

Article

Global Norms, Local Institutions, and Development Performance: Nigeria's Implementation of International Development Frameworks, 2020–2025

UCHOLA Kenedy¹, Victor Prince CHARLES², EFEBO Belinda God'swill Eferebo³, Ovundah CHUKWUOKEAH⁴

^{1,2,3} Department of Political Science, Federal University Otuoke, Otuoke, Nigeria;

⁴ Department of Political Science, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Correspondence: pstucholaken@gmail.com¹, Charlesv230@gmail.com², belindaefebo@gmail.com³, chukwuokeahovundah@gmail.com⁴

Abstract: This study examined the disconnect between Nigeria's formal adoption of international development frameworks and uneven implementation outcomes between 2020 and 2025. The study was grounded in policy translation theory, which explained how global norms were reinterpreted and operationalized within local administrative contexts. A qualitative research design based solely on secondary data was adopted. Sources included international framework documents, national policy instruments, implementation progress reports, government circulars, and official publications. Thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns in the adaptation and operationalization of global norms. The findings indicated that although Nigeria formally aligned with international development frameworks, implementation performance was weakened by institutional fragmentation, limited administrative capacity, and inadequate intergovernmental coordination. Consequently, international frameworks were often operationalized symbolically rather than substantively. The study recommended enhancing institutional capacity for policy translation, improving coordination across tiers of government, and embedding international frameworks into routine administrative and planning processes to strengthen development performance.

Keywords: Global norms, local institutions, development, international development, institutional fragmentation

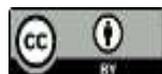
Citation: Kenedy, U., Charles, V. P., Eferebo, E. B. G., Chukwuokeah, O. Global Norms, Local Institutions, and Development Performance: Nigeria's Implementation of International Development Frameworks, 2020–2025. *International Journal of Development and Public Policy* 2026, 6(1), 14-20.

Received: 12th Jan 2026

Revised: 18th Feb 2026

Accepted: 22th Feb 2026

Published: 24th Feb 2026



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

1. Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 represents the most comprehensive global normative framework for guiding socioeconomic transformation in the early twenty-first century [1] [2]. At its core are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all by 2030 [1]. The SDGs encapsulate an unprecedented consensus on development priorities, encompassing economic, social, and environmental dimensions, and reflect a normative shift toward inclusive, multi-stakeholder development governance [2]. Yet while global norms such as the SDGs provide aspirational targets and a shared policy language across countries, translating these into effective and locally meaningful development outcomes remains an enduring challenge across the Global South.

At the global level, scholars of global development governance have underscored the complexity inherent in operationalizing global norms like the SDGs within diverse national institutional contexts. Research on SDG localization highlights that the normative universality of the SDGs often encounters diverse interpretations and implementation pathways shaped by political, socio-economic, and institutional

specificities of local contexts [3] [4]. For instance, studies on SDG localization frameworks in African cities emphasize that global normative statements must be reconciled with entrenched local realities to generate contextually relevant goals and support governance adaptations [4]. Such work suggests that global norms do not automatically translate into effective local action unless they are mediated by robust institutional translation, capacity development, and governance mechanisms that link macro-level commitments with micro-level realities.

This challenge is especially pronounced in federal and politically complex states like Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and a key actor in regional development discourse. Nigeria formally adopted the SDG agenda and established institutional mechanisms including the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs (OSSAP-SDGs) and domesticated models like the integrated SDG (iSDG) simulation tool to mainstream global development frameworks into national planning processes [5]. Despite these formal structures, empirical assessments reveal mixed outcomes in implementation, with progress on many goals remaining uneven and constrained by structural and institutional obstacles such as weak subnational coordination, insufficient data systems, and resource limitations [6]. For example, Nigeria currently ranks among the lower tier of countries in SDG performance indices, with substantive challenges in key social and economic targets such as education, health, and poverty reduction [6].

A substantial body of recent research has sought to explain these implementation gaps by pointing to institutional weaknesses and governance challenges within Nigeria's development ecosystem. Studies highlight issues such as limited technical capacity at subnational levels, fragmented governance systems, and inadequate stakeholder engagement across sectors, which have collectively undermined the penetration of SDG frameworks into local policy processes [2]. Moreover, research on SDG implementation in Nigeria often focuses on specific goals (e.g., water and sanitation, education) or isolated geographic areas, without systematically examining the broader institutional processes through which global development norms are domesticated and operationalized across governance levels [7].

Despite this growing literature, two key gaps persist. First, there is limited analytical emphasis on the domestication pathways the formal and informal processes that translate global norms into national and subnational policy frameworks, institutional arrangements, and practice. While Nigeria has articulated multiple policy instruments to align with the SDGs, there is insufficient empirical understanding of how these global frameworks are contextualized, negotiated, and integrated into diverse local governance environments. Second, existing studies often describe implementation challenges in general terms (e.g., funding limitations, capacity constraints) without systematically linking these challenges to underlying institutional conditions including governance architectures, accountability mechanisms, and intergovernmental dynamics that shape development performance outcomes in an entrenched federal setting.

This study responds to these gaps by focusing on two interrelated, empirically grounded research objectives: to analyze the processes through which global development frameworks are domesticated into Nigeria's national and subnational institutional settings between 2020 and 2025; and to assess the institutional conditions influencing the implementation outcomes of these frameworks. Addressing these objectives contributes to a nuanced understanding of how global norms are reinterpreted and enacted within local contexts and how institutional strength and coherence affect the realization of sustainable development outcomes. By foregrounding institutional translation and implementation dynamics, this research aims to generate evidence that informs both policy and practice, offering insights into how Nigeria and comparable developing nations might more effectively bridge the normative-implementation divide that characterizes much of the global development agenda.

Policy Translation of Global Norms into Domestic Frameworks

Policy translation is the process through which global development norms such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are adapted and operationalised within national institutional settings. Nigeria formally integrated the SDGs into national planning and launched the Nigeria SDGs Implementation Plan 2020–2030, demonstrating political commitment by establishing institutional structures to mainstream the SDGs across government and subnational levels [8]. The SDG

coordination architecture features horizontal collaboration across ministries each with dedicated SDG focal units and vertical linkages intended to synchronize federal, state, and local government actions. For example, the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs (OSSAP-SDGs) serves as the national coordinating body, with a mandate to build partnerships, mobilise resources, and oversee monitoring and evaluation of SDG implementation nationwide [9].

However, translating global norms into operational routines remains uneven. Despite formal coordination mechanisms, actual implementation is constrained by technical capacity limitations, inadequate resource allocation, and weak engagement of subnational and local actors, resulting in differential integration of SDG priorities across regions [10]. Structural weaknesses including insufficient localisation of global goals into state and local development processes lead to gaps between policy intent and practice [6].

Institutional Capacity and Development Performance

Institutional capacity the ability of governance structures to plan, coordinate, implement, and evaluate policies is key to development performance. Nigeria's SDG frameworks have developed policy platforms and coordination platforms but actual operational capacity varies significantly across sectors and levels of government. Limitations in technical expertise, monitoring systems, and stakeholder participation reduce the ability to translate normative commitments into measurable outcomes [10]. Subnational institutions, which are closest to implementation contexts, often lack the financial, technical, and operational support needed to align local development activities with national SDG priorities, compromising performance on locally relevant targets [6]. Without investment in institutional learning, data systems, and collaborative governance including stronger vertical coordination and capacity development global development frameworks risk remaining aspirational rather than transformative [9][10].

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in policy translation theory, a framework that explains how global ideas, norms, and policy models are interpreted, adapted, and reconstituted as they move across institutional and geographical contexts. The theory is most prominently associated with Dolowitz and Marsh, who conceptualized policy transfer as a process through which knowledge about policies, institutions, and ideas in one political system is used in another [11]. Subsequent scholarship, particularly by Stone and Czarniawska and Joerges, refined this perspective by emphasizing that policies are not simply copied but are translated through local institutional logics, power relations, and socio-political conditions [12][13]. More recent work by Stone situates policy translation within global governance, highlighting how international norms are reshaped as they intersect with domestic political and administrative systems [14].

At its core, policy translation theory assumes that global policy frameworks do not travel intact from the international to the national level. Instead, they undergo processes of interpretation, negotiation, and modification as domestic actors seek to align external norms with local priorities, institutional capacities, and political realities [12][13]. This perspective challenges linear and technocratic assumptions of policy diffusion, arguing that implementation outcomes depend less on formal adoption and more on how policies are recontextualized within local governance environments. The theory further assumes that domestic institutions are not passive recipients of global norms but active agents that selectively adapt, reinterpret, or even resist external policy models based on contextual constraints and interests [11].

The relevance of policy translation theory to this study lies in its explanatory power for understanding the gap between Nigeria's formal commitment to international development frameworks notably the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the uneven development outcomes observed between 2020 and 2025. Nigeria has adopted global development norms through national planning instruments, including the integration of the SDGs into the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan and the National Development Plan, alongside the establishment of coordinating bodies such as the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs [8][15]. From a policy translation perspective, these actions represent formal domestication; however, the theory draws attention to the deeper processes through which global norms are operationalized or diluted within national and subnational institutions.

The significance of policy translation theory for this analysis lies in its ability to move beyond normative assessments of compliance with international frameworks toward an institutional explanation of development performance. While much of the SDG literature evaluates progress using indicators and targets, policy translation theory foregrounds the institutional and administrative processes that shape how global commitments are enacted in practice. This is particularly important in federal and capacity-constrained contexts such as Nigeria, where subnational governments play a decisive role in implementation but often lack the technical, financial, and administrative resources required to fully internalize global development norms [6][10]. By emphasizing translation rather than adoption, the theory provides a more realistic account of why development outcomes vary across sectors and regions despite uniform national commitments.

Applying policy translation theory to Nigeria's implementation of international development frameworks between 2020 and 2025, this study conceptualizes the domestication of global norms as a multi-layered institutional process. Global frameworks such as the SDGs are first reframed within national policy documents and coordination structures, after which they are further translated by ministries, departments, agencies, and subnational governments into sector-specific programs and local development initiatives. At each stage, translation is shaped by institutional capacity, governance arrangements, political incentives, and administrative coordination. Where these conditions are weak, global norms risk becoming symbolic commitments with limited transformative impact. Empirical evidence from Nigeria's SDG implementation indicates that while national-level alignment has improved, translation into subnational planning and service delivery remains uneven, resulting in fragmented outcomes across education, health, and poverty reduction targets [6].

Within this framework, development performance is understood not as a direct function of global policy alignment but as an outcome of how effectively domestic institutions translate international norms into actionable and contextually appropriate interventions. Policy translation theory thus enables this study to assess institutional conditions such as coordination mechanisms, administrative capacity, and accountability systems that influence whether global development frameworks generate tangible outcomes or remain largely aspirational. In doing so, the theory provides a coherent analytical bridge between global development governance and local institutional performance, offering critical insights into the conditions under which international development frameworks can contribute meaningfully to national development trajectories.

Overall, policy translation theory offers a robust and context-sensitive lens for analyzing Nigeria's engagement with international development frameworks. By emphasizing adaptation, institutional mediation, and implementation dynamics, the theory aligns closely with the objectives of this study and enhances its capacity to explain variations in development performance within a complex federal governance system.

2. Methodology

A qualitative research design based entirely on secondary data was adopted to examine Nigeria's implementation of international development frameworks between 2020 and 2025. Data sources included international development framework documents, national policy instruments, official implementation progress reports, government circulars, and other official publications. The study employed thematic analysis to systematically identify patterns and trends in the adaptation, domestication, and operationalization of global norms within Nigeria's institutional and administrative context. This approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the ways in which global development goals are translated into national planning processes and the institutional factors that influence their practical implementation, highlighting both successes and structural challenges across federal and sub-national levels.

3. Results and Discussion

The findings indicate that Nigeria's engagement with global development norms especially the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and international climate

frameworks has resulted in a complex interplay between international commitments and domestic institutional capacities. Nigeria has actively participated in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda and consistently presented Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at the High-Level Political Forum, with the third review submitted in 2025, signaling an ongoing commitment to align national development with global frameworks [16]. The 2025 VNR highlights efforts to strengthen institutional frameworks such as the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs (OSSAP-SDGs), alignment of statistical systems with SDG indicators, and implementation of the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF), which together aim to bolster planning and monitoring capacities [16][17]. However, despite this alignment and improved policy coherence, Nigeria's performance on key SDG indicators shows mixed results, with approximately 34.6 % of goals regressing, 30.8 % stagnating, and less than half improving, underscoring the challenge of translating global norms into tangible development gains [18].

Institutional challenges at the local level significantly influence how effectively these global norms are operationalised. Although national frameworks such as OSSAP-SDGs facilitate coordination across federal and sub-national actors, issues like inadequate funding, weak data systems, and fragmentation in implementation persist, limiting the performance outcomes expected under global development frameworks [19]. Nigeria's performance on SDGs is further complicated by structural factors such as corruption, insecurity, and governance bottlenecks that undermine implementation capacity at both national and sub-national levels [19]. These findings suggest that local institutional weaknesses, rather than a lack of commitment to global norms, are a critical barrier to achieving expected development outcomes. In this way, the incorporation of international standards into national policy may be extensive on paper yet remain effectively limited by domestic institutional constraints.

The following table synthesises the key performance trends and institutional drivers shaping Nigeria's implementation of international development frameworks between 2020 and 2025, illustrating the disparity between normative adoption and real-world outcomes:

Table 1. Key Indicators of Nigeria's Implementation of Global Development Frameworks (2020–2025)

Dimension	Global Norm / Framework	Domestic Institutional Action	Performance Outcome (2025)
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	National SDG integration via OSSAP-SDGs and INFF	Mixed progress: 34.6 % improved, 30.8 % stagnated, 34.6 % regressed [18]
Data and Monitoring	SDG statistical indicators	Alignment of National Statistical System	Strengthened but gaps remain [16]
Climate Change and NDCs	Paris Agreement & COP commitments	Updated NDC targets (NDC 3.0) with emission reduction goals	Ambitious climate targets, limited implementation data [20]
Cross-Sector Partnerships	SDG 17 (Global Partnerships)	Regional and stakeholder consultations	Inclusive consultations held; implementation linkage is weak [21]

Source: As Compiled from official Nigeria SDG monitoring reports and peer-reviewed

analysis, (2026)

Despite notable efforts to institutionalise global norms within local policy frameworks, performance outcomes remain uneven and in many cases below expectations. This discrepancy underscores the gap between normative commitment and sustainable implementation, particularly when local institutions lack resources and effective governance mechanisms to operationalise ambitious global targets. For example, while the alignment of national statistical systems with SDG reporting has improved monitoring capacity, persistent data gaps continue to constrain evidence-based decision-making, thus dampening progress toward several SDG targets [16]. Similarly, although Nigeria's updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement showcases bold commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance climate adaptation, actual implementation and measurable outputs remain nascent and uneven across jurisdictions [20][22].

The implications of these findings point to a critical need for strengthening local institutional capacity and financing mechanisms to better harness the potential of global norms for national development. Nigeria's experience reveals that adherence to international frameworks alone is insufficient to produce broad-based development outcomes without reinforcing underlying domestic governance structures [19]. Robust public sector innovation partnerships, such as the UNDP-OHCSF Memorandum of Understanding to accelerate civil service transformation, demonstrate promising avenues for enhancing administrative capacity and policy delivery [20]. However, sustained domestic financing, deeper stakeholder engagement across private sector and civil society, and more effective accountability mechanisms are essential to bridge the implementation gap and ensure that international norms result in substantive improvements in national development performance.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that Nigeria has demonstrated strong normative commitment to international development frameworks between 2020 and 2025, particularly through the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, climate agreements, and global governance standards; however, these commitments have not consistently translated into improved development performance. While global norms have been effectively integrated into national policies and reporting mechanisms, weak institutional capacity, fragmented governance structures, and limited coordination at subnational levels have constrained effective implementation and measurable outcomes.

The findings further show that the gap between global norms and local development performance is primarily driven by domestic institutional limitations rather than deficiencies in the international frameworks themselves. Inadequate financing, weak data systems, and limited accountability mechanisms have undermined the operationalization of global commitments, resulting in uneven progress across sectors and regions. Strengthening local institutions therefore remains central to ensuring that international development frameworks yield tangible and sustainable development gains in Nigeria.

5. Policy and Actionable Recommendations

1. First, to improve the translation of global norms into development outcomes, Nigeria should strengthen local institutional capacity by aligning international framework commitments with subnational planning, budgeting, and accountability systems.
2. Second, to enhance development performance under international frameworks, government should institutionalize a results-based implementation and monitoring system that links global commitments to measurable national and subnational development indicators and financing mechanisms.

REFERENCES

- [1] United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2015. [Online]. Available:

- <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>. Accessed: Feb. 23, 2026.
- [2] W. O. Adedeji, I. K. Okediran, and B. J. Ojerinde, "Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria: A prognostic appraisal," *OAUSTECH Journal of Engineering and Intelligent Technology*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2025, doi: 10.5281/zenodo.17394590.
- [3] D. Ningrum, S. Malekpour, and R. Raven, "Three perspectives on enabling local actions for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)," *Global Sustainability*, 2024, doi: 10.1017/sus.2024.20.
- [4] Springer, "Global norms, African contexts: A framework for localizing SDGs in cities," in *Localizing the SDGs in African Cities*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2022.
- [5] United Nations Development Programme and Government of Nigeria, "Nigeria adopts and domesticates the Integrated SDG Model (iSDG)," UNDP Nigeria, 2019.
- [6] African Centre for Leadership, Strategy, & Development, *Sustainable Development Goals Implementation in Nigeria: Status, Progress and Concerns (Policy Brief)*, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://centrelsd.org/news-and-updates/publications/sustainable-development-goals-sdgs-implementation-in-nigeria-status-progress-and-concerns>. Accessed: Feb. 23, 2026.
- [7] T. O. Ogunbode, "A nine-year critical review of progress and future strategies for SDG 6 in Nigeria," *Discover Sustainability*, vol. 6, Art. no. 1466, 2025, doi: 10.1007/s43621-025-02009-8.
- [8] United Nations Development Programme, "Government of Nigeria launches the Nigeria SDGs implementation plan 2020–2030," 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://www.undp.org/nigeria/press-releases/government-nigeria-launches-nigeria-sdgs-implementation-plan-2020-2030-support-undp>. Accessed: Feb. 23, 2026.
- [9] United Nations Office for Sustainable Development, "Advancing the SDGs through multi-level governance: Nigeria case," unpublished briefing, 2025.
- [10] M. Oweibia, U. G. Elemuwa, E. Akpan, *et al.*, "Analyzing Nigeria's journey towards Sustainable Development Goals: A comprehensive review from inception to present," *F1000Research*, vol. 13, Art. no. 984, 2024, doi: 10.12688/f1000research.148020.1.
- [11] D. P. Dolowitz and D. Marsh, "Learning from abroad: The role of policy transfer in contemporary policy-making," *Governance*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 5–24, 2000, doi: 10.1111/0952-1895.00121.
- [12] D. Stone, "Transfer agents and global networks in the 'transnationalization' of policy," *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 545–566, 2004, doi: 10.1080/13501760410001694291.
- [13] B. Czarniawska and B. Joerges, "Travels of ideas," in *Translating Organizational Change*, B. Czarniawska and G. Sevón, Eds. Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 1996, pp. 13–48.
- [14] D. Stone, "Understanding the transfer of policy failure: Bricolage, experimentalism and translation," *Policy & Politics*, vol. 45, no. 1, pp. 55–70, 2017, doi: 10.1332/030557316X14788764753176.
- [15] Federal Government of Nigeria, *National Development Plan 2021–2025*. Federal Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning, 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://nigeriaembassykyiv.com.ua/files/ndp-2021-2025-vol.-i-for-printing-10122021.pdf>. Accessed: Feb. 23, 2026.
- [16] Federal Republic of Nigeria, "Nigeria presents third voluntary national review on SDGs at the UN High-Level Political Forum," 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://sdgs.gov.ng/nigeria-presents-third-voluntary-national-review-on-sdgs-at-un-high-level-political-forum/>. Accessed: Feb. 23, 2026.
- [17] United Nations High-Level Political Forum, "Nigeria's 2025 voluntary national review on sustainable development: Main messages," 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2025/HLPF%202025%20Nigeria%20Main%20Messages.pdf>. Accessed: Feb. 23, 2026.
- [18] *Daily Trust*, "Nigeria presents 3rd voluntary review on SDGs at UN High-Level Forum," 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://dailytrust.com/nigeria-presents-3rd-voluntary-review-on-sdgs-at-un-high-level-forum>. Accessed: Feb. 23, 2026.
- [19] A. A. Aderogba and O. A. Aderogba, "Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and global inclusive development framework in Nigeria," *Journal of the Management Sciences*, vol. 61, no. 8, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jfms/article/view/5945>. Accessed: Feb. 23, 2026.
- [20] United Nations Development Programme Nigeria, "Nigeria unveils its NDC climate action 3.0 at UNGA: The real work begins," 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.undp.org/nigeria/blog/nigeria-unveils-its-ndc-climate-action-30-unga-real-work-begins>. Accessed: Feb. 23, 2026.
- [21] *THISDAYLIVE*, "FG rallies stakeholders to fast-track SDGs implementation to tackle poverty," Mar. 17, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.thisdaylive.com/2025/03/17/fg-rallies-stakeholders-to-fast-track-sdgs-implementation-to-tackle-poverty/>. Accessed: Feb. 23, 2026.
- [22] *Leadership Newspaper*, "Nigeria admits regression in SDGs indicators," 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://leadership.ng/nigeria-admits-regression-in-sdgs-indicators/>. Accessed: Feb. 23, 2026.