urban contexts.

Keywords: **Urban Mobility Governance; Transport Policy; Governance Failure; Informal Transport; Inclusive Development**

Introduction

Urban mobility systems in the Global South are increasingly recognized as pivotal arenas for advancing inclusive development and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In Nigeria, the introduction and rapid expansion of the Keke tricycle scheme—commonly known as Keke-NAPEP—reflects broader efforts to address poverty, unemployment, and urban transport challenges through informal sector interventions (Enganya et al., 2025; Eyo, 2023; Okodudu, 2024). These schemes have generated significant socio-economic benefits, including employment creation, income generation, and enhanced mobility for urban residents, particularly in cities where formal transport infrastructure is inadequate or inaccessible (Enganya et al., 2025; Eyo, 2023). However, the implementation of such policies often reveals persistent structural barriers, including weak regulatory oversight, exploitative financing arrangements, and entrenched gender-based exclusions, which can undermine their transformative potential (Mirzoev et al., 2021; Mensah, 2025; Mensah et al., 2023).

Transportation plays a vital role in urban development across Africa, particularly in Nigeria, as it enhances economic activities and fosters social interactions (Lenshie et al., 2022; Faiyetole & Adewumi, 2023). It influences urban expansion, population dynamics, and economic growth, while also presenting challenges that necessitate strategic and sustainable urban planning practices and management (Bayode & Siegmund, 2024). Historically, the commercial road transportation sector in Nigeria has been dominated by informal

private operators due to low public investment and weak public sector performance (Kumar, 2011), and in urban areas, this inadequacy of conventional public transport modes has led to the introduction of paratransit modes like motorcycle and tricycle taxis as a means of intra-city transit in several Nigerian cities (Agheyisi, 2021; Abdulai et al., 2024). Urban transportation in Nigeria faces significant challenges, including inadequate infrastructure and complex operational issues. These challenges are exacerbated by rapid urbanization and uncontrolled city expansion, leading to chaotic transportation systems (Olayiwola 2014; Salisu et al., 2023), poverty, unemployment, crimes and insecurity (Ukeje et al., 2020) highlighting the need for integrated urban planning to address challenges relating to urban development and transportation systems (Booth & Richardson, 2001). In Lagos, Nigeria, informal transport systems, such as minibuses and motorcycles, play a vital role in providing accessible and affordable transportation options. These systems contribute to economic development and social cohesion, despite facing regulatory and safety challenges (Oluwakoya, 2024).

Despite their promise, urban transport interventions in Nigeria frequently reproduce existing social hierarchies and exclusions. For example, while tricycle operations have provided new livelihood opportunities, they remain male-dominated, with women facing significant barriers to entry and advancement due to cultural norms and workplace discrimination (Mensah, 2025; Mensah et al., 2023). Moreover, the informal nature of the sector exposes operators to precarious working conditions, harassment, and limited social protections, raising concerns about the sustainability and inclusivity of these empowerment initiatives (Popoola et al., 2024; Otu & Agugua, 2020). The disconnect between policy rhetoric and lived realities is further exacerbated by governance challenges, such as inadequate accountability mechanisms and the politicization of transport unions, which can entrench inequality and limit the effectiveness of poverty alleviation efforts (Olajide et al., 2018; Bamidele, 2016).

Recent scholarship calls for a paradigm shift in urban mobility policy, advocating for participatory governance models that center local agency, context-specific realities, and decolonial approaches to development (Mirzoev et al., 2021; Olajide et al., 2018; Dovey & Recio, 2024). By foregrounding the experiences of marginalized groups and prioritizing social inclusion, such frameworks aim to reframe urban mobility

not merely as a technical solution to poverty, but as a transformative instrument for justice, equity, and sustainable urban futures (Mirzoev et al., 2021; Dovey & Recio, 2024; Oluwakoya, 2024). Recent research highlights that urban transport systems in Sub-Saharan Africa are deeply intertwined with issues of poverty, informality, and spatial inequality. Accessibility is shaped by urban form, income, and the availability of transport options, with marginalized groups—such as women, the urban poor, and residents of peripheral settlements—bearing the brunt of inadequate planning and investment (Oviedo et al., 2024; Sietchiping et al., 2012). Qualitative and participatory studies reveal that everyday mobility practices are influenced by perceived accessibility, which in turn affects social inclusion and the ability to access jobs, education, and healthcare (Oviedo et al., 2024; Oviedo & Guzman, 2020). Informal transport modes, such as motorcycle taxis and minibuses, are vital for mobility but are often marginalized in policy and planning, despite their centrality to urban livelihoods (Evans et al., 2018; Kerzhner, 2024).

Urban transport challenges in many cities of the Global South are increasingly linked to governance failures rather than infrastructure deficits alone. Weak institutional capacity, political interference, and limited accountability often undermine the effectiveness of mobility interventions, resulting in inequitable access and unsustainable outcomes. This study conceptualizes the Keke Tricycle Empowerment Scheme as a case of urban mobility governance failure, examining how institutional and political dynamics shaped its implementation and socio-economic impacts.

Conceptual and Analytical Framework

Policy and Institutional Context of the Keke Tricycle Empowerment Scheme: Linking Federal–State–Local Governance and National Policy Alignment

Nigeria's governance is highly decentralized, with federal, state, and local governments sharing responsibilities for development interventions. National programs such as NAPEP (National Poverty Eradication Programme) and NEEDS (National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy) set broad poverty reduction goals, which states like Ebonyi adapt through schemes like KTES. However, the effectiveness of these schemes depends on the capacity and coordination of subnational governments, as well as their ability to tailor interventions to local realities (Yu et al., 2024). Participatory and context-sensitive

approaches, as seen in successful rural development and empowerment projects, are essential for sustainability and local buy-in (Yu et al., 2024). Local governments and political actors are pivotal in implementing and managing empowerment interventions. Their involvement shapes resource allocation, stakeholder engagement, and the degree of community participation. Evidence from African transport reforms shows that the success of such schemes hinges on the willingness and capacity of local authorities to adapt governance structures, devolve responsibilities, and foster cross-sectoral collaboration (Poku-Boansi & Marsden, 2018). Without robust local governance and institutional reform, interventions risk being undermined by informality, elite capture, or lack of accountability (Poku-Boansi & Marsden, 2018; Yu et al., 2024).

Transport systems are central—not peripheral—to urbanisation, spatial equity, and social inclusion. Poku & Andrews (2023) argue that integrated transport and land-use planning is vital for pro-poor urban development, especially in rapidly urbanising African cities (Cervero, 2013; Cervero, 2023). Mobility infrastructures like KTES represent both economic opportunity and governance challenges: they can enhance access to jobs and services, but also expose gaps in planning, regulation, and social protection (Cervero, 2013; Poku-Boansi & Marsden, 2018). Effective urban governance must therefore prioritize transport as a lever for sustainable, inclusive urban growth.

Sustainable transportation is essential for achieving development goals. In African cities, high-density and mixed-use areas promote non-motorized and public transport, which are crucial for lower-income groups. However, challenges such as overcrowding and inadequate infrastructure persist, necessitating tailored urban planning strategies (Nuuyandja et al., 2024; Agyei et al., 2024). Transportation systems not only improve accessibility and mobility but also stimulate economic activities, such as tourism and business growth, by enhancing connectivity and infrastructure (Nyong et al., 2024; Poku-Boansi et al., 2024). According to Ogbulu et al., (2024), Nigeria governance and policy approach over the years has consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to social empowerment programs, yet the outcomes have been mixed. The country continues to grapple with significant income inequality, ranking alarmingly high on the global poverty index. Despite numerous initiatives aimed at poverty reduction and social intervention, many have failed to produce sustainable

results (Chukwuemeka et al., 2020; Nnaji et al., 2022). Historically, Nigeria has a lengthy track record of experimenting with economic empowerment and poverty alleviation programs, particularly throughout the 20th and 21st centuries (Ukeje et al., 2022; Ogbulu et al., 2024; Akonye et al., 2026; Obi et al., 2026). Idike et al. (2020) traced the evolution of these initiatives, starting with the 1976 Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) under military leader Olusegun Obasanjo, up to the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). Their analysis revealed that these programs often lacked lasting impact and ultimately did not adequately address the social challenges they were designed to solve.

Governance plays a pivotal role in ensuring the effectiveness of policy interventions. Keivani (2010) establishes a direct link between governance quality and sustainable urban development, arguing that transparency, inclusivity, and accountability are essential components of sound governance structures. In Ebonyi State, governance deficiencies manifest in weak institutional frameworks, inadequate stakeholder participation, and corruption, which collectively hamper sustainable development efforts. Despite urbanization's potential to drive economic development, rapid rural-to-urban migration strains available resources, contributing to infrastructure deficits, unemployment, and inadequate social services. The government's response has primarily been reactive, with short-term poverty alleviation schemes rather than structural economic transformations that promote sustainable growth.

Policy implementation in Ebonyi State faces numerous challenges, including poor stakeholder coordination, inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and the politicization of development programs. Manzi et al. (2018) argue that urban sustainability is contingent on strong implementation frameworks that prioritize efficiency and inclusivity. However, in Ebonyi, the lack of reliable data and technical expertise hampers effective planning and execution, leading to the persistence of urban poverty and underdevelopment (Ukeje et al., 2020). Another major challenge is the inadequate funding and resource misallocation in urban development projects. Studies indicate that corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and elite capture of development resources undermine equitable policy implementation (Idike et al., 2020). The result is a cycle of failed interventions that do not address the root causes of urban distress, such as

inadequate economic opportunities and poor infrastructure.

The Keke Tricycle Empowerment Scheme (KTES) initiative was introduced by the Nigerian government as a component of its broader national poverty eradication programme (NAPEP) (Kanayo, 2014). Targeting unemployed youth through the distribution of tricycles (keke), the scheme aimed to provide alternative livelihoods, particularly in urban centres (Ukeje et al., 2020). Despite existing literature on social protection and microenterprise development in Nigeria (Onele et al., 2021; Nnaji et al., 2022), there is a notable scholarly gap in localized assessments of empowerment schemes within urban informal transport systems. Studies often emphasize national-level outcomes without critically examining the contextual challenges faced by target beneficiaries at the grassroots level (Idike et al., 2020; Ogbulu et al., 2024). Furthermore, limited attention has been given to the intersectionality of political exclusion, gender disparity, and informal sector regulation in the distribution and utilization of empowerment resources. This lack of focused inquiry undermines the capacity of scholars and policymakers to formulate data-driven, context-specific reforms.

Ebonyi State, characterized by high poverty rates (Nwobodo et al., 2015; Idike et al., 2020; Ogbulu et al., 2024) and rapid urban growth, has sought innovative solutions to address these pressing issues. One such initiative is the Tricycle Transportation Scheme, which aims to enhance mobility while providing economic opportunities for residents, particularly among the youth and marginalized groups. This scheme not only facilitates better access to essential services but also serves as a potential vehicle for urban poverty reduction. This study aims to assess the implementation of the Keke (Tricycle) Transportation Empowerment Scheme (KTES) in Ebonyi State, exploring its effectiveness in alleviating urban poverty and its alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set forth by the United Nations. Examining the operational framework, challenges, and outcomes of the scheme, this research highlights its implications for broader socio-economic development in Nigeria. Understanding the dynamics of this initiative will provide valuable insights into how targeted transportation policies can contribute to sustainable urban development and poverty alleviation, ultimately advancing Nigeria's commitment to the SDGs.

Urban transportation schemes in Nigeria are often introduced under broader poverty

alleviation and development rhetoric. However, their implementation frequently reflects local political realities more than global development ideals. The Keke Tricycle Empowerment Scheme (KTES), launched in Ebonyi State, was one such initiative positioned as a strategy for economic empowerment and sustainable mobility. Unlike previous schemes that merely projected alignment with SDG indicators, this study reveals how KTES—despite referencing goals such as SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities)—was characterized by politicized distribution, social exclusion, and exploitative repayment structures. These localised governance failures provide a more instructive analytical lens than general urbanization trends or cross-country SDG data tables. Hence, the focus of this paper shifts from broad global alignment to a critical evaluation of how KTES was actually experienced, interpreted, and governed on the ground in Abakaliki. It will address the following key questions: How effectively has the Tricycle Transportation Scheme been implemented in Ebonyi State? What are the implications of this scheme for urban poverty reduction? How does the scheme align with the broader goals of sustainable development, particularly the SDGs?

Urban Transport Policy, Inequality, and Development in Nigeria: Interdisciplinary and Empirical Perspectives

Empirical studies in Nigerian cities reveal that inadequate and poorly planned urban transport systems disproportionately burden low-income and marginalized communities. For example, in Lagos, residents of low-income neighborhoods face significantly longer travel times and higher opportunity costs—up to 27.4% of daily wages—due to poor public transport, directly translating into social exclusion and reduced access to essential services like education, healthcare, and employment (Castro et al., 2022). Gender disparities are also pronounced: women in Abuja rely more on public transport than men but face greater challenges related to safety, affordability, and service quality, highlighting the intersection of gender and mobility disadvantage (Abdullah et al., 2022). In peri-urban and peripheral areas, the lack of formal transit and poor road infrastructure further marginalizes residents, with informal and often unsafe transport modes filling the gap (Yakubu et al., 2023).

The transport-related social exclusion (TRSE) framework and transport well-being models provide analytical tools to understand how mobility disadvantage mediates access to opportunities and well-

being in the Global South (Castro et al., 2022; Oviedo & Sabogal, 2020). These frameworks emphasize that transport policy is not merely technical but deeply political, shaping and shaped by class, gender, and spatial inequalities (Xiao, 2021; Oviedo & Sabogal, 2020). Policy interventions must therefore be context-sensitive, equity-focused, and informed by disaggregated data to avoid reinforcing existing disparities (Benevenuto & Caulfield, 2019; Oviedo & Sabogal, 2020). Subnational governments, such as Ebonyi State, adapt these national frameworks to local contexts, implementing transport empowerment schemes (e.g., Keke tricycle programs) to address unemployment and mobility needs (Akor et al., 2024; Ac-Ogbonna, 2020). However, the effectiveness of these initiatives is often constrained by governance challenges, resource limitations, and political dynamics at the state and local levels (Akor et al., 2024; Ac-Ogbonna, 2020; Oketa, 2024).

Located in southeastern Nigeria, Ebonyi State is characterized by rapid population growth, significant rural-urban migration, and persistent poverty despite investments in road infrastructure (Obiahu et al., 2021; Ac-Ogbonna, 2020). Politically, the state has experienced challenges related to ethnic balancing and resource allocation, which influence the design and implementation of development programs (Oketa, 2024). Ebonyi's selection as a case study is justified by its representative mix of urban and rural dynamics, its active engagement with national poverty alleviation policies, and its ongoing efforts to address mobility and inclusion through targeted transport interventions (Obiahu et al., 2021; Ac-Ogbonna, 2020; Oketa, 2024).

Classic policy-implementation theories distinguish between top-down approaches, where central authorities dictate policy design and execution, and bottom-up approaches, which emphasize local actors, user needs, and adaptive implementation (Sharmeen et al., 2021). In the Global South, both approaches coexist, but top-down models often dominate, reflecting colonial and post-colonial legacies of centralized planning and elite-driven policy (Pojani & Stead, 2018; Craggs & Neate, 2017; Sharmeen et al., 2021). However, evidence from bikeshare and other mobility schemes in India and the Philippines shows that bottom-up, user-led initiatives can be more responsive to local needs and foster greater sustainability, especially when they harness community participation and local knowledge (Sharmeen et al., 2021). Governance and participation literature stresses the importance of collaborative, multi-stakeholder models for sustainable

urban mobility. In Nigeria, power dynamics—shaped by political, economic, and socio-cultural factors—often result in transport policies that favor car-owning elites and marginalize the urban poor, women, and informal sector workers (Oluwakoya, 2024; Hathaway, 1993). Participatory governance, which includes meaningful citizen engagement and stakeholder collaboration, is shown to enhance legitimacy, accountability, and policy effectiveness, but remains underdeveloped in many Nigerian cities (Gergis, 2024; Kramar & Sternad, 2025). The literature cautions that participatory processes must move beyond tokenism to genuinely empower marginalized groups and redistribute decision-making power (Gergis, 2024; Kramar & Sternad, 2025).

Urban mobility/inclusion theory highlights how transport systems are central to spatial equity and social justice. In Nigeria, colonial and post-colonial policy regimes have left a legacy of car-centric planning, infrastructural path dependency, and institutional inertia, which continue to shape urban mobility patterns and reinforce class and gender inequalities (Pojani & Stead, 2018; Craggs & Neate, 2017; Hathaway, 1993). Women, for example, face greater barriers to safe, affordable, and reliable transport, while the urban poor are often relegated to informal, unsafe, or low-status modes of travel (Abdullah et al., 2022; Hathaway, 1993). These outcomes reflect broader patterns of exclusion and the need for context-sensitive, equity-focused policy innovation. Policy innovation in the Global South requires moving beyond the uncritical transfer of "best practices" from the Global North. Instead, successful innovation is rooted in local context, participatory governance, and the co-production of solutions with affected communities (Pojani & Stead, 2018; Sharmeen et al., 2021). The literature warns that policy transfer is rarely straightforward due to cultural, institutional, and historical differences, and that some of the most effective mobility innovations have originated within the Global South itself (Pojani & Stead, 2018; Sharmeen et al., 2021). For example, Latin American cities have pioneered cost-effective public transport systems that are now models for others (Pojani & Stead, 2018).

The Nigerian case demonstrates that urban transport schemes often fail to represent true policy innovation when they remain top-down, elite-driven, and insufficiently participatory. Genuine innovation—and progress toward inclusion—requires addressing structural legacies, redistributing power, and embedding participatory governance at all levels (Pojani & Stead,

2018; Gergis, 2024; Oluwakoya, 2024; Sharmeen et al., 2021; Hathaway, 1993). This approach aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals and the growing consensus that urban mobility is not peripheral, but central, to equitable urbanization and development.

Governance, Regulation, and Empowerment: Addressing Urban Mobility and Poverty Challenges for Sustainability of Future Transport Initiatives

Transportation plays a critical role in urban development, acting as a facilitator of economic activities and social interactions (Olayiwola, 2014; Jedwab, & Storeygard, 2020). Thus, effective governance structures are essential for addressing urban mobility and poverty challenges, particularly in the context of developing regions like Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relies heavily on governance reforms that enhance transparency and accountability, bridging the gap between policy design and execution (Egba et al., 2025a; Obi et al., 2026; Ukeje et al., 2026). Key governance principles, including propriety, transparency, participation, effectiveness, accountability, and human rights, are vital for creating policies that not only address mobility needs but also empower marginalized communities (Addink, 2019, p. 19). Good governance is a fundamental right of citizens and is crucial for fostering inclusive transport initiatives (Addink, 2019, p. 4).

As highlighted by Farazmand, the predominance of models like New Public Management (NPM) often prioritizes market efficiency over public welfare, neglecting essential governance values such as equity and citizen participation. This oversight raises important questions about the motivations behind current governance frameworks and their implications for citizen engagement in transport planning and decision-making. In the context of sustainable urban transport, empowering citizens and addressing poverty through improved mobility are critical strategies. The high rates of rural poverty in Nigeria drive significant rural-to-urban migration as individuals seek better economic opportunities. However, rapid urbanization often leads to inadequate infrastructure, resulting in housing shortages and limited access to social services for migrants (Keivani, 2010; Zhang, 2016; Madeleine, 2016; Panwar & Thapliyal, 2017). These systemic barriers exacerbate urban poverty and social instability, underscoring the need for inclusive transport solutions that provide equitable access to essential services. See

table 1 below showing urban population share among Nigeria and other countries.

T**able** 1: showing the urban population share (2019–2023) for Nigeria and selected African countries:

Country	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Algeria	70.3	70.7	71.1	71.4	71.8
Angola	64.8	65.5	66.0	66.4	66.9
Benin	47.8	48.5	49.0	49.6	50.2
Botswana	66.4	67.0	67.4	67.9	68.3
Burkina Faso	32.4	33.1	33.8	34.6	35.3
Burundi	14.5	14.9	15.3	15.8	16.3
Cameroon	64.4	65.1	65.6	66.1	66.5
Central African Republic	44.4	45.0	45.5	46.1	46.6
Chad	33.2	33.9	34.5	35.1	35.7
Comoros	30.6	30.8	31.4	32.0	32.5
Nigeria	55.6	56.2	56.8	57.3	57.8

Source: "2023 Urban population share" — Our World in Data, based on data compiled from United Nations World Urbanization Prospects: https://ourworldindata.org/urbanization

Policy Implementation Gaps in Africa and Nigeria: Towards Mobility, Accessibility, and Social Exclusion

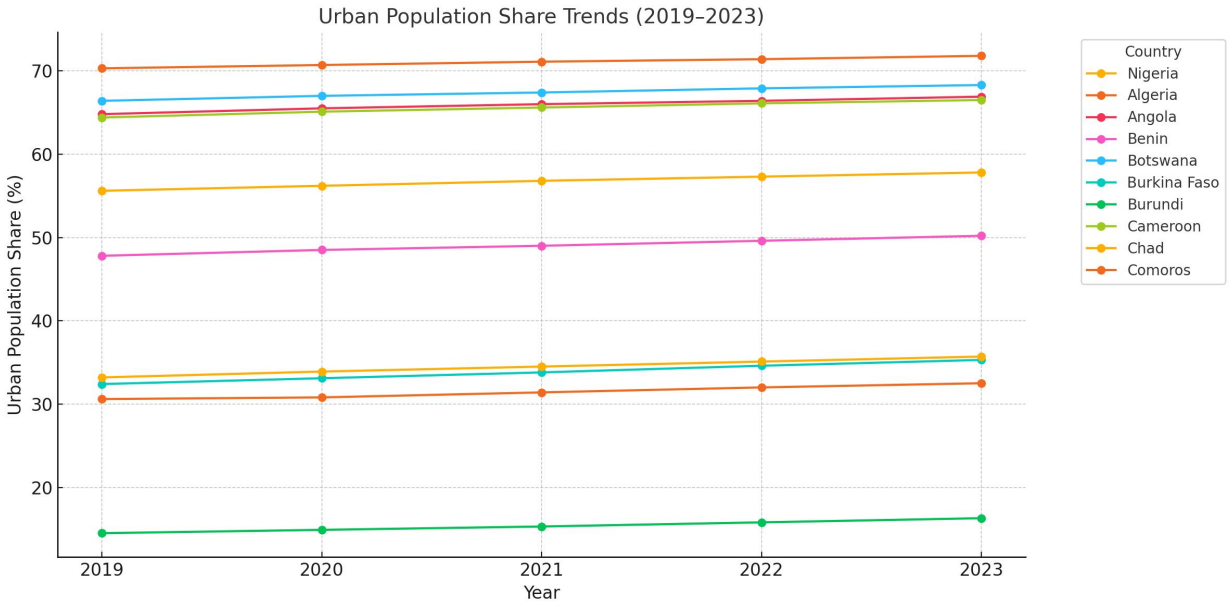
A recurring theme in the literature is the persistent gap between policy formulation and implementation. In Nigeria and across Africa, challenges include unrealistic goal setting, political patronage, neglect of target beneficiaries, corruption, and lack of continuity in governance (Idike et al., 2020; Olowu, 2025; Momoh et al., 2025). These structural issues undermine the effectiveness of public service and infrastructure interventions, including transport. Studies emphasize that policy success requires not only technical solutions but also strong state capacity, transparent governance, and mechanisms for accountability (Olowu, 2025; Momoh et al., 2025).

Transport-related social exclusion (TRSE) frameworks have been applied to African cities to quantify how poor transport systems translate into lost opportunities and social isolation for low-income communities (Castro et al., 2022; Luke, 2024). Empirical evidence from Lagos, Johannesburg, and Maputo demonstrates that high travel times, costs, and safety concerns

disproportionately affect the poor, women, and other marginalized groups, reinforcing cycles of poverty and exclusion (Castro et al., 2022; Luke, 2024). Accessibility deficits are linked to broader social inequalities, including class, race, and gender, and are exacerbated by the lack of formal, affordable, and safe transport options (Bittencourt et al., 2020; Bittencourt & Giannotti, 2021; Luke, 2024). There is increasing recognition of the need for participatory approaches in urban mobility planning. Integrating stakeholder engagement and participatory decision-making can enhance policy effectiveness, build public trust, and ensure that interventions address the needs of diverse user groups (Oviedo et al., 2024; Kramar & Sternad, 2025). However, challenges remain in moving beyond tokenistic participation to genuine power-sharing and co-production of solutions, especially in contexts with entrenched structural inequalities and limited state capacity (Kramar & Sternad, 2025).

Urban Population Share Trends in Nigeria and Selected African Countries (2019–2023)

The graph below shows the trend in urban population share for Nigeria and selected African countries based on data from Our World in Data.



The graph shows rising urbanization in Nigeria and selected African countries from 2019 to 2023. Nigeria's urban population increased steadily to 57.8%. Algeria and Botswana lead in urban share, while Burundi remains the least urbanized. All countries exhibit upward trends, reflecting

growing urban migration and development pressures across the continent

According to the Population Threshold for Urban Area Data (2018), The dataset indicates that Nigeria's urban area threshold is set at 20,000 inhabitants as of 2018. This relatively high threshold means that a settlement must have at least 20,000 residents to be classified as urban. In comparison, many other African countries have lower thresholds, such as Ghana (5,000) and Cameroon (5,000). This classification can significantly impact urban planning and resource allocation, potentially leading to fewer areas being recognized as urban. Consequently, smaller towns may struggle to receive adequate funding and support for infrastructure, housing, and essential services

Addressing Africa's urban mobility challenges requires targeted policy interventions that allocate resources effectively and tackle the root causes of urban distress. As noted by Keivani (2010), urbanization alone does not ensure sustainability; robust infrastructure and well-maintained social programs are necessary to support resilient communities (Madeleine, 2016). Future transport initiatives must prioritize sustainable practices that empower communities, ensuring that urban mobility serves as a catalyst for inclusive development rather than a contributor to socio-economic disparities.

To achieve effective governance and implement meaningful transport reforms, it is crucial to engage citizens actively in the planning and execution of initiatives aimed at improving urban mobility. By aligning governance practices with the principles of sound governance, Nigeria can develop transport systems that not only enhance mobility but also empower marginalized populations, ultimately contributing to poverty alleviation and sustainable urban development (Nwangbo et al., 2025).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1—“end poverty in all its forms everywhere”—and 11—“make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable”—have increasingly dominated academic and policy discussions globally. These goals are intrinsically linked, as addressing urban mobility directly impacts poverty alleviation and the overall sustainability of cities. Additionally, Goal 17—“strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development”—serves as a crucial mediating influence, emphasizing the need for collaborative

efforts across sectors and stakeholders. This highlights the need for clearer accountability mechanisms and robust governance structures to effectively manage public projects and target those in need (Sam & Scherer, 2019; Meessen & Criel, 2008). In the context of urban mobility, effective governance and inclusive regulatory frameworks are essential for translating these goals into actionable strategies. By examining the implications of policy indicators related to urban transport, we can better understand how to achieve desired social, economic, and environmental sustainability outcomes.

Linking Urban Mobility, Governance, and Sustainable Development in the Global South

Urban mobility systems in the Global South are increasingly framed not just as transport provision, but as instruments for social inclusion, economic opportunity, and environmental sustainability, requiring context-sensitive frameworks that address informality, rapid urbanization, institutional weaknesses, and resource constraints (Calderón-Ramírez et al., 2025; Grande-Ayala et al., 2024; Angarita-Lozano et al., 2025). Pojani & Stead (2015) argue that effective governance is a precondition for sustainable urban transport. They identify that weak or fragmented governance arrangements, often prevalent in the Global South, hinder the implementation of sustainable mobility policies. Their analysis calls for integrated policy instruments—regulatory, fiscal, informational, and infrastructural—that are adapted to local realities and capable of overcoming entrenched interests and institutional inertia. They also caution against uncritical policy transfer from the Global North, advocating instead for contextually grounded strategies (Pojani & Stead, 2018).

This perspective challenges the structural biases in global knowledge production and advocates for a paradigm shift toward justice, equity, and context-specific sustainability (Nagendra et al., 2018). Recent research further supports these arguments by demonstrating that sustainable urban mobility in the Global South requires integrated frameworks that combine governance, social inclusion, and environmental stewardship. Effective policy must be participatory, context-sensitive, and attentive to the everyday realities of urban residents, while also challenging colonial legacies and knowledge hierarchies (Angarita-Lozano et al., 2025; Pojani & Stead, 2018; Paller, 2020; Nagendra et al., 2018).

The analytical framework of the SDGs, as illustrated in Table 2 below, highlights the

significance of targeted interventions and collaborative governance in addressing the intertwined challenges of mobility and poverty in urban settings. By focusing on these interconnected goals, future transport initiatives can promote not only improved mobility but also foster inclusive growth and resilience in urban communities.

Table 2: KTES, SDGs, and Policy Implications

Implications of Keke KTES Scheme	Aligned SDGs	Policy Implications
Politicized distribution excluding vulnerable populations	SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities (Target 10.2: Promote social, economic, and political inclusion)	Ensure transparent and equitable beneficiary selection using socio-economic data, not political affiliation
High rate of hire-purchase exploitation and indebtedness	SDG 1 – No Poverty (Target 1.4: Equal rights to economic resources and financial services)	Regulate hire-purchase schemes and promote access to affordable credit for low-income operators
Exclusion of women and marginalized youth	SDG 5 – Gender Equality (Target 5.5: Ensure women's full participation in economic life)	Mainstream gender inclusion in all stages of the empowerment programme
Poor monitoring and evaluation of scheme outcomes	SDG 16 – Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions (Target 16.6: Develop effective, accountable institutions)	Develop robust M&E frameworks with stakeholder feedback mechanisms
Urban congestion and saturation of informal transport sector	SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities (Target 11.2: Provide access to safe, affordable, and sustainable transport systems)	Integrate empowerment schemes with urban transport planning and zoning policies
Decline in operator income due to over-competition and multiple levies	SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth (Target 8.3: Promote decent job creation, entrepreneurship, and formalization of informal economy)	Streamline taxation, reduce exploitative dues, and support formalization of keke operations
Disconnect between scheme objectives and actual urban mobility needs	SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals (Target 17.17: Encourage effective public-private-civil society partnerships)	Involve transport unions, civil society, and private actors in scheme design and delivery for improved accountability

Source: Authors compilation, 2025.

The table outlines the key implications of the Keke Empowerment Scheme, aligning each with relevant SDGs and their targets. It reveals systemic issues such as political bias in distribution, gender exclusion, exploitative hire-purchase practices, and weak monitoring systems. These challenges undermine poverty reduction and sustainable urban development. The aligned SDGs—including SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work), and SDG 11

(Sustainable Cities)—highlight the need for reforms. The table emphasizes policy recommendations such as transparent beneficiary selection, gender inclusion, regulation of informal financing, and stakeholder-driven monitoring to ensure more effective and equitable programme outcomes. Although the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) document's goals have been replicated in the Ebonyi State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (EB-SEEDS), socio-economic indices indicate persistent poverty phenomenon. Poverty rate higher than the national average in Nigeria is evident in illiteracy rate, unemployment and underemployment (Nwobodo et al., 2006). In cities like Abakaliki, where informal transport plays a critical role in urban mobility and employment, the scheme was expected to enhance income generation and reduce urban poverty.

Table 3: MDGs 1 indicators: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

MD Goal/ Indicator	Data source	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015 Target	Remark
Percentage of population living in relative poverty of less than one dollar ($1) per day	State OSSAP-MDG	80.7 61.2	72.0	65.0	64.1	53.4	21.4	Unlikely
Percentage of population living in extreme poverty (consuming 2,900 calories or lower daily)	State	95	90	90	85	27		Data trend not clear
Percentage/proportion of persons aged 15 years and above who are not working but are actively seeking for work/job/employment	State	50.0	60.2	71.1	79.1	12		Data trend not clear
Percentage of households who eat less than three full meals a day.	State	90.0	85.0	71.0	53.1	45.1		Data trend not clear

Source**:** Nwobodo et al., (2015, p. 44). Key: OSSAP means Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on MDGs.

Generally, Ebonyi state has done poorly in the attempt to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. All the indicators are seriously off track towards the MDG target. Going by OSSAP-MDG report, the state has already achieved the target, but this data is seriously conflicting with state data.

Table 4: MDGs 7- Ensure Environmental Sustainability Report in Ebonyi State

MD Goal/ Indicator	Data source	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015 Target	Remark
Proportion of population with sustainable access to an improved water source	State	20	20	40	40	85	77	On track
	OSSAP-MDG	55.1	Nat:58.5 SE:71.4	57.4				
Proportion of population with access to improved sanitation	State	30	35	35	40	60	70	Unlikely
	OSSAP-MDG		31	33.7				
Proportion of households living in urban slums	State					55		Lack of data

Source**:** Nwobodo et al., (2015, p. 50).

No doubt, the Ebonyi State government has invested in major infrastructure projects, including roads, bridges, and urban renewal programs, as part of its modernization agenda. The KTES sought to provide economic opportunities for low-income earners by distributing tricycles as a means of sustainable transportation and employment. However, the implementation of these policies reveals structural inefficiencies. The empowerment scheme, instead of directly benefiting the most vulnerable groups, was plagued by elite capture, misallocation, and commercialization. The Empowerment-Benefit Exchange (EBE) process, where tricycles intended for the poor were resold under exploitative conditions, undermined the intended poverty alleviation impact (Idike et al., 2020). The high financial burdens placed on recipients—through hire-purchase agreements and excessive remittance demands—further entrenched economic inequalities rather than bridging them. Pugalis et al., (2014) emphasize the importance of involving beneficiaries in programs to achieve sustainability in urban communities. However, this approach is insufficient without the ethical selection of citizens equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge. Misallocation of skills during the identification, design, implementation, and evaluation of projects poses a significant barrier to achieving global goals in Ebonyi State.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is grounded in Social Capital Theory, which examines the role of social networks, relationships, and community engagement in achieving positive socio-

economic outcomes (Bourdieu, 1986). This theory is particularly relevant to the context of urban transport, empowerment, and policy interventions aimed at promoting sustainable urban development. Social capital is a critical concept in the social sciences, encompassing various dimensions that influence community dynamics and empowerment. Scholars across disciplines, including economics, sociology, and political science, recognize its importance in shaping collective actions and resource allocation (Beugelsdijk & Smulders, 2003). In organizational studies, social capital refers to the networks that firms utilize, impacting their resources and opportunities (Burt, 1992; Coleman, 1988). Research indicates that strong social capital within communities significantly contributes to the success of collective initiatives (Bebbington et al., 2006; Pretty, 2003). Social Capital Theory posits that individuals and communities can leverage their social networks to access resources, information, and opportunities that can enhance their well-being. In urban contexts, social capital plays a crucial role in facilitating cooperation among community members, improving collective efficacy, and promoting participation in initiatives such as transportation schemes.

Understanding these frameworks is essential for analyzing urban transport initiatives, such as the Keke NAPEP scheme, and their impact on empowerment and sustainable urban development, particularly for marginalized communities.

Alignment with Urban Transport and Empowerment

1. Community Engagement: Effective urban transport policies, like the Keke NAPEP scheme, require active participation from the community. When individuals are involved in the planning and implementation processes, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and commitment to the project. This engagement can enhance the effectiveness of transport initiatives by ensuring they meet the actual needs of the users.
2. Access to Resources: Social capital can influence access to necessary resources, including financial support, information about available programs, and connections to policymakers. Those with strong social networks may find it easier to benefit from empowerment schemes, such as receiving government-supported keke, while marginalized

groups may be excluded due to weaker social ties.

3. Collective Action: The theory emphasizes the importance of collective action in addressing urban challenges. When communities unite to advocate for equitable transport policies, they can exert greater influence on decision-makers. This collective mobilization can lead to more inclusive and effective policy interventions that promote sustainable urban development.
4. Trust and Reciprocity: Social capital fosters trust and reciprocity within communities, essential for the successful implementation of transport initiatives. When beneficiaries trust that resources will be distributed fairly and that their needs will be considered, they are more likely to participate actively and support the initiative.

Understanding Social Capital Theory can help policymakers design interventions that enhance social networks within urban communities. Fostering collaboration, building trust, and ensuring inclusive participation, transport policies can be more effectively tailored to address urban poverty and promote sustainable development. Moreover, recognizing the barriers that marginalized groups face in accessing social capital can lead to targeted strategies that empower these communities, ultimately contributing to more equitable urban transport solutions. The theory provides a robust framework for analyzing the dynamics of urban transport, empowerment, and policy interventions, emphasizing the need for community involvement and strong social networks in achieving sustainable urban development.

Conceptual Model Development and Explications

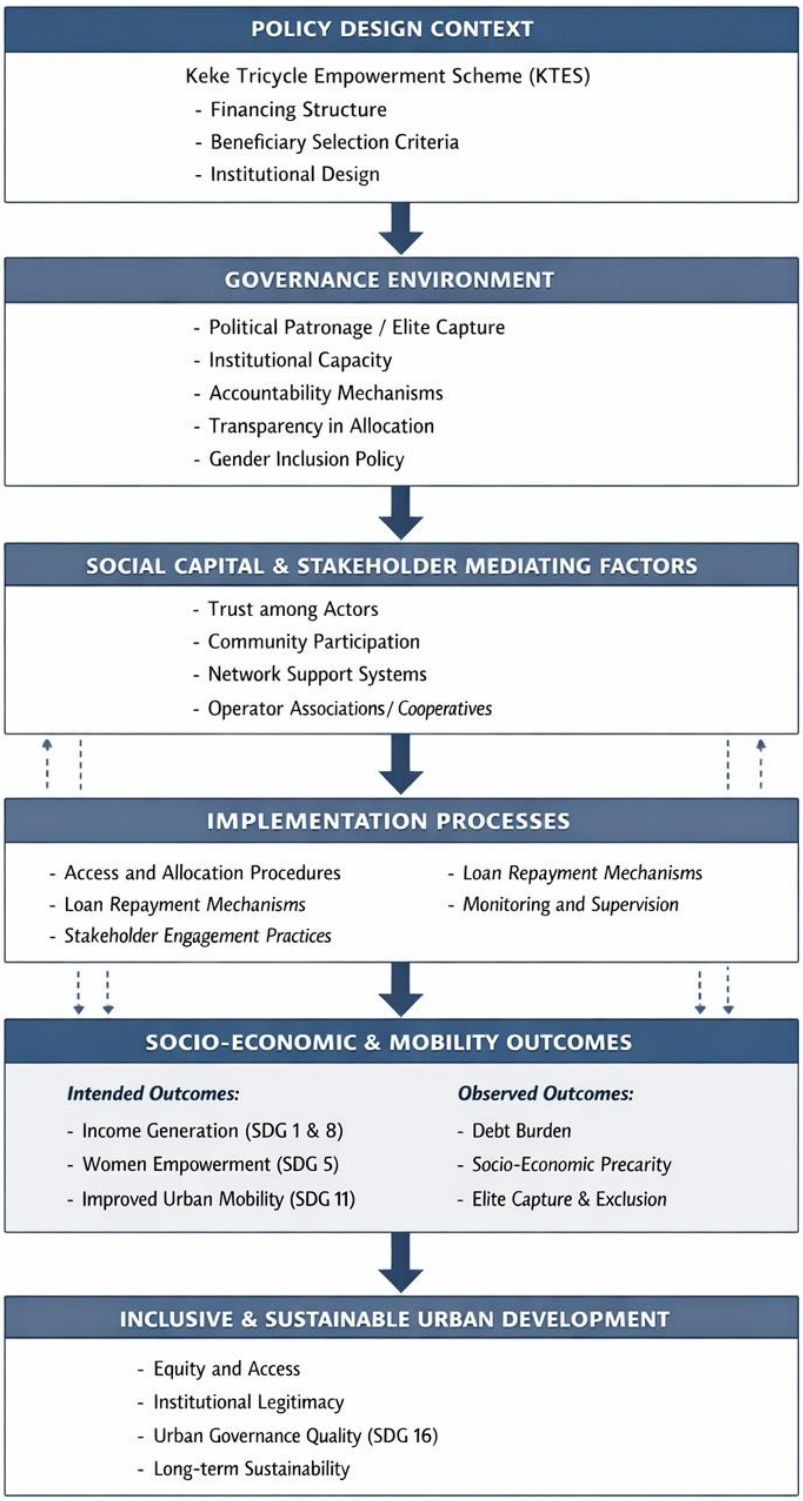
Drawing from the Multi-Stakeholder Urban-Transport Development and Sustainability framework (MS-UTDSFs) (see figure 1) developed in this paper, study argues that government policy failures in Nigeria's public sector stem from governance challenges, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and inadequate stakeholder engagement. MS-UTDSFs provides a participatory and innovative solution to these persistent policy failures by emphasizing sustainable and inclusive policymaking. By engaging local and informed stakeholders including the Keke transport union leaders and organizations in all stages of the policy process, MS-UTDSFs promotes sustainable practices and increases the likelihood of

successful policy implementation (Nwangbo et al., 2020).

The MS-UTDSFs provides an alternative model for addressing policy implementation gaps through participatory governance approach. MS-UTDSFs emphasizes the role of local stakeholder engagement in the transportation industry in co-designing policies to enhance sustainability and effectiveness. Applying MS-UTDSFs to Nigeria's governance challenges, particularly in poverty alleviation and human capital development, ensures that policies integrate certain selection criteria components alongside financial interventions. Inclusive and participatory governance model indicates that policies co-created with local communities yield better long-term outcomes (Onele et al., 2021; Nwangbo et al., 2023; Ukeje et al., 2026). Furthermore, MS-UTDSFs encourages adaptive governance, where policies are continuously reviewed and modified based on stakeholder feedback and periodic evaluations with community stakeholders, ensuring that various interventions/schemes allocated for economic empowerment translated into meaningful poverty reduction. This mechanism ensures that interventions remain relevant and effective, addressing the common issue of policy discontinuity in Nigeria.

Figure 1: The Multi-Stakeholder Urban Mobility Governance and Inclusion Framework (MS-UTDSF)

Figure 1. Multi-Stakeholder Urban Mobility Governance and Inclusion Framework (MS-UMGIF)



Source: Synthesis of the literature and conceptual proposition by the Authors

The Multi-Stakeholder Urban Mobility Governance and Inclusion Framework (MS-UMGIF), presented in Figure 1, explains how the design and governance of urban transport empowerment programs shape their sustainability and inclusion outcomes. The framework adopts a systems perspective, linking policy intentions to actual socio-economic and urban development results through institutional and relational mechanisms.

At the foundation of the model is the policy design context, represented by the Keke Tricycle Empowerment Scheme (KTES). This includes key structural elements such as financing arrangements, beneficiary selection criteria, and institutional design. While these components define the formal objectives of the program, the framework posits that policy design alone does not determine outcomes. The second layer highlights the governance environment, which serves as a critical structural determinant of implementation performance. Factors such as political patronage, elite capture, institutional capacity, accountability mechanisms, transparency in allocation, and gender inclusion policies shape the fairness, efficiency, and integrity of program delivery. Weak governance conditions increase the risk of exclusion, misallocation, and policy distortion.

The model further incorporates social capital and stakeholder mediating factors, including trust among actors, community participation, support networks, and the role of operator associations. Drawing on Social Capital Theory, this component emphasizes that strong relational ties and participatory engagement enhance compliance, collective responsibility, and program sustainability, while weak social capital undermines implementation effectiveness. These structural and relational conditions influence implementation processes, including access procedures, loan repayment systems, monitoring and supervision, and stakeholder engagement practices. The quality of these processes determines whether policy benefits reach intended beneficiaries and whether the scheme remains operationally viable.

The framework distinguishes between intended and observed outcomes. Intended outcomes include income generation, women's empowerment, and improved urban mobility, aligned with SDGs 1, 5, 8, and 11. However, governance failures and weak institutional support may produce unintended consequences such as debt

burdens, socio-economic precarity, and elite capture. Ultimately, these outcomes shape broader inclusive and sustainable urban development, reflected in equitable access, institutional legitimacy, improved urban governance (SDG 16), and long-term sustainability. The framework demonstrates that effective urban mobility programs depend not only on policy design but also on governance quality and stakeholder engagement.

Effective governance requires coordination across government sectors, institutional cooperation, and the willingness to engage with both public and private actors to achieve transport sustainability and social inclusion (Pojani & Stead, 2018; Angarita-Lozano et al., 2025). Encourage partnerships where stakeholders share resources, such as funding, expertise, and technology (Atukpa et al., 2025; Egba et al., 2025b), to enhance transport services. Participatory governance models, which involve citizens in decision-making and policy evaluation, are shown to produce more context-sensitive and sustainable outcomes, especially in resource-constrained environments (Angarita-Lozano et al., 2025; Duleba & Moslem, 2018). Social capital—comprising trust, social networks, and norms of reciprocity—plays a pivotal role in the success of empowerment programs. Studies demonstrate that trust and cooperation among community members enhance collective action, facilitate resource mobilization, and support the sustainability of empowerment initiatives (Chen et al., 2025; Dulkiah, 2022; Avazpour et al., 2024). Social capital fosters both bonding (within-group cohesion) and bridging (linkages to external resources), which together strengthen community resilience and the effectiveness of urban transport interventions (Chen et al., 2025; Fernández-Salido et al., 2025; Avazpour et al., 2024). Empowerment is further reinforced when communities are actively engaged in planning and implementation, leading to greater ownership and long-term impact (Avelino et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2025).

The MS-UTDSF's emphasis on multi-stakeholder engagement, governance, and social capital is validated by recent frameworks that integrate environmental, social, economic, and governance dimensions in urban mobility planning (Angarita-Lozano et al., 2025; Duleba & Moslem, 2018; Grande-Ayala et al., 2024). These models highlight the importance of aligning objective policy measures with subjective citizen perceptions, ensuring that transport interventions are both evidence-based and responsive to local needs (Angarita-Lozano et al., 2025; Duleba &

Moslem, 2018). The inclusion of governance and social capital dimensions enables the identification and resolution of conflicts among stakeholders, promotes trust-building, and enhances the legitimacy and sustainability of transport policies (Duleba & Moslem, 2018; Okraszewska et al., 2018). Empirical research shows that trust-building, social reciprocity, and collective agency are essential for successful community empowerment and urban mobility projects. Trust facilitates transparent interactions and shared decision-making, while reciprocity and collective agency enable communities to mobilize resources, negotiate power differentials, and sustain engagement over time (Chen et al., 2025; Fernández-Salido et al., 2025). These dynamics are critical for the co-production of transport solutions that are inclusive, equitable, and contextually appropriate (Angarita-Lozano et al., 2025; Duleba & Moslem, 2018).

Implementing the MS-UTDSF with active participation from all stakeholders, including Keke operators' unions, Nigeria can develop a more inclusive, efficient, and sustainable urban transport system that addresses the diverse needs of its local and urban populations.

To address these challenges, policy-makers must adopt integrated and participatory approaches that incorporate sustainability principles, strengthen governance frameworks, and prioritize long-term infrastructure investments. Policies should be designed to enhance social inclusion, economic opportunity, and environmental resilience, ensuring that urban development contributes to poverty reduction and improved quality of life (Olayiwola, 2014). Aligning governance reforms with sustainable urban policies, developing countries can create more inclusive and resilient urban environments capable of withstanding future socio-economic and environmental challenges. Sustainable urban development requires integrated and participatory policy approaches that address infrastructure deficits, economic inequalities, and environmental challenges (Njoku et al., 2025; Egba et al., 2026). Effective policy-making for sustainable urban development requires inclusive participation, transparency, and proper accountability mechanisms. The exclusion of core vulnerable groups from the Ebonyi State empowerment initiatives contradicts the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Additionally, the lack of training and awareness programs for beneficiaries of the keke scheme resulted in operational inefficiencies and heightened road safety

risks. The failure of the program to support urban-rural mobility resulted in temporary urban-rural migration as some tricycle operators sought relief from urban financial pressures. Instead of decongesting cities, the policy inadvertently exacerbated urban poverty and instability.

Table 5: Theme-to-Framework Mapping Table

Emerging Theme	Social Capital Theory Link	MS-UTDSF Component
Politicized Access and Exclusion	Weak bridging/linking capital; reliance on bonding ties within political networks	Stakeholder Identification and Engagement
Economic Precarity and Hire-Purchase Exploitation	Breakdown of trust and reciprocity; exclusion of informal operators from safety nets	Transparency and Accountability; Capacity Building
Gender Exclusion	Absence of bridging capital and institutional norms supporting gender inclusion	Inclusive Targeting and Stakeholder Engagement
Lack of Awareness and Participation	Low social integration; exclusion of non-networked groups from policy awareness	Collaborative Planning and Stakeholder Communication
Weak Monitoring and Evaluation	Lack of institutional trust; perceived government apathy	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Feedback Mechanisms
Declining Income and Urban Congestion	Limited collective agency; oversaturation undermines economic cooperation	Collaborative Planning and Resource Regulation
Unregulated Ticketing and Levies	Erosion of trust; informal rent-seeking undermines reciprocal norms	Transparency and Accountability
Rural Neglect and Infrastructure Gaps	Weak linking capital; rural communities disconnected from institutional frameworks	Integrated Urban-Rural Planning; Stakeholder Mapping

This table 5 links the key empirical themes that emerged from participant interviews with corresponding theoretical and conceptual dimensions. The Social Capital Theory column identifies how social relationships, trust, and network access influenced the observed outcomes, particularly in relation to exclusion, mistrust,

and inequity. The MS-UTDSF Component column aligns each theme with one or more pillars of the Multi-Stakeholder Urban Transport Development and Sustainability Framework (MS-UTDSF), demonstrating how governance structures, stakeholder engagement, and institutional design affected the implementation of the Keke Tricycle Empowerment Scheme (KTES). This thematic mapping reinforces the integrated application of theory and model to real-world urban policy outcomes in Nigeria.

Research Method

Utilizing a qualitative research design (Creswell, 2003), this study examines the intersection of the Keke empowerment scheme and its impact in Nigeria. Both Thematic and Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was applied to capture the subjective experiences of participants, facilitating an in-depth exploration of their perceptions regarding the Keke empowerment scheme. This method allows for a thorough examination of public perceptions, policy challenges, and structural barriers to accessing benefits. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 25 participants and focused group discussions (FGDs). Participants were selected via purposive and convenience sampling to ensure a diverse representation of perspectives (Barbour, 2008; Bryman, 2012). Physical interviews were conducted with scheme beneficiaries to ensure a comprehensive collection of perspectives, thereby strengthening the reliability of the data. Interviews lasted between 10 to 30 minutes, allowing for detailed responses while keeping participants actively engaged. Thematic analysis revealed several key themes regarding the Keke NAPEP scheme: Awareness and Participation, Eligibility Criteria and Accessibility, Monitoring and Evaluation, and Impact on the Rural Economy. A conceptual framework called the MS-UTDSFs (Figure 1) was developed to analyze the need for inclusive and accountable transport policy planning. This framework integrates tricycle operators' unions, local governance structures, and civil society actors, addressing SDG targets on participatory governance in achieving inclusive economic growth. It emphasizes a participatory empowerment approach to prevent future policy failures through sustainable and inclusive policymaking. By engaging local stakeholders, including Keke transport union leaders and organizations at all stages of the policy process, the MS-UTDSFs promotes sustainable practices and increases the likelihood of effective implementation.

Data Presentation/ Analysis

Thematic Analysis: Lived Realities of the Keke NAPEP Empowerment Scheme in Abakaliki

Theme 1: Governance, Political Patronage, and Clientelism

Across the parks studied, respondents consistently described the empowerment scheme as politically manipulated and institutionally compromised. Access to benefits was not determined by need, skill, or vulnerability but by party affiliation and personal connections to political officeholders. Several participants noted they were either excluded due to lack of alignment with the ruling party or required to feign support to be considered.

"Distribution of the keke was highly political. Beneficiaries were pre-selected; since I do not belong to the ruling party, there is no way I will be given one, though I pretended to support the party." — *Vanco Park, Day 1 (2018)*

The requirement to present "10 to 15 guarantors" or pay informal "expression of interest" fees created additional barriers that favored politically connected and economically privileged groups.

"You will have to pay N30,000 to a beneficiary who is already working to be considered qualified. My friend lost out because he could not raise the money." — *Mile 50 Park, Day 2 (2018)*

Such testimonies demonstrate how empowerment initiatives in postcolonial contexts often become extensions of patron-client networks, where resources are distributed for political loyalty rather than social equity. Respondents recognized this pattern as part of a wider culture of elite capture, leading one participant to observe that *"government is not sincere"* and that politicians "expect them to pay as much as N1 million gradually." The findings reveal weak institutional governance and a lack of transparency, reinforcing the perception that public welfare schemes function as vehicles of political legitimacy rather than as means of inclusive development. This aligns with the recurring critique of neopatrimonial governance in the Global South, where state-led "empowerment" perpetuates rather than dismantles hierarchical dependency.

Theme 2: Empowerment, Economic Precarity, and the Paradox of Inclusion

While the scheme's stated aim was to reduce urban poverty through asset distribution, participants' experiences reveal a contradiction between empowerment rhetoric and economic reality. Many described the scheme as exacerbating their

financial struggles, citing increased operational costs, debt burdens, and market saturation from an oversupply of tricycles.

"The income is too poor. Everywhere is keke. There are few passengers. At the end of the day, you manage to get your daily bread to survive."
— *Vanco Park, Day 1 (2018)*

"I now make less than N3,000 from the N7,000 I used to make each day. The daily ticket money we pay makes matters worse for us."
— *Waterworks Park, Day 2 (2018)*

Respondents detailed a proliferation of unregulated taxes, levies, and union dues that eroded already minimal profits. Operators spoke of paying *"for state emblems, local government emblems, and daily tickets,"* which, combined with rising unemployment, "made the crime rate increase." Participants also highlighted the emergence of exploitative hire-purchase systems, where politically connected individuals—often civil servants who received tricycles—leased them to poorer operators at inflated costs.

"The empowerment by the government is a good thing, but discrimination against many people is what I do not like... Some people are using it on hire purchase at N1.4 million."
— *Vanco Park, Day 1 (2018)*

This created a hierarchical economy within the informal sector (Akor et al., 2025), where indirect beneficiaries became indebted subordinates of direct beneficiaries. Thus, empowerment was effectively commodified, reproducing class and power inequalities within the same community it was meant to uplift. The findings demonstrate a structural paradox of empowerment: by relying on short-term distributional mechanisms without institutional reform or regulatory oversight, the scheme deepened economic fragility and entrenched precarity among urban poor populations.

Theme 3: Gender and Social Exclusion in Access to Empowerment

The data reveals that gender was a significant axis of exclusion. Despite the scheme's youth empowerment framing, respondents acknowledged that distribution was almost entirely male-dominated. Female participants and observers identified a lack of deliberate inclusion mechanisms, suggesting that empowerment was designed with patriarchal assumptions about economic productivity.

"It was male-focused empowerment... I think the people who received it were not the right ones the government was supposed to empower."
— *Church Focus Group, Day 2 (2018)*

The exclusion of women from access to tricycles not only perpetuated gender inequities but also narrowed the

transformative potential of the scheme. This aligns with intersectional analyses, which emphasize how empowerment efforts that ignore gendered social structures risk reproducing systemic inequalities. Moreover, gender exclusion intersected with political discrimination, further marginalizing women who lacked both party connections and financial capacity. The absence of women in the driver–operator space also reflected cultural barriers that policymakers failed to address, underscoring the tokenistic nature of empowerment discourses detached from local realities of gendered labor participation.

Theme 4: Accountability, Monitoring Failure, and Institutional Weakness

Respondents across all parks voiced frustration at the lack of accountability and monitoring mechanisms following distribution. Government agencies did not track utilization or outcomes, allowing beneficiaries to misuse or neglect the assets.

"If the programme were well-intentioned, the government would carry everyone along and develop measures to encourage the commitment of beneficiaries."
— *Waterworks Park, Day 1 (2018)*

"Once you receive yours, you no longer have business with the government. If you like, use it well; that's your own concern. Who cares?"
— *Meat Market Park, Day 2 (2018)*

This institutional vacuum led to what participants described as "a façade" — a superficial empowerment programme designed more for political optics than socio-economic transformation. Operators observed that *"one party member parked his for more than five months without operating it,"* yet there was no government follow-up.

The lack of oversight mechanisms undermined public trust and highlighted the performative nature of state-led empowerment, a phenomenon often referred to as "symbolic governance." In such systems, success is measured by visibility—through press releases and photo opportunities—rather than by long-term impacts on livelihoods. The data therefore reflects a systemic governance failure, where the lack of institutional capacity, bureaucratic integrity, and citizen accountability limits the sustainability of empowerment interventions.

Theme 5: Urban–Rural Divide, Infrastructure Deficit, and Structural Inequality

A recurring thread in the discussions is the spatial dimension of exclusion. Poor rural infrastructure, insecurity, and lack of maintenance services discouraged operators from extending services to rural areas. Many restricted their operations to Abakaliki city,

resulting in urban congestion, declining revenue, and rural marginalization.

"I decided to restrict operations to the city even when there is potential high revenue in the village because of bad roads, which can cause constant damage to the keke."
— Vanco Park, Day 1 (2018)

"I cannot go to my village because of bad roads and the fighting between my village people and Cross River people. There are no mechanics to help repair it if it breaks down."
— Meat Market Park, Day 1 (2018)

Respondents recognized that while rural operations might offer potential markets, structural constraints—bad roads, insecurity, lack of electricity—made it economically unviable. This dynamic highlights how infrastructural inequality reproduces spatial exclusion, limiting mobility and reinforcing urban-centric poverty traps.

Discussion

The findings reveal deep contradictions between the rhetoric of empowerment and the lived realities of Keke NAPEP operators in Abakaliki. While the scheme ostensibly aimed to reduce poverty and promote self-reliance, its implementation was shaped by clientelism, political favoritism, and weak institutional oversight, leading to the marginalization of genuine beneficiaries. Respondents' experiences expose the persistence of neopatrimonial governance, where access to state resources is mediated through political loyalty rather than transparent, equitable processes. Economic outcomes were similarly uneven: operators faced rising operational costs, exploitative hire-purchase arrangements, and unregulated levies that diminished their potential income. The programme's gender-blind design excluded women and reinforced patriarchal assumptions about economic productivity. Additionally, infrastructural decay and insecurity hampered rural service delivery, maintaining spatial inequalities between urban and rural livelihoods. Collectively, these findings underscore how empowerment initiatives in the Global South often reproduce the very inequalities they aim to alleviate. The discussion affirms that, without accountability, gender sensitivity, and participatory governance, state-led empowerment becomes performative—serving as a political instrument rather than a transformative developmental policy.

Applying Social Capital Theory and the Multi-Stakeholder Urban Transport Development and Sustainability Framework (MS-UTDSF), this discussion unpacks the social, economic, and institutional dynamics that shaped the scheme's trajectory and outcomes. At its core, Social Capital Theory

provides an interpretive lens for understanding the uneven distribution of empowerment benefits within the KTES. Beneficiary selection overwhelmingly favoured individuals with political affiliations, often excluding those without access to the ruling party or its networks. This pattern exemplifies the dominance of bonding capital—strong ties within homogenous political groups—but a glaring absence of bridging capital that could have extended benefits across social divides (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). The consistent exclusion of women, youth without political backing, and rural dwellers from the scheme illustrates the failure to foster horizontal and inclusive social linkages necessary for equitable development (Beugelsdijk & Smulders, 2003).

Moreover, the absence of linking capital—vertical connections between the citizens and government institutions—explains the widespread skepticism toward the scheme's credibility and intent. Focus group participants frequently expressed distrust in the government's empowerment programmes, describing them as politically manipulated and institutionally hollow. This breakdown in reciprocity and trust—a key dimension of social capital—further eroded community engagement and participation, limiting the capacity of KTES to function as a legitimate and transformative policy instrument (Pretty, 2003).

From an implementation perspective, the MS-UTDSF model exposes significant governance failures within the KTES. The scheme lacked essential features of participatory planning, multi-actor collaboration, and continuous feedback mechanisms. The most recurrent implementation weakness was stakeholder exclusion. The voices of tricycle operators, union leaders, civil society actors, and marginalized communities were absent from all stages of policy design and delivery. This stakeholder exclusion aligns with the MS-UTDSF's indicator of weak participatory governance (Nwangbo et al., 2025). Similarly, the exploitative hire-purchase arrangements reported by indirect beneficiaries highlight the absence of regulatory oversight—a critical component of the MS-UTDSF framework. Operators were burdened with repayments often double the market value of the tricycles, yet no financial safeguards, grievance channels, or support systems were available to mitigate this debt entrapment. The scheme's inability to prevent this economic vulnerability underscores its failure to integrate basic accountability systems and

transparent regulatory protocols (Onele et al., 2021; Ukeje et al., 2020).

Equally troubling was the absence of monitoring and evaluation (M&E). The MS-UTDSF emphasizes adaptive governance—an iterative process where programmes are assessed, corrected, and recalibrated based on stakeholder feedback. Yet, in Ebonyi State, once tricycles were distributed, there was no structured follow-up to determine if they were being used as intended or to assess the impact on beneficiaries' livelihoods. This absence of feedback loops weakened institutional responsiveness and led to resource wastage, as some recipients abandoned their vehicles or diverted them for profit (Egba et al., 2025a).

In terms of effectiveness, the implementation of the Tricycle Transportation Scheme in Ebonyi State can be characterised as limited, misaligned, and exclusionary. Though the scheme delivered physical assets (i.e., tricycles), it failed to deliver on its empowerment promise. The over-concentration of Keke operators in urban areas, lack of coordination with broader urban mobility planning, and saturation of the informal transport market resulted in declining income among drivers. This reflects a classic case of policy misalignment, where the scheme's execution lacked coherence with its development objectives (Pugalis et al., 2014). In evaluating the implications for urban poverty reduction, the scheme may have inadvertently reinforced the socio-economic conditions it sought to alleviate. The proliferation of Keke services, unaccompanied by market regulation or income protection mechanisms, led to oversupply and low profitability. Moreover, the exploitative hire-purchase contracts exacerbated indebtedness rather than enabling upward mobility. Thus, the KTES appears to have reproduced a cycle of economic precarity under the guise of empowerment (Idike et al., 2020; Nnaji et al., 2022).

When viewed against the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the findings raise serious questions about alignment. While the scheme claimed to advance SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), its exclusionary targeting and absence of accountability mechanisms undermined these aspirations. The failure to address SDG 5 (Gender Equality) was particularly evident in the absence of female beneficiaries and gender-sensitive planning. Furthermore, the lack of M&E structures contravenes SDG 16.6, which calls for

effective, accountable, and transparent institutions (United Nations, 2023).

Broader implications emerge when the KTES is situated within Africa's ongoing urbanization discourse. Nigeria, like many African nations, is experiencing rapid urban growth without commensurate expansion in infrastructure or inclusive mobility planning (Bayode & Siegmund, 2024). The case of Abakaliki illustrates how empowerment schemes, if poorly governed, can amplify inequality in emerging urban centres. Rather than serving as an instrument of urban inclusion, the KTES reinforced spatial inequality, limited access to economic opportunities, and fostered institutional mistrust. These outcomes mirror patterns across African cities, where top-down empowerment policies often falter due to a lack of contextual sensitivity, institutional transparency, and participatory governance (Agyei et al., 2024; Nuuyandja et al., 2024). To align such initiatives with international best practices and scholarly expectations, a reframing is required—one that emphasizes co-production of policy, community engagement, and strategic monitoring. A journal-facing analysis must go beyond describing policy failure to identifying the structural and relational gaps that make such failures predictable. This study responds to that need by linking grounded empirical observations to robust theoretical interpretations and offering insights into policy transformation. In doing so, it not only contributes to Nigerian policy discourse but also resonates with global debates on urban governance, informality, and inclusive development in the Global South.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Keke NAPEP empowerment scheme in Abakaliki exemplifies the structural contradictions of postcolonial development policy in Nigeria. Despite its progressive rhetoric, the programme was undermined by elite capture, weak monitoring systems, and institutional corruption, transforming what could have been an inclusive initiative into a mechanism of exclusion. Respondents' testimonies illustrate that empowerment, when filtered through politicized channels, becomes a tool for reproducing dependency rather than fostering autonomy. The study further highlights how gender and spatial inequalities intersect with governance failures to entrench socio-economic marginalization among youth and informal workers. Infrastructural deficits and insecurity in rural communities sustain urban congestion and limit the redistributive potential of such schemes. For

empowerment to achieve sustainable impact, policy reform must prioritize transparency, participatory inclusion, and equitable resource distribution. Future interventions should integrate gender-responsive frameworks and institutional accountability mechanisms to mitigate clientelism. Ultimately, the findings reaffirm that, in the absence of structural transformation, empowerment in Nigeria remains a symbolic promise—one that legitimizes political authority but fails to deliver socio-economic justice for the marginalized.

The thematic analysis of the Keke empowerment scheme underscores the complexities inherent in policy interventions aimed at poverty reduction and employment generation. The issues of political bias, economic oversaturation, exclusionary practices, lack of accountability, and infrastructural deficits highlight the multifaceted challenges that need to be addressed. For such schemes to achieve their intended outcomes, it is imperative to adopt a holistic approach that includes transparent beneficiary selection processes, market assessments to prevent oversaturation, inclusive policies that consider gender and socio-economic status, robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and infrastructural development that supports both urban and rural economies. Only through such comprehensive strategies can empowerment initiatives truly serve as catalysts for sustainable development and social equity. While the Keke NAPEP scheme was theoretically aligned with key SDG goals, poor implementation practices—particularly political bias, poor targeting, lack of transparency, and absence of institutional support—undermined its impact. Achieving sustainable urban economic empowerment requires transparent, inclusive planning, gender-sensitive designs, and robust monitoring aligned with SDG indicators. Urbanization is a defining characteristic of contemporary Nigeria, marked by rapid population growth and significant migration from rural to urban areas, particularly in small and remote cities, by enhancing market access and facilitating rural-to-urban migration (Jedwab, & Storeygard, 2020). The study's findings align with the observation that historical poverty alleviation strategies in Nigeria, such as Operation Feed the Nation and the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), have largely been ineffective in reducing poverty. This ineffectiveness is attributed to factors such as corruption, inadequate beneficiary targeting, and the reliance on unsustainable frameworks (Paul & Ojo, 2017).

Sustainable development in Ebonyi State, and by extension Nigeria, requires a shift from patronage-based empowerment schemes to institutionalized policy frameworks that guarantee equity, transparency, and long-term impact. The failure of the keke empowerment scheme highlights the dangers of policy misalignment with socioeconomic realities. Future policies should incorporate strategic policy intelligence, participatory governance, and rigorous monitoring to ensure that empowerment programs genuinely contribute to sustainable urban and rural development. In conclusion, while the Keke Transport Empowerment Scheme presents a promising avenue for addressing urban poverty and enhancing mobility in Abakaliki, its effectiveness is contingent upon careful consideration of equity in its implementation. The Keke Tricycle Empowerment Scheme exemplifies how urban mobility, governance, and sustainable development are deeply interconnected in Nigeria. Its success depends on multi-level policy alignment, strong local institutions, and the recognition of transport as a driver of spatial justice and social inclusion (Poku-Boansi & Marsden, 2018; Yu et al., 2024; Cervero, 2013; Cervero, 2023). Modern geospatial technologies can also enhance the Keke NAPEP empowerment program in Nigeria by optimizing routes, analyzing demand, and improving fleet management. They facilitate community engagement, assess infrastructure needs, and evaluate socioeconomic impacts, ultimately promoting sustainable urban transport and addressing issues of empowerment and exclusion within urban areas. The Keke scheme did not fail because the model was flawed—it failed due to governance failures in urban mobility management. The article calls for a more strategic approach to empowerment that not only provides resources but also equips individuals with the necessary skills and support to thrive in a changing urban landscape. This holistic view is essential for fostering sustainable development in the region.

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