

Beyond Human Resources: Human-Centered Environmental and Security Systems in Nigeria

Augustine I. Wonor
City University, Cambodia

Gloria Chigbu
Anchor University Lagos, Nigeria

Maryjane Y. Oghogho
City University, Cambodia

O.M.C Osazuwa
City University, Cambodia

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Abstract

This research examines the shortcomings of conventional governance frameworks in Nigeria's environmental and security domains and suggests a human-centered approach grounded in dignity, inclusion, and resilience. Traditional frameworks, especially those shaped by Human Resource Management (HRM), emphasise institutional control and resource efficiency, frequently sidelining vulnerable groups and undermining public trust. In environments characterised by environmental degradation, urban insecurity, and systemic exclusion, such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Abuja, these models are insufficient. The research is informed by human security theory and participatory governance theory, highlighting the importance of ethical engagement, participatory design, and rights-based development. The study employs a qualitative design utilising solely secondary data derived from academic literature, policy documents, and institutional reports. Thematic analysis identifies four primary findings: systemic exclusion and institutional mistrust; discrepancies between policy reform and implementation; the rise of human-centered principles; and the interrelationship between inclusion and resilience. These findings are consistent with and expand upon existing scholarship by situating governance legitimacy within the context of human dignity rather than administrative efficiency. The study advocates for the institutionalisation of inclusive governance mechanisms, reform of policy implementation frameworks, adoption of human-centered training, promotion of participatory budgeting, and integration of human security metrics into national planning. The conclusion underscores that the shift towards human-centered governance is essential both ethically and strategically for the development of resilient, equitable, and inclusive societies in Nigeria.

Keywords: Human-centered governance, environmental systems, security reform, inclusion, resilience.

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1. Introduction

Background to the Study

Traditional Human Resource Management (HRM) has historically focused on enhancing personnel performance, aligning workforce skills with organisational objectives, and treating labour as a resource within institutional structures. This approach enhances operational efficiency but tends to regard individuals merely as functional assets, neglecting their lived experiences, vulnerabilities, and socio-cultural contexts (Erondu & Nwakanma, 2025). In contexts characterised by insecurity, environmental degradation, and systemic inequality, as observed in various regions of Nigeria, this managerial perspective is inadequate. It does not adequately address fundamental human needs for dignity, inclusion, and resilience, particularly within marginalised populations. The global discourse is increasingly focused on participatory governance and rights-based development, necessitating a transition from traditional human resource management to human-centered systems that emphasise ethical engagement, community empowerment, and holistic well-being (Global Discourse, 2024; UNDP, 2025).

Societies worldwide are facing complex challenges concerning environmental sustainability and public security. Rapid urbanisation, climate change, and increasing socio-political tensions have transformed the design and management of these systems by governments and institutions.

Historically, environmental and security frameworks have prioritised institutional control and resource optimisation, frequently overlooking the experiences and agency of individuals and communities. This has prompted a demand for a paradigm shift towards human-centered systems that emphasise empathy, participation, and responsiveness (Erondu & Nwakanma, 2025). In the context of environmental governance, this encompasses sustainable infrastructure, climate justice, and adaptation strategies led by communities. Security discourse entails a transition from enforcement mechanisms to participatory safety models and rights-based frameworks. International frameworks, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasise the significance of inclusive and human-

centered governance, particularly in Goals 11 and 16 (UNDP, 2025).

In Nigeria, global imperatives converge with local conditions characterised by environmental degradation, urban insecurity, and institutional mistrust. Cities including Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Abuja are experiencing increasing challenges due to population growth, informal settlements, and climate-related risks such as flooding, pollution, and heatwaves. Security challenges, including police brutality, insurgency, communal violence, and digital surveillance, have revealed systemic issues of exclusion and impunity. The 2020 End SARS protests underscored the critical necessity for reform within Nigeria's security framework, especially concerning youth involvement, accountability, and human rights (Amnesty International, 2025).

Notwithstanding policy initiatives like the Nigeria Police Act 2020 and the National Urban Development Policy, implementation continues to be inconsistent. Vulnerable groups, such as women, youth, ethnic minorities, and individuals with disabilities, frequently face exclusion from decision-making processes and are disproportionately impacted by environmental hazards and security threats (Erondu & Nwakanma, 2025; Global Discourse, 2024). The outlined conditions highlight the necessity of advancing beyond conventional human resource frameworks towards human-centered environmental and security systems that prioritise participation, ethics, and inclusivity.

This study aims to investigate how Nigeria can rethink its environmental and security systems from a human-centered perspective. This research seeks to enhance theoretical understanding and practical strategies for developing safer, more inclusive and resilient communities through the examination of existing models, identification of systemic gaps, and proposal of actionable reforms.

Statement of the Problem

Despite increasing global advocacy for inclusive and human-centered governance, Nigeria faces persistent systemic challenges in its environmental and security sectors. Conventional frameworks, typically based on

managerial logic and institutional oversight, have not sufficiently addressed the actual experiences of vulnerable populations. Environmental systems are predominantly technocratic, exhibiting minimal community involvement in planning and adaptation. Concurrently, security institutions are often marked by excessive force, exclusionary practices, and insufficient accountability mechanisms (Amnesty International, 2025; Erondu & Nwakanma, 2025).

The ongoing issues of environmental degradation, urban insecurity, and institutional mistrust, particularly in cities such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Abuja, highlight a significant deficiency in governance. Vulnerable populations, including women, youth, ethnic minorities, and individuals with disabilities, experience a disproportionate impact from climate-related hazards and policing inadequacies; however, they continue to be under-represented in decision-making processes (Global Discourse, 2024). While policy reforms such as the Nigeria Police Act 2020 and the National Urban Development Policy indicate advancement, their execution has been inconsistent and frequently disconnected from the communities they intend to benefit (UNDP, 2025).

This disconnect highlights a fundamental structural issue: the ongoing dependence on resource-centric and control-oriented systems that undermine human dignity, participation, and resilience. There is an urgent necessity to rethink Nigeria's environmental and security frameworks from a human-centered perspective, emphasising ethical engagement, community empowerment, and inclusive design. In the absence of such a shift, initiatives aimed at establishing sustainable and secure societies will be both incomplete and inequitable.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to critically examine how Nigeria's environmental and security systems can be reimagined through a human-centered lens, emphasizing dignity, inclusion, and resilience over institutional control and resource optimization.

The objectives are to

1. analyze the conceptual foundations of human-centered approaches in environmental and security governance.
2. evaluate existing environmental and

security frameworks in Nigeria for their responsiveness to human needs and vulnerabilities.

3. identify systemic gaps in inclusion, participation, and ethical engagement within current governance structures.
4. explore alternative models and practices that prioritize human dignity and community empowerment.

Research Questions

1. What are the core conceptual foundations of human-centered approaches in environmental and security governance, and how do they differ from traditional resource- and control-oriented frameworks?
2. To what extent do existing environmental and security frameworks in Nigeria address human needs, lived experiences, and vulnerabilities, particularly among marginalised populations?
3. What systemic gaps exist in current governance structures with respect to inclusion, participation, accountability, and ethical engagement?
4. What alternative human-centered models and practices can be adopted to enhance dignity, community empowerment, and resilience within Nigeria's environmental and security systems?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for policymakers and government institutions responsible for environmental management, urban development, and security governance in Nigeria. By foregrounding a human-centered perspective, the research provides critical insights into how existing frameworks can be reoriented to prioritise dignity, inclusion, and accountability. The findings offer evidence-based guidance for designing policies that are more responsive to community realities, thereby strengthening public trust and institutional legitimacy.

The study also holds practical relevance for security agencies and environmental governance bodies. By identifying systemic gaps in participation and ethical engagement, it supports institutional reform efforts aimed at improving service delivery, community relations, and crisis responsiveness. A human-centered approach offers pathways for transitioning from reactive and enforcement-driven models to preventive,

participatory, and rights-based systems.

For civil society organisations and community-based actors, the study contributes analytical tools for advocacy and programme design. By articulating the lived impacts of exclusionary governance, it reinforces the role of communities as active agents rather than passive beneficiaries, thereby strengthening grassroots engagement in environmental adaptation and community safety initiatives.

The research further contributes to academic scholarship by extending human-centered theory beyond its traditional applications in design and management into the domains of environmental and security governance. It enriches interdisciplinary literature on governance reform in developing contexts and provides a conceptual foundation for future empirical studies on inclusive and ethical systems design.

Finally, the study is relevant to international development partners, offering context-specific insights that support alignment with global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goals 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). The findings can inform development programming that integrates governance reform with social justice and human security objectives.

Scope of the Study

The study focuses on Nigeria's environmental and security systems, with particular emphasis on urban and peri-urban contexts where governance challenges, population pressures, and climate risks intersect most acutely. Empirical and policy analysis draws primarily from major urban centres such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Abuja, while also considering national-level frameworks and institutional arrangements.

The scope of the research is thematic rather than sectorally exhaustive. It concentrates on governance structures, policy frameworks, and institutional practices related to environmental management and public security, rather than technical environmental engineering or military strategy. Particular attention is given to the experiences of vulnerable groups, including women, youth, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities, as central to assessing inclusivity and human-centeredness.

Temporally, the study situates its analysis within contemporary governance reforms, with reference to policy developments and socio-political dynamics from

the mid-2010s to the present. While the study is context-specific to Nigeria, its analytical framework and findings have broader relevance for other developing societies grappling with similar challenges of environmental stress, insecurity, and governance legitimacy.

2. Literature Review

Conceptual Review

From Traditional Systems to Human-Centered Transformation

Traditional governance frameworks, especially in Human Resource Management (HRM), environmental management, and security agencies, have generally emphasised efficiency, adherence to regulations, and oversight. These systems are based on bureaucratic rationality and institutional hierarchies aimed at ensuring predictability and discipline (UNDP, 2025). Although they have enhanced organisational stability and operational order, they frequently overlook the social and emotional aspects of governance that are crucial for legitimacy, trust, and moral accountability. Traditional HRM frameworks prioritise labour optimisation, performance metrics, and adherence to procedures, often neglecting creativity, employee well-being, and participatory engagement (UNDP, 2025). This reductionist perspective perceives individuals as instruments for institutional efficiency, overlooking their autonomy, dignity, and lived experiences, which are crucial for effective governance.

Environmental and security institutions have historically operated within technocratic and militarised frameworks that reinforce hierarchical structures, marginalise public participation, and sustain asymmetric power dynamics (Global Discourse, 2024; Amnesty International, 2023). Environmental management has frequently been characterised by top-down policies that prioritise economic growth and industrial control at the expense of ecological justice and community participation. Security systems have been organised around coercive authority, allowing minimal room for accountability or community collaboration. These models are increasingly inadequate for the realities of the 21st century, characterised by complex global interdependence, rapid urbanisation, and heightened social awareness.

The limitations of traditional systems in Nigeria are manifested in ongoing institutional mistrust, governance inefficiencies, and recurring public dissent. Instances of police violence, failures in environmental policy and

bureaucratic opacity have led to a decrease in public trust in state institutions (Amnesty International, 2023). These failures indicate a deficiency in governance, characterised by the presence of formal structures devoid of moral and participatory legitimacy. Therefore, a transformation centred on human considerations is essential. This transformation redefines efficiency via empathy, authority through accountability, and compliance through collaboration. It positions the citizen not merely as a passive recipient of state power, but as an active co-creator of governance outcomes. The human-centered model, grounded in ethical engagement, rights-based design, inclusivity, and accessibility, signifies a shift in governance from control mechanisms to frameworks that emphasise empowerment, responsiveness, and social justice (UNDP, 2025).

Human-Centered Systems

Human-centered systems signify a developing framework in public administration and development theory that prioritises human dignity, participation, and collective well-being within institutional processes. This model, grounded in humanistic management and participatory governance theory, posits that institutions gain legitimacy not solely through legal mandates or procedural efficiency, but through their ability to improve the quality of human life. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2025) characterises human-centered governance as an approach based on empathy, ethical responsibility, and responsiveness to the lived experiences of citizens. These systems aim to rebuild trust in public institutions by promoting participatory, transparent, and socially accountable decision-making processes.

The significance of this model in contexts characterised by structural inequality, such as Nigeria, is considerable. The prevalence of poverty, environmental degradation, and political exclusion underscores the shortcomings of technocratic governance systems that emphasise metrics at the expense of ethical considerations. Human-centered systems mitigate these deficiencies by incorporating compassion, collaboration, and moral reasoning into governance frameworks. The emphasis transitions from abstract institutional performance to concrete human outcomes including dignity, inclusion, and resilience. This reorientation changes governance into stewardship, wherein the state's role encompasses not only regulation but also the cultivation of human potential and social solidarity.

Moreover, human-centered governance serves as an ethical counterbalance to neoliberal administrative reforms that prioritise efficiency at the expense of empathy. Focussing on human welfare enhances legitimacy and institutional resilience ensuring policies align with societal values while promoting equitable and sustainable development. In Nigeria, the incorporation of human-centered principles into governance through participatory budgeting, community consultations, and inclusive policy-making has the potential to restore public confidence and promote collective ownership of reform processes.

Environmental Systems

Environmental governance serves as a vital framework for negotiating the interactions among the state, society, and sustainability. Environmental systems have historically been characterised by hierarchical management frameworks that emphasise regulation, control, and the economic exploitation of natural resources. These approaches frequently embody technocratic rationalities, treating environmental challenges as technical or administrative issues rather than as socio-ecological concerns that necessitate community engagement and ethical consideration (Global Discourse, 2024).

A human-centered approach to environmental governance, nonetheless, alters this paradigm. It underscores the importance of inclusivity, participatory decision-making and social justice as fundamental elements of environmental management. This approach recognises that environmental sustainability is inextricably linked to human welfare and equity. Human-centered environmental governance integrates local knowledge, values indigenous perspectives, and acknowledges marginalised groups as co-stewards of natural resources. Instead of imposing external solutions, it promotes co-creation, ensuring that communities most impacted by environmental degradation are actively engaged in the design and implementation of policies.

Nigeria exemplifies the necessity for such transformation. Environmental crises, including oil spills in the Niger Delta, deforestation in the Middle Belt, and flooding in Lagos, represent not only ecological challenges but also significant social justice issues. The significant effects of these challenges on impoverished and rural populations highlight the relationship between environmental mismanagement and human vulnerability. Human-centered environmental systems aim to address

this imbalance by merging ecological objectives with human rights, livelihood security, and community empowerment (Global Discourse, 2024). This method encourages justice, resilience, and sustainability, which are principles that standard systems haven't always paid attention to.

Security Systems

Security systems represent a domain in which the shortcomings of conventional governance are clearly evident. In numerous developing contexts, such as Nigeria, security institutions are structured around centralised authority and militarised enforcement mechanisms. Such systems frequently associate stability with control and perceive dissent as a form of disorder. This model emphasises state security, focussing on the protection of institutions and elites, rather than human security, which pertains to the safety, dignity, and freedom of individuals (Amnesty International, 2023).

Human-centered security redefines this dynamic by establishing public safety within rights-based, participatory, and trust-building frameworks. It acknowledges that security encompasses more than the mere absence of crime or conflict; it involves the presence of justice, fairness, and societal cohesion. In this framework, coercion is supplanted by collaboration; surveillance is substituted with dialogue; and punishment is harmonised with prevention and rehabilitation. Human-centered security utilises trauma-informed methodologies that recognise the psychological and social effects of violence on communities, thereby fostering healing instead of fear.

In Nigeria, the decline in public trust towards policing and security agencies, attributed to reports of brutality, corruption, and impunity, underscores the importance of this shift. Movements like End SARS have underscored the pressing need for a security framework that prioritises transparency, accountability, and community engagement. Establishing collaborations between law enforcement and the community, incorporating gender-sensitive and community policing approaches, and prioritising human rights education can enable Nigeria to evolve into a security framework that enforces order while also reflecting justice and legitimacy (Amnesty International, 2023).

Outcomes of Human-Centered Governance

The shift towards human-centered governance produces significant and interconnected results, including

resilience, trust, dignity, and sustainability. Resilience enables communities to recover from crises by fostering collaboration, promoting innovation, and encouraging shared responsibility. Trust enhances the social contract by promoting voluntary compliance and civic engagement. Dignity guarantees that governance practices maintain human rights and ethical standards, acknowledging citizens as individuals of equal value rather than mere subjects of authority. Sustainability encompasses the interrelation of social, economic, and environmental stability, guaranteeing that advancement is both lasting and just (UNDP, 2025).

Inclusion and resilience represent the fundamental outcomes of governance centred on human needs. Inclusion entails the active and equitable engagement of all societal groups, especially marginalised communities, in the processes of policy formulation and implementation. This guarantees that governance processes embody diversity and are attuned to diverse social, cultural, and economic contexts. Inclusion transcends procedural objectives; it constitutes a moral obligation that recognises the intrinsic value of each individual and underscores the importance of representation in public decision-making.

Resilience refers to the ability of individuals, communities, and institutions to adapt to and recover from crises, including those that are environmental, economic, or security-related. A resilient society is characterised by its ability to endure shocks while simultaneously learning, evolving, and strengthening in response to adversity. In a human-centered framework, inclusion and resilience are mutually dependent: inclusive systems foster the trust and social capital essential for collective resilience, whereas resilient institutions uphold inclusion by maintaining responsiveness in challenging circumstances.

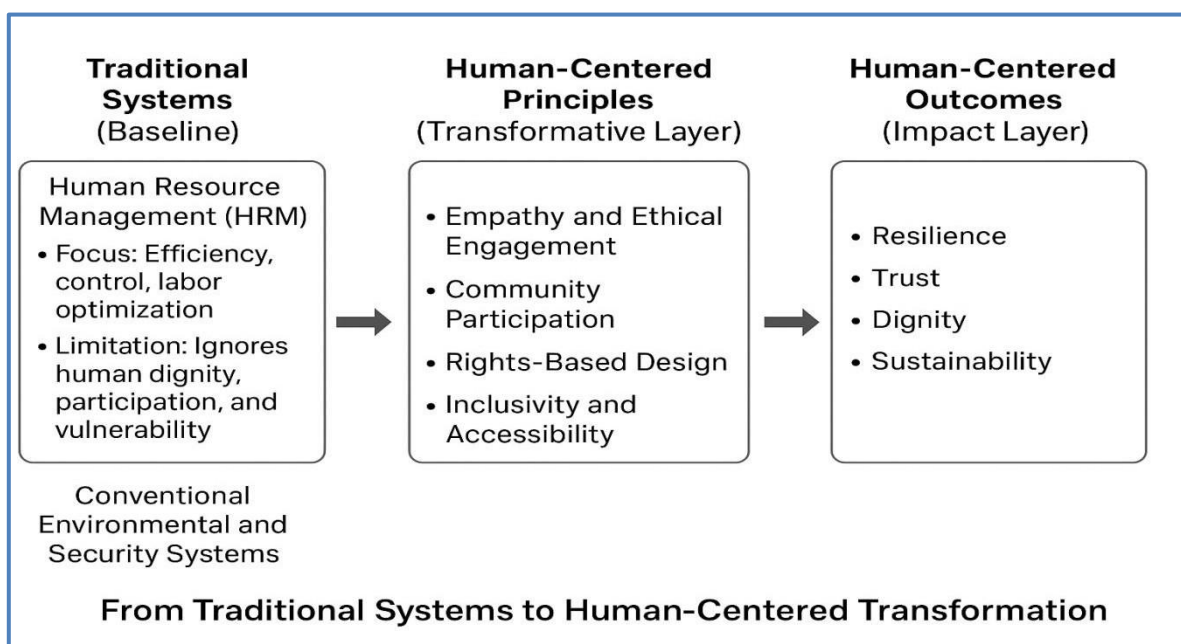
In Nigeria, systemic inequalities, ethnic divisions, and recurrent crises necessitate policies that foster inclusion, including gender equality, youth engagement, and disability representation, which are essential for resilience. Empowering vulnerable populations to engage in decision-making enhances the adaptability, legitimacy, and sustainability of governance. Inclusion and resilience collectively establish the moral and structural basis of human-centered governance, which prioritises empowerment over exclusion and sustenance over suppression.

The outcomes exhibit mutual reinforcement. Trust

contributes to resilience, as communities that have confidence in their institutions demonstrate greater cooperation during crises. Dignity enhances legitimacy, as individuals are more inclined to endorse systems that acknowledge their humanity. Sustainability guarantees that current reforms do not undermine the requirements of future generations. In Nigeria, attaining these outcomes is crucial for restoring damaged state- society relations, enhancing institutional credibility, and directing national development towards inclusivity and justice.

The shift from control-oriented systems to human-centered governance represents an administrative progression as well as a moral and philosophical rethinking of statehood. It defines governance as a dynamic, relational process in which institutions and citizens collaborate to promote life, dignity, and the common good. This progressive shift is critical to the endurance of democracies and the creation of just societies in the twenty-first century.

Conceptual Model



This study's conceptual model demonstrates the shift from traditional governance systems to human-centered governance outcomes, mediated by ethical and participatory principles. It conceptualises governance as a dynamic continuum instead of a static structure, highlighting transformation across three interconnected tiers: Traditional Systems, Human-Centered Principles, and Human-Centered Outcomes.

Traditional Systems, which include Human Resource Management (HRM), environmental administration, and security institutions, fundamentally function through control, efficiency, and compliance mechanisms. These systems depend on hierarchical authority and procedural discipline to establish order. Nonetheless, their technocratic approach and restricted responsiveness frequently lead to alienation, inefficiency, and a decline in trust. In Nigeria, these structural limitations are

evident through bureaucratic inertia, environmental injustice, and diminished legitimacy of security institutions.

The Transformative Layer, situated at the model's core, incorporates Human-Centered Principles as essential catalysts for systemic reform. These factors encompass empathy, ethical engagement, community participation, rights-based design, inclusivity, and accessibility. These principles serve as mediating variables that modify institutional behaviour and reshape governance culture. They convert command-based systems into collaborative frameworks, substituting coercive efficiency with cooperative adaptability. In the context of environmental and security governance, these principles promote community ownership, accountability, and transparency, thereby transforming the relationship between citizens and the state from one of subordination to partnership.

The Human-Centered Outcomes occupy the upper tier, representing both the tangible and intangible results of integrating these principles into governance frameworks. The outcomes include resilience, trust, dignity, and sustainability, which collectively indicate effective and equitable governance. Resilience refers to the ability of institutions and communities to adapt to change while sustaining functionality. Trust signifies the moral legitimacy of governance. Dignity underscores the importance of preserving human rights and social justice. Sustainability guarantees a long-term balance between ecological integrity and human development. The model illustrates a circular and iterative flow, as opposed to a linear progression. Human-centered outcomes inform governance processes, reinforcing transformative principles and facilitating ongoing learning and adaptation. Resilience and trust are not only outcomes of human-centered governance; they also serve to reinforce it. This feedback loop fosters ethical resilience, characterised by governance systems that sustain their legitimacy and responsiveness during crises.

The conceptual model asserts that the transformation of governance in Nigeria relies on the incorporation of human-centered ethics into the operational frameworks of environmental and security systems. It argues that institutional efficiency by itself cannot ensure legitimacy; instead, legitimacy emerges from the integration of empathy, participation, and justice in governance practices. The model offers an analytical and normative framework for evaluating contemporary policy reforms, facilitating the assessment of how human-centered design principles can transform governance into a more dignified, inclusive, and sustainable enterprise.

Empirical Review

Human-Centered Governance: Conceptual Foundations and Global Perspectives

Human-centered governance signifies a significant transition from conventional models that focus on control, compliance, and administrative efficiency to frameworks that prioritise empathy, participation, and human dignity. This approach is especially pertinent in the environmental and security sectors, where technocratic and militarised systems have traditionally marginalised vulnerable populations. Gwiazdon (2020) posits that global environmental governance should transition from strict enforcement mechanisms to inclusive frameworks that recognise human vulnerability

and agency. Clover (2005) advocates for a shift in African security paradigms from state-centric models to human-centered approaches that incorporate environmental risks and community resilience.

The human security framework supports these conceptual shifts by highlighting individual well-being and participatory governance. Lautensach and Lautensach (2020) propose the integration of environmental governance into comprehensive human security frameworks to effectively tackle interrelated challenges, including climate change, displacement, and resource conflict.

This is consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasise the importance of inclusive institutions and participatory decision-making as fundamental elements of sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). The combination of human security and participatory governance theories establishes a strong basis for rethinking governance systems that are ethical, inclusive, and attuned to the actual experiences of citizens.

Evaluating Nigeria's Environmental and Security Governance: Responsiveness and Reform

Nigeria's frameworks for environmental and security governance have faced challenges in adequately addressing the needs of its diverse and vulnerable populations. Empirical research indicates fundamental deficiencies in institutional coordination, public engagement, and regulatory enforcement. Ndum, et al (2023) indicates that environmental governance in Nigeria suffers from fragmented policies and insufficient community engagement, which exacerbates ongoing challenges such as oil pollution, deforestation, and urban flooding. Environmental challenges disproportionately impact marginalised communities, highlighting the necessity for inclusive and participatory strategies.

In the security sector, enforcement is predominantly reactive and militarised, frequently compromising human rights and diminishing public trust. Amupitan (2025) observes that although legal frameworks for environmental protection are in place, their enforcement is obstructed by corruption, regulatory overlaps, and socioeconomic limitations. Amnesty International (2023) reports systemic abuses in Nigeria's policing institutions, highlighting the absence of trauma-informed and community-based strategies. The findings indicate that existing frameworks are inadequate for addressing

the intricate relationships among environmental degradation, insecurity, and social exclusion.

The Nigeria Police Act (2020) and the National Urban Development Policy (2021) exemplify advancements in inclusive governance through policy reform. Nonetheless, implementation is inconsistent, and numerous communities remain excluded from decision-making processes (Global Discourse, 2024). Erundu and Nwakanma (2025) contend that effective reform necessitates a purposeful transition to human-centered systems that emphasise ethical engagement, empathy, and inclusion.

Inclusion, Participation, and Ethical Engagement: Bridging Systemic Gaps

Nigeria's governance is marked by the systemic exclusion of marginalised groups, such as women, youth, individuals with disabilities, and ethnic minorities. Momoh et al. (2025) argue that effective governance requires transparency, accountability, and inclusive representation principles frequently lacking in Nigeria's institutional practices. Dutse (2025) identifies cultural and socioeconomic barriers that restrict women's political participation, whereas Nnubia and Ajisebiyawo (2025) emphasise structural obstacles that impede youth engagement in governance.

The identified gaps undermine the legitimacy of governance systems and hinder the establishment of resilient institutions. Oyewole, et al (2024) highlights the significance of inclusive leadership and discursive practices in promoting participatory governance and civic engagement. Madekwe (2025) associates citizen participation in public policy formulation with enhanced legitimacy and accountability, underscoring the significance of ethical engagement in governance.

International frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals and initiatives by the United Nations Development Programme (2025), emphasise the necessity of inclusive governance. UNDP's focus on digital skills and ethical AI in policing signifies a wider dedication to human-centered reform. Amnesty International (2025) critiques global policing practices and advocates for rights-based approaches. In contrast, Global Discourse (2024) examines the intersection of human security and sustainable livelihoods in the Niger Delta.

Toward Human-Centered Systems: Alternative Models and Practices

Alternative governance models present viable avenues for facilitating human-centered transformation. The models emphasise co-creation, participatory budgeting, and community-led monitoring, thereby fostering trust, responsiveness, and social justice. Sánchez-Soriano et al. (2024) propose governance frameworks that enhance community empowerment and foster equity. Iroanya (2023) highlights the significance of ethical leadership and inclusive development in Nigeria for fostering communal dignity and enhancing national prosperity.

Ngang (2024) proposes a governance model centred on the right to development that integrates human dignity with structural transformation, thereby contesting the prevalence of top-down approaches. Evidence from pilot programs in Nigeria indicates that community policing and environmental co-management enhance service delivery and promote adaptive capacity (Amnesty International, 2023). Lenshie and Okoli (2025) promote community-led security governance, asserting that local engagement enhances both legitimacy and efficacy. Erundu and Nwakanma (2025) promote sustainability strategies in the environmental sector that prioritise human security and inclusion. Frank, et al (2025) contends that sustainable development should be fundamentally anchored in human development, especially in areas impacted by environmental degradation. Eneanya (2022) emphasises the public health hazards linked to inadequate environmental planning and supports the implementation of participatory ecological management.

In Human Resource Management (HRM), conventional frameworks have emphasised institutional efficiency and labour optimisation, frequently overlooking the socio-cultural contexts of individuals. Erundu and Nwakanma (2025) evaluate these models and promote human-centered systems that prioritise ethical engagement and empathy. UNDP (2025) supports this viewpoint by advocating for governance frameworks that combine digital innovation with the safeguarding of human rights.

Theoretical Framework Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory provides a framework for rethinking governance by emphasising individual well-being and dignity over state-centric protection. This approach highlights the importance of protecting individuals from persistent threats, including environmental degradation, violence, and social exclusion, thus fostering freedom from fear, want, and indignity (Erundu & Nwakanma, 2025). This theory is

especially relevant in the Nigerian context, where insecurity, climate vulnerability, and institutional mistrust disproportionately impact marginalised populations.

Ugwu, et al (2023) emphasise the multidimensional and preventive aspects of human security, stating that it is inherently people-centered, multidimensional, and preventive. It advocates for policies that enable individuals and communities to engage in the development of their own safety and sustainability (p. 270). This viewpoint critiques conventional Human Resource Management (HRM) and security frameworks that regard individuals as mere passive recipients of protection. It promotes governance systems that are based on ethical principles, incorporate diverse perspectives, and address human needs effectively. Human Security Theory offers a normative basis for the development of institutions focused on human dignity and resilience within the realms of environmental and security governance. It promotes the formulation of policies that merge social justice with ecological sustainability, thus aligning governance with the actual experiences of marginalised communities.

Participatory Governance Theory

Participatory Governance Theory complements Human Security Theory by emphasizing the active involvement of citizens in shaping decisions that affect their lives. It promotes transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in public policy and institutional design, thereby reinforcing democratic legitimacy and civic engagement (Oyewole, et al, 2024). This theory aligns with human-centered governance by recognizing that sustainable environmental and security systems must be co-created with communities rather than imposed through top-down mechanisms.

Oyewole et al. (2024) argue that inclusive leadership and discursive practices are essential in fostering participatory governance and civic engagement, especially in fragile democracies like Nigeria. In Nigeria, where governance structures often marginalize local voices, participatory governance offers a pathway to reform. It supports the integration of indigenous knowledge, community-led initiatives, and rights-based frameworks into environmental and security planning. By embedding participatory principles into governance systems, this theory facilitates the development of institutions that are not only effective but also equitable and responsive. It fosters trust between the state and

society, enhances legitimacy, and strengthens the adaptive capacity of communities to address complex challenges.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design that relies exclusively on secondary data sources. Rather than collecting primary data through interviews or fieldwork, the research draws from an extensive review of existing literature, including academic publications, policy documents, institutional reports, and international frameworks. Key sources include scholarly articles on human-centered governance, environmental and security systems in Nigeria, and global best practices as outlined by organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Amnesty International, and Global Discourse. These materials were critically analyzed to identify prevailing themes, conceptual frameworks, and systemic gaps in Nigeria's current governance structures.

The data analysis employed thematic content analysis to extract recurring patterns related to inclusion, resilience, ethical engagement, and institutional responsiveness. By synthesizing insights from diverse sources, the study constructs a conceptual model that illustrates the transition from traditional governance systems to human-centered outcomes. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical and practical dimensions of human-centered governance without the limitations or ethical considerations associated with primary data collection.

Findings

Systemic Exclusion and Institutional Mistrust

The literature consistently highlights the exclusion of vulnerable populations from Nigeria's environmental and security governance structures. Women, youth, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities are often sidelined in policy formulation and implementation, despite being disproportionately affected by environmental hazards and security threats. Reports from Amnesty International and UNDP reveal that this exclusion contributes to widespread mistrust in public institutions. In the security sector, excessive use of force, lack of accountability and limited community engagement have eroded public confidence, particularly among young people and marginalized communities. Similarly, environmental governance is marked by top-down decision-making and fragmented policy

frameworks that fail to incorporate local knowledge or address community-specific needs. This systemic exclusion undermines the legitimacy of governance and perpetuates cycles of disenfranchisement and resistance.

Policy Reform Gaps

Nigeria has implemented various policy reforms to enhance governance, including the Nigeria Police Act 2020 and the National Urban Development Policy; however, these initiatives have not resulted in significant change in practice. The literature indicates a consistent disparity between policy objectives and their execution. Reforms frequently appear technocratic and disconnected from the actual experiences of the populations they aim to benefit. The Nigeria Police Act underscores the principles of accountability and community policing; however, its implementation has been inconsistent, resulting in ongoing instances of brutality and impunity in numerous communities. Urban development policies have similarly faced challenges in addressing the needs of informal settlements and populations vulnerable to climate change. The disjunction between policy and practice indicates underlying structural problems, such as bureaucratic inertia, corruption, and insufficient participatory mechanisms.

Emergence of Human-Centered Principles

The literature increasingly acknowledges the importance of human-centered principles in effective governance. The principles of empathy, ethical engagement, participation, and responsiveness are recognised as essential remedies for the shortcomings of conventional systems. Human-centered governance redefines institutional legitimacy by focussing on the enhancement of human dignity and well-being, rather than solely on compliance enforcement or resource optimisation. In Nigeria, alternative models including community policing, participatory budgeting, and inclusive environmental management have demonstrated potential in enhancing trust and responsiveness. These approaches promote collaboration between citizens and institutions, facilitating more adaptive and ethically informed governance. Research indicates that integrating these principles into mainstream policy frameworks may substantially improve institutional legitimacy and resilience.

Conceptual Integration of Inclusion and Resilience

Inclusion and resilience are identified as interdependent

outcomes of human-centered governance. Inclusion entails the active engagement of all societal groups in decision-making processes, ensuring that governance incorporates diverse perspectives and addresses a range of needs. Resilience refers to the ability of communities and institutions to adapt to and recover from crises. Research indicates that inclusive systems tend to exhibit greater resilience by fostering trust, social capital, and collective ownership in governance processes. In Nigeria, the prevalence of recurrent crises, including environmental disasters and security breakdowns, underscores the importance of fostering inclusion to enhance adaptive capacity. Policies promoting gender equality, youth engagement, and disability representation affirm human dignity while enhancing societal cohesion and institutional responsiveness. Inclusion and resilience constitute the foundation of sustainable and equitable governance.

4. Discussion

This study's findings indicate a continual pattern of systemic exclusion and institutional distrust across Nigeria's environmental and security governance structures. Vulnerable groups, especially women, young people, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities, are still left out of decision-making processes, even though they are the ones who suffer the most from environmental damage and security failures. This observation corresponds with the findings of Momoh et al. (2025), who highlight the lack of inclusive representation in Nigeria's governance frameworks. Amnesty International (2023) also records the decline of public confidence in security organisations attributable to exclusionary tactics and disproportionate force. This research examines exclusion, typically viewed as a governance failure in existing studies, via the lens of Human Security Theory, framing it as a structural weakness that jeopardises human dignity and social resilience. This theoretical paradigm enhances prior research by asserting that legitimacy in governance stems not from institutional dominance but from the ethical inclusion of all society factions.

The research also reveals a substantial disparity between policy reform and its practical execution. Nigeria has implemented progressive policies, such as the Nigeria Police Act 2020 and the National Urban Development Policy; yet, their effectiveness is constrained by inconsistent enforcement and insufficient community involvement. This discovery supports the assertions of Ndum, et al (2023), who indicate that environmental

governance is hindered by disjointed enforcement and inadequate public involvement. Amupitan (2025) likewise attacks the security sector's inability to implement rights-based reforms. This research, in contrast to earlier studies, highlights the conceptual disjunction between technocratic policy formulation and human-centered governance results. Utilising Human-Centered Governance Theory, the study contends that policy efficacy relies not solely on legal structures but also on ethical involvement and participatory execution. The ineffectiveness of reforms to align with actual experiences indicates a profound epistemic divide, as administration is structured according to institutional logic rather than human necessities. This viewpoint enhances the literature by asserting that reform must be both structurally robust and ethically founded to attain legitimacy.

A third important finding is that more and more people are recognising that human-centered values like empathy, ethical involvement, and participation are important for changing the way Nigeria is run. This observation corroborates the assertions of Sánchez-Soriano et al. (2024) and Erundu & Nwakanma (2025), who champion inclusive governance approaches that emphasise human dignity. It aligns with UNDP's (2025) focus on ethical accountability and responsiveness. This study illustrates the practical significance of human-centered concepts through conceptual modelling and thematic synthesis, despite these sources emphasising its normative importance. The research demonstrates that Human-Centered Governance Theory principles are not merely intellectual concepts but practical instruments for legitimacy and resilience. This study's conceptual model demonstrates how ethical involvement mediates the shift from control-based systems to sustainable results, so enhancing the theoretical discourse by connecting values to institutional behaviour and governance culture.

The study emphasised that inclusion and resilience are mutually dependent outcomes of human-centered governance. Inclusive systems cultivate social capital and legitimacy, whereas resilient institutions adjust to disasters via collaboration and ethical responsiveness. This discovery aligns with the research of Oyewole et al (2024), who highlight inclusive leadership as a catalyst for civic involvement, and Madekwe (2025), who associates public participation with enhanced accountability. Nonetheless, prior research frequently regards inclusion and resilience as distinct objectives. This study addresses the gap by illustrating their

conceptual and functional connection. The study posits that, from the perspective of Human Security Theory, inclusiveness is essential for resilience. When empowered to engage, marginalised groups enhance the trust and collective ownership essential for adaptive governance. This discovery enhances the literature by suggesting a feedback loop between inclusion and resilience, wherein each element fortifies the other to maintain human-centered outcomes. The study both corroborates current scholarship and provides a sophisticated framework for comprehending government reform in Nigeria.

5. Recommendations

Institutionalize Inclusive Governance Mechanisms

Government agencies should embed inclusive structures into environmental and security decision-making processes. This includes establishing community advisory boards, mandating gender and disability representation in policy committees, and creating youth-led oversight platforms. Such mechanisms will ensure that marginalized voices are not only heard but actively shape governance outcomes.

Reform Policy Implementation Frameworks

To bridge the gap between policy and practice, Nigeria must develop localized implementation strategies that reflect community realities. This involves decentralizing policy execution, training local officials in participatory methods, and integrating feedback loops that allow communities to monitor and evaluate progress. Policies like the Nigeria Police Act and urban development plans should be revised to include clear accountability benchmarks and community validation protocols.

Adopt Human-Centered Training for Public Institutions

It should be required that security and environmental agencies learn about human-centered governance principles, such as empathy, ethical engagement, trauma-informed practice, and rights-based approaches. Working with civil society groups and international organisations like UNDP can help make this happen. Training should be ongoing and integrated into the institutional culture, rather than regarded as isolated initiatives.

Promote Participatory Budgeting and Co-Design Models

Local governments should establish participatory

budgeting systems that give individuals a say in how funds are allocated for environmental and security activities. Co-design methods, in which communities work with authorities to find solutions, should be implemented in places prone to environmental dangers or security concerns. These tactics promote trust, ownership, and responsiveness.

Strengthen Legal and Ethical Accountability Systems

Nigeria must enhance its legal frameworks to ensure ethical accountability in governance. This includes establishing independent oversight bodies for environmental and security institutions, enforcing anti-corruption laws, and protecting whistleblowers. Legal reforms should be accompanied by public education campaigns that empower citizens to demand transparency and justice.

Integrate Human Security Metrics into National Development Planning

National planning agencies should include human security indicators in their development assessments, such as dignity, inclusion, and resilience. These measures should help with resource allocation, policy prioritisation, and program evaluation. By changing from GDP-centric metrics to human-centered benchmarks, Nigeria may match its growth trajectory with its population's lived experiences.

Leverage Digital Platforms for Civic Engagement

Digital tools should be used to expand civic participation in governance. Mobile apps, online portals, and social media platforms can facilitate real-time feedback, crowdsource solutions, and disseminate policy updates. These platforms must be designed to be accessible to persons with disabilities and available in local languages to ensure broad reach.

6. Conclusion

This study used a human-centered perspective to critically assess Nigeria's environmental and security governance institutions, highlighting both the limitations of traditional, control-oriented frameworks and the transformative possibilities of ethical, inclusive, and participatory approaches. Drawing on Human Security Theory and Human-Centered Governance principles, the study emphasises that legitimacy in governance cannot be preserved solely through institutional efficiency; it must also be based on citizens' dignity, agency, and lived experiences. The findings show that systematic

exclusion, policy implementation gaps, and institutional mistrust continue to impede Nigeria's attempts to promote sustainable development and public safety. Despite the prevalence of reform-oriented initiatives, their technical focus and lack of community engagement have reduced their effectiveness. In contrast, human-centered principles such as empathy, ethical engagement, and participatory design provide a more responsive and morally grounded framework for governance. These values not only strengthen institutional legitimacy, but also promote resilience and trust, particularly in circumstances of inequality and crises.

By combining global literature and contextual realities, the study makes concrete recommendations that prioritise inclusive governance structures, localised policy implementation, human-centered training, participatory budgeting, and digital civic participation. These tactics are more than just administrative modifications; they constitute a fundamental shift in governance from control to collaboration, exclusion to empowerment. Finally, Nigeria's move to human-centered environmental and security systems is both moral and strategic. To co-create governance institutions that reflect shared values and common ambitions, governments, civil society, and communities must commit to this effort over time.

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