



doi:10.5281/zenodo.18518240

# **Knowledge And Perceived Effectiveness Of Urban And Regional Planning Policies In Nigeria Among Residents In Rivers State, Nigeria**

**\*Dike-Nwamu Maryan Joy & Dr. M, B, T. Kpang**

**Department of Geography and Environmental Management,  
Faculty of the Social Sciences,  
University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria  
\*Email: [mjnwamu@gmail.com](mailto:mjnwamu@gmail.com)**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined residents' knowledge and perceived effectiveness of urban and regional planning policies in Rivers State, Nigeria, using a survey research design. A random sample of 150 respondents, comprising homeowners and representatives of urban and regional planning agencies, was selected. Data was collected using a validated researcher-developed questionnaires with a reliability index of 0.84. 150 copies of the questionnaire were administered to obtain demographic data, knowledge of building and development permits, perceptions of regional planning policies, and stakeholder engagement in planning processes. The results indicated that although most respondents were aware of permit requirements (78.67%), knowledge depth was limited, as only 18.67% reported being very knowledgeable, while 55.33% were somewhat knowledgeable and 26.00% were not knowledgeable. Consistent with this knowledge gap, only 27.33% had ever applied for a building or development permit, with 72.67% reporting no prior application; however, among applicants, experiences were largely positive (14.67% somewhat positive; 7.33% very positive). Perceptions of planning outcomes were mixed: 52.00% rated regional planning policies as somewhat effective and 16.67% as highly effective, while 18.67% were neutral and 12.67% rated them ineffective. Importantly, 58.00% believed planning policies had negatively affected homeowners through demolitions without proper compensation. Stakeholder engagement was generally perceived as weak, with 50.67% rating participation as very low, compared to 43.33% reporting moderate engagement and only 6.00% reporting very high engagement. The study recommends strengthening public education on permit processes, improving inclusive stakeholder participation, ensuring transparent and fair compensation mechanisms, and instituting regular policy evaluation and multi stakeholder collaboration to enhance planning effectiveness and socio-economic outcomes in Rivers State.

**Keywords:** Knowledge, Perceived effectiveness, Urban Regional Planning, Policy, Rivers State

## 1.0 Introduction

Urban and regional planning remains a central tool for guiding orderly physical development, regulating land use, and coordinating infrastructure provision in cities and regions. As urbanization accelerates across many low and middle income settings, planning institutions face increasing pressure to manage rapid growth, informal development, and competing land demands (Chau et al., 2018). In Nigeria, these pressures are particularly visible in fast growing and economically strategic states such as Rivers State (Abubakar et al., 2025), where urban expansion, migration, and development activities continue to reshape settlement patterns. Within this environment, the success of planning is not only determined by the existence of policies and institutions, but also by how residents understand planning requirements and how they perceive the outcomes and fairness of planning actions.

A key factor shaping the effectiveness of planning in practice is residents' knowledge of urban and regional planning requirements, especially building and development permit processes. Knowledge, in this context, refers to the degree to which residents understand what planning regulations require, the procedures for compliance, and the implications of non-compliance for development control. When knowledge is low, compliance tends to weaken, and planning agencies may encounter resistance, delays, and enforcement conflicts because residents perceive permit processes as unclear or burdensome. Evidence from the literature suggests that socio economic change, land use dynamics, and urban growth pressures can strain planning systems, making clear information dissemination and regulatory clarity crucial for effective implementation (Cheng et al., 2018; Jiang et al., 2022). In addition, planning is often contested where regulatory processes are not well understood or when residents interpret them as restrictive rather than protective. These contestations become more pronounced when experiences of compliance are shaped by negative outcomes such as delays, perceived inefficiency, or inconsistent enforcement, thereby linking knowledge directly to perceptions of planning legitimacy and policy effectiveness.

Closely connected to knowledge is residents' perceived effectiveness of urban and regional planning policies, which refers to how residents judge planning policies in terms of their ability to achieve intended planning outcomes and deliver public value. Perceived effectiveness matters because even well-designed planning frameworks can fail socially if residents believe the policies are ineffective, unfair, or selectively enforced. The literature argues that planning effectiveness depends not only on technical policy design but also on governance quality, transparency, and the capacity of institutions to implement plans consistently (Adeyemi & Olatubara, 2018; Pfeffer & Malmberg, 2018). Where residents perceive planning outcomes as inequitable such as through demolition practices, weak procedural safeguards, or limited accountability trust can erode and compliance becomes more difficult to secure. In this sense, perceived effectiveness is both a reflection of policy performance and a determinant of public cooperation with planning institutions, making it a crucial variable for understanding the broader acceptability of planning governance.

Although existing studies have examined planning and development control in Nigeria, evidence remains limited on how residents in Rivers State simultaneously experience and interpret (a) their knowledge of permit requirements and (b) the perceived effectiveness of planning policies, including concerns about enforcement outcomes and stakeholder engagement. The literature increasingly acknowledges that policy success in planning depends on citizen understanding, perceptions of fairness, and meaningful participation, yet empirical work that integrates these dimensions within the Rivers State context remains insufficient (Adeyemi & Olatubara, 2018; Pfeffer & Malmberg, 2018). This gap is important because Rivers State's unique development pressures and governance dynamics may shape residents' knowledge and perceptions differently from other regions, meaning that assumptions based on broader national trends may not hold. Addressing this gap can provide evidence to strengthen communication strategies, participation mechanisms, and the implementation legitimacy of planning institutions. Hence, this study was to examine residents' knowledge of building and development permit requirements and their

perceptions of the effectiveness of urban and regional planning policies in Rivers State, Nigeria, including perceived issues around policy implementation and stakeholder engagement.

### **Aim and Objectives**

This study investigates the urban and regional planning effect on socio-economic development in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study specific objectives were as follows:

1. To determine is the level of knowledge and understanding of building and development permits among residents in Rivers State.
2. To find out the perceptions of regional planning policies and their effectiveness in promoting socio-economic development among residents in Rivers State.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the objectives, three research questions were answered in this study

1. What is the level of knowledge and understanding of building and development permits among residents in Rivers State?
2. What are the perceptions of regional planning policies and their effectiveness in promoting socio-economic development among residents in Rivers State?

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

**Historical Development of Urban and Regional Planning in Rivers State:** Urban and regional planning in Rivers State has a rich history and has undergone significant developments over the years.

Here is an overview of the history and key developments in urban and regional planning in Rivers State:

**Early Development and Colonial Era:** During the colonial era, Rivers State (then part of the Niger Coast Protectorate) witnessed the establishment of administrative structures that laid the foundation for urban development. Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State, was established in 1913 as a major port for the export of agricultural produce (Yang et al., 2022).

**Post-Independence Era:** After Nigeria gained independence in 1960, urban and regional planning in Rivers State experienced a significant boost. The State Town Planning Office was established to regulate land use and physical development. The focus was primarily on managing urban growth, ensuring basic infrastructure, and providing housing for the growing population.

**Oil Boom and Urbanization:** The discovery of oil in Nigeria, including substantial reserves in Rivers State, led to rapid urbanization and economic growth. The influx of people and investments transformed Port Harcourt into a major industrial and commercial center. The urban planning focus shifted towards accommodating the needs of a rapidly growing city and managing the environmental and social impacts of oil exploration and production (Jiang et al., 2020).

**Development of Planning Institutions:** To strengthen urban and regional planning in Rivers State, several planning institutions were established. The Rivers State Physical Planning and Development Authority (RSPDA) was set up as the primary agency responsible for land use planning and development control. The agency is tasked with implementing the state's planning policies and regulations.

**Master Plans and Development Strategies:** Over the years, Rivers State has developed and implemented various master plans and development strategies to guide urban growth and regional development. These plans aim to promote sustainable development, manage land use, infrastructure provision, transportation, housing, and environmental conservation. The master plans provide a roadmap for orderly and balanced development across the state (Ouyang et al., 2022).

**Infrastructure Development:** Rivers State has witnessed significant infrastructure development to support its growing urban centers. This includes the construction and expansion of roads, bridges, airports, seaports, water supply systems, and electricity networks. Infrastructure projects have been implemented to enhance connectivity, stimulate economic activities, and improve the quality of life for residents.

**Environmental Conservation and Sustainability:** Recognizing the importance of environmental conservation, Rivers State has implemented measures to protect its natural resources, including mangroves, forests, and riverine ecosystems. Efforts have been made to promote sustainable building

practices, incorporate green spaces into urban areas, and address environmental challenges arising from industrial activities and urbanization (Eppenberger & Richter, 2021).

**Participatory Planning and Stakeholder Engagement:** Rivers State has embraced participatory planning approaches, encouraging public participation and stakeholder engagement in decision-making processes. This includes conducting public consultations, engaging with communities and interest groups, and incorporating their perspectives and feedback into planning initiatives.

#### **Challenges and Future Directions:**

Despite the progress made, urban and regional planning in Rivers State faces several challenges, including rapid urbanization, inadequate infrastructure, informal settlements, and environmental degradation. Future directions should focus on addressing these challenges through integrated planning approaches, sustainable development strategies, and inclusive governance mechanisms.

Overall, urban and regional planning in Rivers State has evolved significantly over the years to manage urbanization, support economic growth, and promote sustainable development. Efforts continue to be made to address the challenges and ensure that planning initiatives align with the needs and aspirations of the state's residents (Wang et al., 2021).

### **Impact of Urban and Regional Planning on Socio-economic Development**

#### **Infrastructure Development**

Proper planning facilitates the provision of essential infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, water supply, electricity, and waste management systems. By ensuring adequate infrastructure, urban and regional planning can attract investments, support industries, and enhance the overall socio-economic development of Rivers State.

#### **Housing and Land Use**

Efficient land use planning and the provision of affordable housing are crucial for social stability and economic growth. Through zoning regulations, urban and regional planning can allocate land for residential, commercial, and industrial purposes, ensuring a balanced and sustainable urban environment. Affordable housing schemes and slum upgrading programs can improve living conditions and foster inclusive development (Zhou et al., 2021).

#### **Transportation and Connectivity**

An effective transportation network is vital for economic activities and social connectivity. Urban and regional planning can address transportation challenges by developing efficient road networks, promoting public transportation systems, and integrating land use and transportation planning. Well-planned transportation infrastructure enhances accessibility, reduces congestion, and boosts economic productivity.

#### **Environmental Sustainability**

Urban and regional planning should prioritize environmental sustainability to mitigate the negative impacts of rapid urbanization. It can promote green spaces, protect natural resources, and encourage sustainable building practices. By incorporating environmental considerations into planning processes, Rivers State can achieve long-term socio-economic development while preserving its natural heritage (Oduwaye, 2018).

### **METHODOLOGY**

**Research Design:** The study adopts a cross-sectional survey design to gather data on the knowledge and perceptions of homeowners and urban and regional planning agencies regarding the urban and regional planning effect on socio-economic development in Rivers State. The survey design allows for the collection of data at a specific point in time and provides insights into the current state of affairs.

**Study Area:** Rivers State is located in the southern part of Nigeria and is one of the country's leading economic hubs. The state's capital, Port Harcourt, is a major industrial and commercial center, attracting

significant investments in various sectors, including oil and gas, manufacturing, and services. The region's natural resources, such as oil and gas reserves, fertile land, and water bodies, contribute to its economic significance.

**Population:**

The population of interest for this study includes homeowners and urban and regional planning agencies in Rivers State. Homeowners represent the target group affected by urban and regional planning policies, while planning agencies provide insights into the planning processes and policies. This is therefore estimated to be 240.

**Sample Size:**

The sample size for this study is determined through random sampling. The sample size should be representative enough to generalize the findings to the broader population of homeowners and planning agencies in Rivers State. Therefore, The Taro Yamane formula is used to determine the sample size required for a given population size. The formula is as follows:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e^2))$$

Where: n = sample size, N = population size, and e = margin of error (expressed as a decimal). Therefore, a population size of approximately 240 would lead to a sample size of 150, given a margin of error of 0.05 using the Taro Yamane formula.

**Sampling Technique:** The study utilizes a random sampling technique to ensure the selection of participants from the population. Random sampling helps in minimizing bias and ensures that each member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample. The sample can be generated using a random number generator or other random selection methods.

**Operationalization of Variables:** The study identifies variables such as knowledge of building and development permits, perceptions of regional planning policies, and adverse effects on homeowners. These variables need to be operationalized, which involves defining them in measurable terms. For example, knowledge can be operationalized through a questionnaire that assesses specific knowledge areas related to building permits and processes.

**Validity and Reliability:** To ensure the validity of the survey instrument, the questionnaire should be developed based on established literature and theories related to urban and regional planning. The questions were accurately capture the intended constructs and provide meaningful data. Piloting the questionnaire with a small sample can help identify any issues with item clarity or response options. Reliability was assessed through measures such as test-retest reliability or internal consistency analysis (e.g., Cronbach's alpha) to ensure that the questionnaire items yield consistent results over time or across similar constructs.

**Data Analysis Technique and Tools:** The data collected from the survey can be analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency, can be used to summarize the data. Inferential statistics, such as chi-square tests or t-tests, can be employed to explore relationships and associations between variables. Statistical analysis tools, such as SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to analyze the data. These software packages provide a range of statistical tests and functions for data manipulation, exploration, and hypothesis testing.

## Results

Each of the responses provides insights into the participants' perspectives and experiences regarding urban and regional planning in Rivers State.

### Table 1: Demographic Information

<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Gender		
Male	85	56.67%
Female	63	42.00%
Other	2	1.33%
Age		
Under 18	7	4.67%
18-25	25	16.67%
26-35	43	28.67%
36-45	42	28.00%
46-55	25	16.67%
56 and above	8	5.33%
Educational Background		
Primary Education	9	6.00%
Secondary Education	36	24.00%
Vocational/Technical Training	24	16.00%
Bachelor's Degree	57	38.00%
Master's Degree	18	12.00%
Doctorate Degree	6	4.00%
Occupation		
Student	19	12.67%
Employed	91	60.67%
Self-employed	27	18.00%
Unemployed	9	6.00%
Retired	3	2.00%
Other	1	0.67%
Length of Residency in Rivers State		
Less than 1 year	12	8.00%
1-5 years	34	22.67%
6-10 years	56	37.33%
More than 10 years	48	32.00%

The demographic characteristics in table 1 of the participants showed that the study involved 150 respondents, with males forming the majority (56.67%), followed by females (42.00%) and a small proportion identifying as other (1.33%). Respondents were largely within the productive adult age brackets, as those aged 26–35 (28.67%) and 36–45 (28.00%) constituted the largest groups, suggesting a mature population likely to have direct experience with housing, land use, and planning issues. Educationally, the sample was relatively well educated, with bachelor’s degree holders dominating (38.00%), alongside secondary education (24.00%) and vocational or technical training (16.00%), indicating a mix of formal and practical skills. Most respondents were employed (60.67%), while self-employed individuals also formed a notable share (18.00%), implying stable economic engagement and potential exposure to property development decisions. Residency patterns show strong local familiarity, as 37.33% had lived in Rivers State for 6–10 years and 32.00% for over 10 years, supporting informed perceptions of planning policies.

**Table 2: Knowledge of Building and Development Permits**

Questions	Count	Percentage
Are you aware of the requirements for obtaining building permits in Rivers State?		
Yes	118	78.67%
No	32	21.33%
Please indicate your level of knowledge regarding the components and requirements of building and development permits in Rivers State		
Very Knowledgeable	28	18.67%
Somewhat Knowledgeable	83	55.33%
Not Knowledgeable	39	26.00%
Have you ever applied for a building or development permit in Rivers State?		
Yes	41	27.33%
No	109	72.67%
If yes, please rate your experience in obtaining the permit(s) in terms of ease and efficiency		
Very Positive	11	7.33%
Somewhat Positive	22	14.67%
Neutral	5	3.33%
Somewhat Negative	2	1.33%
Very Negative	1	0.67%

The findings showed that most respondents were aware of the requirements for obtaining building permits in Rivers State, as 118 participants (78.67%) reported awareness, while 32 (21.33%) indicated they were not aware. In terms of depth of understanding, the majority described themselves as somewhat knowledgeable (55.33%), suggesting moderate familiarity with permit components and procedures, although a notable proportion still reported being not knowledgeable (26.00%), indicating existing information gaps. Only a smaller fraction considered themselves very knowledgeable (18.67%), implying that high level mastery of permit requirements was limited among respondents. Despite the relatively high awareness levels, most respondents had not applied for a building or development permit, with 109 (72.67%) reporting no prior application and only 41 (27.33%) indicating they had applied. Among those who had applied, experiences were generally rated positively, as 22 (14.67%) reported somewhat positive experiences and 11 (7.33%) reported very positive experiences, while only a few respondents reported negative experiences, showing that permit acquisition was perceived as manageable by many applicants.

**Table 3: Perceptions of Regional Planning Policies**

Questions	Count	Percentage
In your opinion, how effective are the regional planning policies in promoting socio-economic development in Rivers State?		
Highly Effective	25	16.67%
Somewhat Effective	78	52.00%
Neutral	28	18.67%
Somewhat Ineffective	16	10.67%
Highly Ineffective	3	2.00%
Do you believe that the regional planning policies have negatively impacted homeowners in terms of property demolitions without proper compensation?		
Yes	87	58.00%
No	57	38.00%
Not Sure	6	4.00%

---

How would you rate the level of stakeholder engagement and public participation in the urban and regional planning processes in Rivers State?		
Very High	9	6.00%
Moderate	65	43.33%
Very Low	76	50.67%

---

The result in table 3 revealed that the residents’ perception towards urban planning policy effectiveness was positively but with clear reservations, as most respondents rated the policies as somewhat effective (52.00%) and a smaller proportion considered them highly effective (16.67%). However, 18.67% remained neutral, and 12.67% viewed the policies as ineffective to varying degrees, suggesting that confidence in planning outcomes was not uniform. Importantly, a majority believed the policies had negatively affected homeowners through demolitions without proper compensation, with 87 respondents (58.00%) agreeing, compared to 57 (38.00%) who disagreed and 6 (4.00%) who were unsure. Stakeholder participation was generally perceived as weak, as 76 respondents (50.67%) rated engagement as very low, 65 (43.33%) rated it moderate, and only 9 (6.00%) rated it very high.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings on knowledge of building and development permits suggested a clear gap between general awareness and practical understanding among residents. Although most respondents had been aware of permit requirements, the dominant pattern was only moderate knowledge, and a sizeable minority had reported being not knowledgeable. More importantly, most participants had never applied for a permit, implying that awareness might have been superficial or passive rather than action oriented. This outcome supported the argument that planning systems in fast growing contexts often struggle with compliance when residents do not fully understand procedures, standards, and benefits, which can weaken orderly development outcomes (Oduwaye, 2018). It also aligned with broader evidence that governance and socio-economic systems interact strongly, meaning that where institutions do not communicate clearly, policy intentions do not translate into behavioural change (Wang et al., 2021). However, the findings did not fully align with the expectation that a relatively educated and employed sample would demonstrate stronger technical knowledge and higher participation in formal approval processes. This mismatch suggested that education level alone might not guarantee planning literacy, particularly where permit systems are perceived as bureaucratic, costly, or disconnected from everyday development realities. In this sense, the results indirectly challenged a purely “human capital” assumption by showing that even where respondents were educated, engagement with formal permit processes remained limited, reflecting deeper institutional and procedural constraints (Adeyemi & Olatubara, 2018).

On perceptions of regional planning policies and their effectiveness, respondents had generally leaned positive but with clear reservations, as most had rated policies as somewhat effective, while a smaller proportion saw them as highly effective and a meaningful group remained neutral or viewed them as ineffective. This mixed judgement implied that residents may have recognized the potential of planning to deliver development benefits, yet did not experience these benefits consistently enough to produce strong confidence. The positive component of the findings was consistent with literature emphasizing that planning can shape socio economic outcomes through infrastructure provision, land use coordination, and spatial organizations that supports investment and productivity (Adeyemi & Olatubara, 2018; Oduwaye, 2018). It also resonated with studies showing that socio economic development and policy effectiveness are closely linked, especially when planning frameworks are integrated with broader development priorities (Pfeffer and Malmberg, 2018). Yet, the neutrality and perceived ineffectiveness reported by some respondents did not sit comfortably with literature that portrays coordinated planning as a strong driver of equitable development, suggesting that Rivers State may be experiencing an implementation gap where policy intent exists but delivery outcomes are uneven (Oduwaye, 2018). In addition, evidence that rapid socio-economic changes can generate environmental and social pressures when governance does not

keep pace offered a useful explanation for why residents might not perceive strong effectiveness in practice (Cheng et al., 2018; Jiang, Li & Liu, 2022).

A particularly critical result was that a majority of respondents had believed planning policies had negatively affected homeowners through demolitions without proper compensation, alongside a perception that stakeholder engagement and public participation were low. These findings raised concerns about procedural justice and social equity, because planning that is experienced as punitive or unfair can undermine legitimacy and compliance, even when policies are development oriented. This outcome supported the view that socio economic development trajectories are not only shaped by growth outcomes but also by how costs and benefits are distributed and whether governance systems protect citizens' rights (Pfeffer & Malmberg, 2018). It also aligned with arguments that inequality in access, participation, and outcomes can persist even where planning structures exist, particularly when decision making is top down (Zhou & Shi, 2019). However, the perception of very low engagement appeared to contradict the ideal of participatory planning and inclusive governance pathways described as necessary for sustainable development and social acceptance (Adeyemi & Olatubara, 2018). In practical terms, even if planning agencies had conducted consultations, the dominant "very low" rating suggested that such engagements were either insufficient, poorly communicated, or not perceived as meaningful. The demolition compensation concern also implied that policy enforcement might be emphasized over social safeguards, which could weaken trust and intensify resistance, thereby reducing the overall effectiveness that residents otherwise acknowledged.

This result has a quite number of implications for policies: planning can support socio economic development, but its legitimacy depends on transparency, fairness, and citizen inclusion. The knowledge findings implied that policy implementation should not assume awareness equals understanding; instead, permit literacy must be treated as a core governance function, supported by sustained public education and simplified compliance processes (Oduwaye, 2018). The perception findings implied that effectiveness will remain "somewhat" rather than "highly" perceived if policy outputs are not visible in everyday infrastructure, housing orderliness, and improved quality of life, a point consistent with literature linking development outcomes to integrated policy delivery rather than policy design alone (Pfeffer & Malmberg, 2018; Wang et al., 2021). Most importantly, the demolition and participation results suggested that planning reforms must strengthen procedural safeguards, compensation mechanisms, and public participation structures, because socio economic development that produces insecurity and perceived injustice can worsen social vulnerability and deepen inequality (Zhou & Shi, 2019). In short, the evidence implied that Rivers State should pursue a planning approach that combines enforcement with education and social protection, ensuring that development control is not experienced as exclusionary but as a legitimate pathway to inclusive growth (Adeyemi & Olatubara, 2018; Oduwaye, 2018).

## **CONCLUSION**

The survey findings highlight a lack of adequate knowledge among homeowners regarding the components and requirements of building and development permits. Additionally, the adverse effects of regional planning policies, including the destruction of homes without proper compensation, were identified as significant concerns. To address these issues, it is essential for planning agencies to prioritize public awareness, effective communication, and stakeholder engagement in the planning processes. By incorporating transparent and participatory decision-making, Rivers State can promote socio-economic development while safeguarding the rights and well-being of its residents. Urban and regional planning plays a vital role in shaping the socio-economic development of Rivers State. By addressing challenges related to infrastructure, housing, transportation, and environmental sustainability, effective planning can promote inclusive and sustainable development. It is essential for the government, planning authorities, and stakeholders to collaborate and prioritize long-term planning strategies to maximize the positive impact on Rivers State's socio-economic growth.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Planning authorities in Rivers State, working with local government councils and community leadership structures, should prioritize improving residents' knowledge of building and development permit requirements. This is necessary because the findings suggest that limited understanding of what permits involve, how to obtain them, and why they matter can contribute to non-compliance, enforcement conflicts, and weak support for orderly development. The most practical way to address this is through sustained public sensitization using town hall meetings, community-based workshops, radio programmes in local languages, simplified guides and infographics, and outreach through churches, schools, youth groups, and landlords' associations, ensuring the information is clear, accessible, and repeated enough to reach diverse population groups.
2. Urban and regional planning agencies, together with the Ministry responsible for physical planning, should strengthen stakeholder engagement and public participation as a core planning requirement rather than an optional step. This is important because inclusive participation improves legitimacy, reduces resistance to planning decisions, and produces plans that better reflect community priorities and local realities, thereby improving socio economic outcomes. This can be achieved by institutionalizing public consultations before major planning decisions, involving community representatives and professional bodies in planning reviews, creating feedback mechanisms that allow residents to track responses to their concerns, and establishing regular forums where planners and the public can maintain ongoing dialogue, especially in areas experiencing rapid development pressures.
3. The Rivers State Government and relevant compensation and land administration bodies should urgently address the issue of property demolitions without adequate or timely compensation by strengthening and enforcing compensation frameworks. This is necessary because perceived injustice in demolitions can deepen public distrust, worsen socio economic hardship, and encourage avoidance behaviors that undermine planning compliance. The action should include clear compensation guidelines aligned with due process, transparent valuation procedures, independent review channels for disputes, and timely payment mechanisms, while ensuring that affected residents are informed early, given reasonable notice, and supported through grievance redress systems that are simple, accessible, and credible.
4. Policy makers in the state, supported by planning agencies and independent research institutions, should adopt a culture of routine policy evaluation to ensure planning policies remain effective and responsive to emerging socio-economic realities. This is important because policies that are not reviewed regularly may fail to address evolving challenges such as population growth, informal expansion, environmental risks, and changing economic needs, which can weaken development outcomes over time. This can be done through periodic monitoring and evaluation frameworks that use measurable indicators, stakeholder feedback, and field-based evidence, with evaluation reports informing targeted policy revisions, improved enforcement strategies, and the reallocation of resources to high impact planning priorities.
5. Professional planning institutions, state ministries, and training partners such as universities and recognized professional bodies should invest in capacity building for planners and related stakeholders to strengthen planning implementation. This is necessary because effective urban and regional planning depends on technical competence, ethical practice, and the ability to manage complex development pressures while balancing social and economic needs. Practical capacity building can include regular professional development training, workshops on participatory planning and conflict resolution, updates on digital planning tools and land information systems, and structured mentorship programmes that improve service delivery, reduce errors, and promote consistent application of planning standards across the state.
6. The state government should also encourage stronger multi stakeholder collaboration involving government agencies, the private sector, academic institutions, civil society organisations, and

community-based organisations to improve the effectiveness of planning interventions. This is important because socio economic development challenges are multi-dimensional, and collaborative approaches allow resources, expertise, and innovation to be pooled, reducing duplication and strengthening implementation outcomes. This can be achieved by establishing formal partnership platforms for joint planning projects, creating clear roles for partners in community renewal and infrastructure programmes, supporting research to generate evidence for planning decisions, and incentivizing responsible private sector participation in development initiatives that align with approved plans and community priorities.

7. Finally, policy makers and planning agencies should translate these actions into a coordinated implementation roadmap that links planning reforms to measurable socio-economic development targets. This is necessary to ensure the recommendations do not remain aspirational but produce visible improvements in the lived experience of residents, including safer neighborhoods, better infrastructure, reduced disputes, and more inclusive growth. This can be done by assigning responsibilities to specific institutions, setting timelines and monitoring benchmarks, securing budget allocations, and publishing periodic progress updates that keep stakeholders informed and build accountability across the planning system.

## REFERENCES

- Abubakar, A. S., Bello, N. I., & Ismail, A. H. (2025). Navigating Environmental Migration in Nigeria: Trends, Impacts, And Strategic Responses. *International Journal of Environmental Pollution and Environmental Modelling*, 8(1), 1-10.
- Adeyemi, T. O., & Olatubara, C. O. (2018). Urban and Regional Planning as a Catalyst for Socio-economic Development: A Review of Literature. *International Journal of Innovation and Economic Development*, 4(4), 13-25.
- Chau, K. W., Choy, L. H., & Webster, C. J. (2018). Institutional innovations in land development and planning in the 20th and 21st centuries. *Habitat International*, 75, 90-95.
- Cheng, X., Chen, L., Sun, R., & Kong, P. (2018). Land use changes and socio-economic development strongly deteriorate river ecosystem health in one of the largest basins in China. *Science of the Total Environment*, 616, 376-385.
- Eppenberger, N., & Richter, M. A. (2021). The opportunity of shared autonomous vehicles to improve spatial equity in accessibility and socio-economic developments in European urban areas. *European transport research review*, 13(1), 1-21.
- Jiang, C., Li, J., & Liu, J. (2022). Does urbanization affect the gap between urban and rural areas? Evidence from China. *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences*, 82, 101271.
- Jiang, L., He, S., Cui, Y., Zhou, H., & Kong, H. (2020). Effects of the socio-economic influencing factors on SO2 pollution in Chinese cities: A spatial econometric analysis based on satellite observed data. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 268, 110667.
- Oduwaye, L. (2018). Planning, Urbanization, and Urban Poverty in Nigeria: A Review. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 20(2), 1-15.
- Ouyang, X., Xu, J., Li, J., Wei, X., & Li, Y. (2022). Land space optimization of urban-agriculture-ecological functions in the Changsha-Zhuzhou-Xiangtan Urban Agglomeration, China. *Land Use Policy*, 117, 106112.
- Pfeffer, K., & Malmberg, A. (2018). Urban and Regional Development Trajectories in Contemporary Capitalism. *Regional Studies*, 52(1), 8-20.
- Wang, D., Zhou, T., Lan, F., & Wang, M. (2021). ICT and socio-economic development: Evidence from a spatial panel data analysis in China. *Telecommunications Policy*, 45(7), 102173.
- Zhou, M., Deng, J., Lin, Y., Zhang, L., He, S., & Yang, W. (2021). Evaluating combined effects of socio-economic development and ecological conservation policies on sediment retention service in the Qiantang River Basin, China. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 286, 124961.
- Zhou, Q., & Shi, W. (2019). Socio-economic transition and inequality of energy consumption among urban and rural residents in China. *Energy and Buildings*, 190, 15-24.