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Assessing the Role of Development Control Agencies in Enhancing Sustainable Architecture in Lagos State

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ABSTRACT

Rapid urbanisation in Lagos State, Nigeria, has intensified pressure on the built environment, heightening concerns about environmental sustainability and building performance. While sustainable architecture has been promoted as a response to these challenges, its implementation is strongly shaped by regulatory and institutional frameworks. This study assesses the role of development control agencies in enhancing sustainable architecture in Lagos State. A qualitative literature and document analysis was conducted, reviewing approximately 20 relevant publications, from which 8 key studies were selected for in-depth thematic synthesis. The analysis focused on regulatory awareness, enforcement effectiveness, institutional challenges, and the influence of development control processes on architectural outcomes. Findings indicate that development control agencies demonstrate moderate awareness of sustainability principles, but enforcement remains largely compliance-orientated, prioritising spatial order and building safety over environmental performance. Sustainability considerations such as energy efficiency and climate-responsive design are weakly embedded within approval and monitoring processes, limiting regulatory impact. Institutional capacity constraints and poor inter-agency coordination further undermine enforcement effectiveness. The study concludes that development control agencies have significant but underutilised potential to promote sustainable architecture in Lagos State and recommends the integration of explicit sustainability benchmarks and strengthened regulatory capacity.

Keywords: Development Control, Lagos State, Regulatory Enforcement, Urban Development, Sustainable Architecture.

INTRODUCTION

Rapid urbanisation is a defining feature of cities in the Global South, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where population growth, rural–urban migration, and economic concentration continue to place intense pressure on urban infrastructure, land use, and the built environment (UN-Habitat, 2020; Oladunmoye, 2025). Lagos State, Nigeria’s economic and commercial hub, exemplifies these dynamics, with sustained migration and demographic expansion driving rapid physical development and land-use transformation across the metropolitan region (Lawanson, Oyalowo, Nubi, 2021). The pace of urban growth, estimated at over 20 million residents, has frequently outstripped the institutional and regulatory capacity required for effective development management and control (Soyinka, Siu, Lawanson, & Adeniji, 2017).

Sustainable architecture has been advanced as a critical response to the environmental and socio-economic challenges associated with rapid urbanisation in high-density cities (United Nations Environment Programme UNEP, 2020). It emphasises environmentally responsible design, efficient resource use, climate-responsive strategies, waste minimisation, and improved life-cycle performance of buildings (Olanipekun, Xia, & Skitmore, 2016). In Lagos, the adoption of sustainable architectural principles is increasingly

recognised as essential for mitigating environmental degradation, reducing energy demand, improving thermal comfort, and enhancing resilience to climate-related risks (Kalu, Ogunnaike, & Eze, 2025).

The implementation of sustainable architecture extends beyond design practice and is strongly shaped by institutional and regulatory frameworks governing physical development (Adeyemi, Onifade, Jimoh, & Akindeju, 2023). Development control agencies influence architectural outcomes through planning approvals, building control, site inspections, and regulatory enforcement (Lawanson, Sawyer, & Olalekan, 2025). In Lagos State, agencies such as the Lagos State Physical Planning Permit Authority (LASPPPA) and the Lagos State Building Control Agency (LABSCA) are legally mandated to ensure compliance with statutory planning, building, and environmental standards (Lagos State Government, 2019). Despite these regulatory structures, sustainability considerations within development control processes remain limited and inconsistently applied (Adejagbagbe & Ojo, 2022). Enforcement practices tend to prioritise spatial order, land-use conformity, and structural safety, while broader sustainability indicators, such as energy efficiency, climate responsiveness, and sustainable materials, are weakly embedded within approval and monitoring frameworks (Alabi, Odunjo, Okanlawon, & Ayinla, 2025).

The aim of this study is to assess the role of development control agencies in enhancing sustainable architecture in Lagos State, Nigeria. While the specific objectives of the study are:

1. To assess institutional awareness and understanding of sustainable architecture principles within development control agencies in Lagos State.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of development control regulations and enforcement in promoting sustainable architectural practices.
3. To identify the institutional, administrative, and contextual challenges faced by development control agencies in enforcing sustainability-related building standards.
4. To examine the influence of development control processes on sustainable architectural outcomes in Lagos State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable Architecture in Rapidly Urbanising Contexts

Globally, sustainable architecture is understood as an approach that integrates environmental responsibility, resource efficiency, climate-responsive design, and long-term building performance into the built environment (UNEP, 2020). In the Global South, where urban growth is often unplanned and infrastructure provision is constrained, sustainable architectural practices are increasingly viewed as essential for mitigating environmental degradation, reducing energy consumption, and improving urban liveability (Gil-Ozoudeh, Iwuanyanwu, Okwandu, & Ike, 2023).

In Nigeria, sustainable architecture is expected to respond to local climatic conditions, socio-economic realities, and material availability. Adejagbagbe & Ojo (2022) argue that sustainable architectural practice in Nigeria remains uneven, with limited integration of passive design strategies, energy-efficient systems, and environmentally sustainable materials. Similarly, Adewumi and Bello (2025) note that while sustainability is increasingly acknowledged in professional discourse, its translation into everyday architectural practice remains constrained by weak regulatory enforcement and limited institutional support. Evidence from studies on passive and biophilic design further suggests that while such strategies can enhance thermal comfort and reduce energy demand, their adoption remains largely voluntary rather than driven by development control regulations (Kalu, Ogunnaike, & Eze, 2025).

Development Control and the Regulation of the Built Environment

Development control refers to the statutory mechanisms through which planning authorities regulate land use, building design, construction activities, and compliance with approved standards. It is widely recognised as a critical instrument for achieving orderly urban development, public safety, and environmental protection (Abubakar, Lawanson, & Usman, 2020). Through development permits, building approvals, site inspections, and enforcement actions, development control agencies exert substantial influence over architectural form, density, spatial organisation, and infrastructure provision.

In Lagos State, development control operates within a complex institutional framework involving agencies such as the Lagos State Physical Planning Permit Authority (LASPPPA) and the Lagos State Building Control Agency (LABSCA). These institutions are mandated to ensure compliance with planning regulations,

building codes, and environmental standards. However, empirical studies consistently report low levels of compliance with development control regulations, particularly in high-density and informal urban areas (Lawanson et al., 2025). Bureaucratic delays, high approval costs, and limited enforcement capacity have been identified as key factors driving non-compliance and informal development practices (Oduwaye & Enisan, 2021).

Institutional Capacity and Regulatory Effectiveness

The effectiveness of development control is closely linked to the institutional capacity of regulatory agencies, including staffing levels, technical expertise, funding, and inter-agency coordination. Studies across Nigerian cities indicate that development control agencies often face overlapping mandates, fragmented responsibilities, and limited coordination, which weaken regulatory enforcement and monitoring (Morakinyo, Eghenure, Adebisi, & Adeola, 2025). Alabi et al. (2025) highlight that inadequate collaboration between regulatory agencies and building professionals undermines effective housing delivery and compliance with planning standards.

Institutional challenges are further compounded by socio-political factors such as political interference, corruption, and low public trust in regulatory institutions. Oladunmoye (2024) reports that developers frequently perceive planning approval processes as cumbersome and unpredictable, leading to deliberate avoidance of formal regulatory channels. These institutional weaknesses reduce the ability of development control agencies to enforce not only basic planning standards but also more complex sustainability-related requirements.

Development Control and Sustainability Integration

Although development control frameworks are theoretically well positioned to promote sustainable architecture, the extent to which sustainability principles are embedded within regulatory processes remains contested. Several studies suggest that development control in Lagos State prioritises spatial order, zoning compliance, setbacks, and structural safety, with limited emphasis on energy efficiency, climate-responsive design, or environmental performance (Olanipekun et al., 2016). Sustainability outcomes that do occur are often incidental, resulting from design choices made by architects or developers rather than from explicit regulatory requirements.

Empirical evidence from Lagos and other Nigerian cities indicates that weak enforcement of sustainability-related standards contributes to environmentally inefficient buildings, increased reliance on artificial cooling, and heightened vulnerability to climate risks such as flooding and urban heat stress (Ajani et al., 2025; Duduyegbe & Oke, 2025). Morakinyo et al. (2025) further demonstrate that non-compliance with development control guidelines has direct environmental, infrastructural, and aesthetic consequences, reinforcing the need for stronger regulatory integration of sustainability principles.

Research Gap

Despite a growing body of literature on sustainable architecture and development control in Nigeria, important gaps remain. Existing studies often examine regulatory effectiveness and sustainability outcomes separately, with limited empirical focus on how development control agencies actively operationalise sustainability principles within architectural approval, monitoring, and enforcement processes. Furthermore, while several studies acknowledge institutional and regulatory challenges, few systematically assess the influence of development control mechanisms on sustainable architectural design and construction outcomes in Lagos State. This gap underscores the need for a focused assessment of the role of development control agencies in enhancing sustainable architecture, particularly within the context of rapid urbanisation and increasing environmental vulnerability.

RESEARCH METHODODO

This study adopts a qualitative research approach based on systematic literature and document analysis to assess the role of development control agencies in enhancing sustainable architecture in Lagos State. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the study focuses on understanding institutional roles, regulatory frameworks, enforcement practices, and contextual challenges influencing sustainability outcomes within the built environment, rather than on the generation of numerical or statistical data.

A comprehensive review of approximately 20 scholarly articles, policy documents, and institutional reports published between 2016 and 2025 was conducted. These sources were selected based on their relevance to development control, sustainable architecture, regulatory agencies, and urban development in Lagos State and Nigeria more broadly. The reviewed documents were accessed through peer-reviewed academic journals, academic databases, institutional repositories, and official government publications. This approach enables a structured and evidence-based evaluation of the role of development control agencies while situating the findings within the broader regulatory and sustainability context of Lagos State.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From an initial pool of approximately 20 reviewed publications, 7 key studies were purposively selected for in-depth analysis based on their direct relevance to development control agencies, regulatory enforcement, professional involvement, and sustainability outcomes in Lagos State and Nigeria. These studies form the empirical basis for the findings and discussion.

Table 1: Summary of Selected Core and Regulatory Studies

S/N	Authors	Year	Country	Paper Title	Study Area / Scope
1	Adeyemi, Onifade, Jimoh, & Akindeju	2023	Nigeria	Development control as a tool for urban sustainability in southwestern Nigeria	South-West Nigeria (including Lagos)
2	Ogunseye	2022	Nigeria	Planning approval process: An analysis of property developers' experiences	South-West Nigeria
3	Bashua, Dare-Abel, Daramola, & Ajayi	2025	Nigeria	Environmental, infrastructure, and aesthetic impacts of non-compliance with development control guidelines	Badagry, Lagos State
4	Adegbenro Alade & Ojo	2025	Nigeria	Involvement of building professionals and regulatory agencies in private housing delivery	Selected cities in Nigeria
5	Duduyegbe & Oke	2025	Nigeria	Awareness and adoption of green policies among construction practitioners	Nigeria (construction sector)
6	Achara & Igwe	2025	Nigeria	Sustainable architectural practice: A case of Nigeria	Nigeria-wide
7	Ogunnaike, Daramola, & Ojo	2025	Nigeria	Modernist architecture and human comfort in public spaces	Lagos State

Awareness and Understanding of Sustainable Architecture Principles

Findings across the reviewed studies indicate that development control agencies and related professionals demonstrate moderate awareness of sustainability concepts, particularly those associated with land-use regulation, environmental protection, and building safety (Adeyemi et al., 2023; Duduyegbe & Oke, 2025). However, this awareness is largely conceptual and regulatory, rather than performance-driven. Sustainability is commonly interpreted through zoning compliance, setbacks, density control, and adherence to basic environmental regulations, with limited emphasis on energy efficiency, passive design, or life-cycle performance (Achara & Igwe, 2025; Ogunnaike et al., 2025).

This finding suggests a disconnect between global sustainability discourse and local regulatory interpretation, where development control agencies recognise sustainability in principle but lack the technical frameworks and enforcement tools required for comprehensive implementation.

Effectiveness of Development Control Regulations and Enforcement Mechanisms

The reviewed studies consistently reveal that while Lagos State possesses a relatively robust development control framework, enforcement effectiveness remains inconsistent. Development control

regulations contribute positively to spatial order, building alignment, and infrastructural coordination (Adeyemi et al., 2023). However, enforcement is undermined by bureaucratic delays, limited manpower, and weak monitoring systems (Ogunseye, 2022; Adegbenro et al., 2025).

Notably, Bashua et al. (2025) provide empirical evidence that weak enforcement leads to environmental degradation, poor aesthetics, and infrastructural strain, particularly in peri-urban and high-density areas. These findings indicate that regulatory presence alone is insufficient; enforcement capacity is critical to achieving sustainable architectural outcomes.

Challenges in Enforcing Sustainability-Related Standards

Institutional and operational challenges emerge as dominant constraints across the reviewed literature. Key challenges include overlapping agency mandates, inadequate technical expertise, political interference, corruption, and low public trust in regulatory institutions (Ogunseye, 2022; Adegbenro et al., 2025). Additionally, the absence of clearly defined sustainability benchmarks within development approval processes limits agencies' ability to mandate green building practices (Duduyegbe & Oke, 2025; Achara & Igwe, 2025). Rapid urbanisation and informal development further exacerbate these challenges, particularly in Lagos State, where regulatory agencies struggle to monitor development effectively across diverse urban contexts.

Influence of Development Control Processes on Sustainable Architectural Outcomes

Evidence from the selected studies indicates that development control processes influence sustainable architectural outcomes primarily indirectly. Compliance with planning approvals improves ventilation potential, site organisation, and spatial efficiency, which can enhance thermal comfort and reduce environmental stress (Ogunnaiké et al., 2025). However, sustainability outcomes are often incidental rather than intentional, as development control frameworks rarely mandate renewable energy integration, sustainable materials, or climate-responsive design strategies (Achara & Igwe, 2025; Adeyemi et al., 2023). Consequently, sustainable architectural performance varies significantly across developments and is largely dependent on the voluntary commitment of architects and developers rather than regulatory compulsion.

Table 2: Analysis of Research

S/N	Methods Used	Advantages Highlighted	Limitations Identified	Key Findings
1	Literature review; policy analysis	Highlights regulatory role in sustainability promotion	Limited empirical performance indicators	Development control contributes indirectly to urban sustainability.
2	Questionnaire survey; interviews	Provides insight into developer–agency interactions	Focuses more on process than outcomes	Bureaucratic delays and unpredictability reduce compliance.
3	Case study; field observation	Demonstrates consequences of weak enforcement	Limited generalisability beyond the study area	Non-compliance leads to environmental and infrastructural degradation.
4	Survey research	Emphasises professional–agency collaboration	Weak focus on sustainability performance	Poor coordination undermines regulatory effectiveness.
5	Questionnaire survey	Highlights awareness gaps in sustainability	Does not isolate regulatory agencies	Awareness does not translate into enforcement.
6	Literature-based analysis	Identifies sustainable design strategies	Limited regulatory perspective	Sustainability adoption is largely voluntary.
7	Systematic literature review	Links design to comfort and energy efficiency	Limited focus on regulation	Regulatory frameworks weakly address performance outcomes.

Synthesis of Findings

Overall, the findings demonstrate that development control agencies in Lagos State play an important but limited role in enhancing sustainable architecture. While regulatory frameworks support spatial order and safety, their capacity to enforce comprehensive sustainability standards remains constrained. Strengthening institutional capacity, embedding explicit sustainability benchmarks within development control processes, and improving inter-agency collaboration are critical for repositioning development control agencies as effective drivers of sustainable architectural development in Lagos State.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of development control agencies in promoting sustainable architecture in Lagos State through a qualitative synthesis of selected empirical and regulatory studies. The findings show that development control agencies play a strategically important role in shaping architectural outcomes through planning approvals, building control, and regulatory enforcement; however, their influence on sustainable architecture remains largely indirect.

Although development control agencies demonstrate moderate awareness of sustainability concepts, this understanding is primarily compliance-oriented, focusing on spatial order and structural safety rather than comprehensive environmental performance. Existing regulations have contributed to orderly development and basic environmental protection, but inconsistent enforcement, driven by institutional capacity constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and weak monitoring systems, limits their effectiveness.

The study further reveals that sustainability-related building standards are weakly embedded within development control frameworks, resulting in limited integration of energy-efficient and climate-responsive design strategies. As a result, sustainable architectural outcomes in Lagos State are largely dependent on voluntary actions by developers and design professionals rather than regulatory enforcement.

Overall, the study concludes that while development control agencies possess significant potential to drive sustainable architecture in Lagos State, realising this potential requires institutional strengthening, the integration of clear sustainability benchmarks, and improved regulatory coordination.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the role of development control agencies in promoting sustainable architecture in Lagos State:

1. **Integration of Explicit Sustainability Benchmarks:** Development control agencies should incorporate clear and measurable sustainability criteria, such as energy efficiency, passive design, natural ventilation, flood resilience, and sustainable material use, into planning approval guidelines and building control procedures.
2. **Strengthening Institutional and Technical Capacity:** Continuous professional training, adequate staffing, and improved funding should be prioritised to enhance the technical competence of development control officers in assessing sustainable and climate-responsive architectural designs.
3. **Digitalisation of Development Control Processes:** The adoption of digital permitting, monitoring, and compliance-tracking systems can reduce bureaucratic delays, improve transparency, and facilitate the integration of sustainability assessment tools into approval and enforcement processes.
4. **Improved Inter-Agency Collaboration:** Stronger coordination between development control agencies, environmental authorities, and professional bodies is required to harmonise standards, reduce regulatory overlaps, and improve sustainability enforcement across the development lifecycle.
5. **Stakeholder Sensitisation and Public Engagement:** Targeted awareness programmes for developers, architects, and property owners should be intensified to promote understanding of the environmental, economic, and social benefits of sustainable architecture and encourage voluntary compliance.

6. **Policy Review and Alignment with Global Best Practices:** Planning and building regulations should be regularly reviewed and aligned with emerging sustainability and resilience priorities while remaining responsive to Lagos State's local climatic and socio-economic context.

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