

Sustainable Development of Mountainous and Hilly Towns in Nigeria: Issues and Policy Direction

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Abstract

Nigeria is a country divided into six geopolitical regions with each region having towns, and villages surrounded by mountains and hills. Each of the towns, and villages with mountains and hills have peculiar crops and animals that survive in them. This paper focuses on three towns in three geopolitical zones out of the six chosen randomly because of their terrain, climate, and the special crops that have to be brought to the fore for policy attention in Nigeria. In the Southwestern geopolitical zone, Idanre Hill in Ondo state is picked. In the Northcentral, Jos Plateau is considered while in the North Eastern zone, Mambila Plateau is considered. Idanre Hill allows the plantation of cocoa, palm produce, and timber; Jos Plateau allows the plantation of cabbage, Irish potatoes, tomatoes, cucumber, and carrots among others while Mambila Plateau allows the plantation of tea, honey, and timber. The major argument of this paper is that the global surface temperature of these towns has changed and continues to change in the nearest future. Hence, the need to devise sustainable means of adaptation and mitigation to the challenges of climate for sustainable development of these products. It is the opinion of this paper that the sustainable development of mountainous or hill towns in Nigeria requires the adoption of a holistic approach that takes into consideration the economic, social, and environmental aspects of development. This paper argues that Nigeria needs to channel policy towards the protection of the ecologically sensitive areas of the hill towns by promoting sustainable practices such as waste management, reforestation, and conservation of biodiversity. This can be achieved through community participation where the local community is involved in the planning and implementation of development projects. Also, the promotion of agriculture in the fertile land of the mountain or hill towns in Nigeria can help create jobs and boost the local economy and preserve the environment. Focusing on eco-tourism and the agricultural potential of hill towns will necessitate the provision of access to basic amenities which are lacking in most of the hill towns in Nigeria, such as electricity, clean water, and healthcare. Providing access to these amenities can improve the living standards of the local people and attract more residents to the area, thereby aiding adaptation to climate and sustaining the production of these crops useful for the economic development and sustainability of Nigeria.

Key words: sustainable, development, sustainable development, hilly, mountainous, towns

Introduction

Nigeria is a country situated in the western region of Africa, with diverse topography, and boasts of six geopolitical regions, (North Central, North East, North West, South East, South-South and South West) with distinct flora and fauna that help enrich its landscape navigating many towns and villages nestled amidst breathtaking mountains and hills. These geographical features not only enhance the natural beauty of Nigeria but also contribute significantly to its agricultural and ecological wealth (Ikpeland, et al.1994).

Nigeria experiences a tropical climate with distinct variations across its regions. The country can be divided into two primary seasons: the rainy season, which typically spans from April to October, and the dry season, occurring from November to March. These seasonal shifts have profound

implications on agriculture, especially on crop production, availability of water, and overall development strategies of towns and villages located in mountainous and hilly areas.

The population of Nigeria is vast and diverse, with over 200 million people representing various ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds. However, the distribution of the population is uneven, with densely populated urban centres contrasting with sparser populations in rural and mountainous regions. Understanding the dynamics of population distribution is vital for designing sustainable development policies that account for the specific needs and challenges faced by mountainous and hilly towns.

Mountainous and hilly towns in Nigeria present both opportunities and challenges for sustainable development. These areas' unique terrain and climatic conditions contribute to their ecological significance, agricultural potential, and attractiveness for tourism. However, they also face obstacles such as limited accessibility, inadequate infrastructure, environmental degradation, soil erosion, and vulnerability to natural disasters.

The sustainable development of mountainous and hilly towns in Nigeria is a subject of growing importance, considering their immense potential for environmental preservation, cultural heritage, and economic growth. The delicate ecological balance in these regions, coupled with their vulnerability to the effects of climate change, necessitates a thoughtful and inclusive approach towards development. Yet, more often than not, such towns are overshadowed by their urban counterparts when it comes to policy planning, resource allocation, and infrastructural development.

This paper seeks to explore the distinctive characteristics of three randomly selected towns from different geopolitical zones: Idanre Hill in Ondo State representing the South West region; Jos, Plateau State representing the North central region, and Mambila Plateau representing the North East region. These towns exhibit diverse terrains, climates, and crops. Thus, bringing to the fore the main concern of the region and policy attention and sustainable development strategies to harness their full potential and address the challenges they may encounter.

With a careful blend of expert insights, this paper ignites a meaningful dialogue on harnessing the potential of mountainous and hilly towns while safeguarding their ecological integrity and cultural heritage. By offering pragmatic solutions and policy recommendations, we hope to inspire policymakers, stakeholders, and communities alike to embark on a journey towards sustainable development that is inclusive, equitable, and environmentally responsible. The preservation of these idyllic landscapes and the upliftment of the communities residing within them are not only paramount to the prosperity of these towns but also crucial for the overall sustainable development trajectory of Nigeria as a whole. It is time to recognize the unique challenges and potential of mountainous and hilly towns and forge a path towards sustainable and inclusive growth, ensuring that the beauty and richness of these regions remain preserved for generations to come.

Conceptual Clarifications of key variables

In the context of hilly and mountainous towns in Nigeria, these key concepts are clarified:

Hilly and Mountainous Terrain: Hilly and mountainous areas are regions characterized by elevated landforms, steep slopes, and often rugged topography. In Nigeria, these areas can be found in different regions, such as the Jos Plateau in the Middle Belt and the Mambilla Plateau in the Northeast. In the South West region, Idanre Hill is a fertile paradise that enables the cultivation of various crops, including cocoa, palm produce, and timber. This picturesque town is adorned with cascading waterfalls and rich biodiversity (Antonio, et al 2003). The hill offers economic and environmental opportunities. However, the changing global environmental temperature poses a threat to these crops, demanding the adoption and adaptation of sustainable practices that facilitate climate change while preserving the area's natural beauty.

Situated in the North Central region, is Jos plateau, a remarkably elevated landmass known for its cold temperature and fertile soil for exotic fruits such as cabbage, Irish potatoes, tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots, and apples. This bountiful plateau provides a favourable conditions for cultivating this diverse range of crops. However, global climate change trends seem to be affecting weather patterns and temperature fluctuations, and implementing sustainable development strategies becomes imperative to ensure the continued productivity and resilience of these agricultural systems. This paper argues for the implementation of climate-smart agriculture techniques, including water conservation, soil management, and the use of resilient crop varieties, to enhance farmers' adaptive capacity and secure food production on the Jos Plateau.

Finally, the Mambila plateau is situated in Taraba State and is nestled high in the mountainous terrain of the North East region. This pristine plateau is a treasure base of natural resources, offering an ideal environment for cultivating tea, honey, and timber. The Mambila Plateau's unique climate and fertile soils make it a suitable location for sustainable agricultural practices. Nevertheless, as climate change continues to influence weather patterns, rainfall distribution, and pest prevalence, it is crucial to implement measures that bolster climate resilience, improve irrigation systems, and enhance agroforestry techniques. By doing so, the long-term viability of these crops, and the promotion of economic prosperity within the local communities would be guaranteed.

Sustainable Development: Sustainable development is an approach to development that aims to balance economic, social, and environmental considerations. It involves using resources efficiently, promoting social inclusivity, and safeguarding the environment to ensure long-term well-being and prosperity for the community. The sustainable development of hilly and mountainous towns in Nigeria refers to the balanced and responsible growth of these areas while preserving their unique ecological, social, and cultural characteristics. Sustainable development seeks to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Essentially, achieving sustainable development in Nigeria's mountainous and hilly towns demands a comprehensive, holistic and integrated approach that would address economic, social, and environmental concerns. Recognizing the ecological sensitivity of these areas is essential, along with implementing policies that prioritize the preservation of their unique ecosystems through waste management, reforestation initiatives, and biodiversity conservation efforts (Arousso, 2000).

One of the primary issues hindering the sustainable development of these towns is inadequate and underdeveloped infrastructure. The challenging terrain often renders it difficult to build reliable road networks, water supply systems, and electricity grids, which are crucial for fostering economic activities and enhancing the quality of life for residents. The lack of proper infrastructure not only isolates these towns but also limits their potential for growth and investment (Omofonmwan, et al 2008).

Environmental Conservation in hilly and mountainous towns is crucial due to the unique ecosystems, biodiversity, and fragile landscapes. Achieving this requires prioritization of the preservation of natural resources, and wildlife habitats, and the prevention of soil erosion and land degradation. The agricultural sector, a significant source of livelihood for many communities in these regions, faces challenges due to land degradation, deforestation, and unsustainable agricultural practices. Encouraging sustainable agricultural practices, such as terracing, soil conservation, and promoting climate-resilient crops (Ekins, 2002). Hence it is imperative to safeguard both the environment and the livelihoods of the local populace. Tourism, another promising avenue for economic growth, presents its own set of challenges in these towns. While the natural beauty and cultural heritage of these regions attract tourists, inadequate tourism infrastructure and lack of promotion often hinder the realization of the full potential of this sector in Nigeria.

Infrastructure and Services: Sustainable development involves providing essential infrastructure and services in hilly and mountainous towns to improve the quality of life for residents. This includes access to clean water, sanitation facilities, healthcare, education, transportation, and energy. To achieve sustainable development in Nigeria's mountainous and hilly towns, it is crucial to address the lack of basic amenities that hinder progress, such as reliable access to electricity, clean water, healthcare facilities, and education. By bridging these gaps, we can improve living standards, attract more residents to the area, and ensure the long-term sustainability of these communities.

Climate Change Resilience: Hilly and mountainous towns are susceptible to the impacts of climate change, such as extreme weather events and altered precipitation patterns. Sustainable development thinking brings to the fore the need to put in place measures to enhance resilience and adaptability to climate-related challenges.

Cultural Heritage: Hilly and mountainous towns often have unique cultural traditions and heritage. Sustainable development entails respect and promoting the preservation of these cultural identities, ensuring that local communities' cultural values are integrated into development plans.

Community Participation: Engaging local communities in decision-making processes is vital for sustainable development. Involving residents in planning and implementation ensures that development initiatives align with their needs, aspirations, and local knowledge.

Economic Diversification: Sustainable development encourages economic diversification in hilly and mountainous towns. It involves promoting sustainable livelihoods, supporting local industries, and exploring ecotourism as a means of income generation.

Disaster Risk Reduction: Given the vulnerability of hilly and mountainous areas to natural disasters like landslides and flash floods, sustainable development encourages the incorporation of disaster risk reduction strategies to minimize potential hazards and protect residents.

Public Awareness and Education: Promoting public awareness and education on sustainable practices is essential for creating a culture of sustainability in hilly and mountainous towns. This involves sensitizing residents, government officials, and other stakeholders about the importance of responsible development.

Theoretical frameworks

This paper utilises key theories to drive the understanding of the subject of sustainable development of hilly and mountainous towns in Nigeria. These frameworks provide conceptual foundations and principles to design and implement strategies that promote environmental conservation, community well-being, and economic development. The first theory is the Ecological Sustainability theory, promoted by Dernbach (2003), which emphasises the importance of maintaining ecological balance and biodiversity in hilly and mountainous regions. In this paper, the theory is used to advocate for the protection of natural resources, wildlife habitats, and ecosystems, within the wider ecological carrying capacity of the area to prevent environmental degradation. While taking this with the Ecosystem Services Approach, the need to take sustainable development of hilly towns more seriously emerges. The comprehensive and responsible utilization of the essential services that ecosystems provide to human well-being, such as water purification, climate regulation, and soil fertility through the incorporation of the value of these ecosystem services into decision-making processes, ensure their sustainable management.

Furthermore, utilising the Integrated Land-Use Planning (ILUP) framework advanced by Metternich, (2017) would help in promoting the integration of various land uses, such as agriculture, forestry, tourism, and local residential areas, in a coordinated manner. More importantly, the ILUP framework can help to optimize land use to support economic activities while minimizing negative impacts on the environment and social fabric of the community. Moreover, the study learns from the Resilience Theory developed by Norman Garmezy which focuses on building resilience in hilly and mountainous towns and the need to cope with environmental and social shocks and stresses. The theory taught the need to enhance adaptive capacity, reduce vulnerabilities, and foster community-led initiatives for disaster risk reduction.

Within this framework, this paper also considers the recommendations of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach promoted by Serrat, (2017) which advocated improving the livelihoods of local communities while preserving natural resources, especially promoting income-generating activities that are environmentally sustainable and culturally appropriate for the region. This would require consideration of the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders, including marginalized groups and indigenous communities. This ensures social inclusivity, equity, and participation in decision-making processes and equitable sharing of development benefits.

However, the study situates properly also within the Green Economy framework which is advocating for an economy that is low-carbon, resource-efficient, and socially inclusive. More importantly the adoption of green technologies and practices in hilly and mountainous towns to

reduce environmental impacts while creating economic opportunities. While the study considers recommendations from the Circular Economy framework (Ekins et al, 2019) in the area of promotion of a regenerative approach to resource use, waste reduction, and recycling. In this study, the circular economy concept application in hilly and mountainous towns is capable of leading to more sustainable resource management and decreased environmental impacts.

METHOD

This paper utilises SWOT analysis to explain the sustainable development of hill and mountainous towns in Nigeria as it provides a structured and comprehensive assessment of the internal and external factors that can influence the development process. The SWOT analysis is a strategic tool that helps to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of a project. In the context of sustainable development of hilly towns, it was used to assess the current situation, identify potential areas for improvement, and formulate strategies to achieve the desired goals. Specifically, the SWOT analysis has been used for analysing sustainable development of hilly towns such as Shimla hill destination in India (Badar, and Bahadure, 2020); sustainable ecotourism development in Lorestan province, Iran (Asadpourian, Rahimian, and Gholamrezaei, 2020) and Ezunrum province (Kaymaz, Birinci, and Kızıllan, 2022). In all these studies, the utilization of SWOT analysis has aided explaining sustainable development in hill and mountainous towns and enhances the understanding of the town's current state, potential, challenges, and opportunities. In this paper, SWOT analysis is a valuable framework for guiding strategic planning, resource allocation, and decision-making, fostering collaborative efforts and ultimately contributing to the successful and inclusive development of these unique regions.

Analysis of Hill Town Development Potentials

3.1 Idanre Hill

Located 914.4 meters above sea level, Idanre Hill in Idanre Local Government of Ondo state, Nigeria is known for a variety of cultural sites and landscapes, and very unique ecosystems comprising different flora and fauna. Socio-culturally, its unique beauty has attracted human curiosity and has made it an attraction to the global community. This has equally qualified it as UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its bio-physical environment had given rise to undisturbed vegetation suitable for special species of animals (eg Hyrax, bats) and crops (eg cocoa). The recent trend of climate change has no boundary, hence the need to analyse the current eco-tourism and agricultural prospects of this hill to make an informed deduction and policy recommendations. Most importantly, Idanre which was once an epicenter of Cocoa cultivation due to some reported microclimatic conditions of rainfall is now living in its shadow. The responsible agency for the sustainable development of Idanre Hill is the Ondo State Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development and Culture and Tourism. The holistic approach to the sustainable development of Idanre Hill requires the involvement of the concerned ministries and the stakeholders in the state. The analysis of the development is presented in the SWOT matrix table below.

3.1.1 SWOT Analysis of Idanre Hill

Table 3.1 SWOT Matrix Table for Idanre Hill Sustainable Development

Strength	Weaknesses
1. Political will	1. Lack of basic amenities

2. International recognition (UNESCO)	2. Low technological development
3. Conducive climate for tourism and farming activities.	3. Lack of access to improved farming inputs
4. Naturally resource availability	4. Poor climate change mitigation and adaptation measure
Opportunity	Threats
1. Need for economic diversification	1. Climate change
2. Good soil and rainfall pattern	2. Insecurity
3. Employment generation	3. Postharvest processing difficulties
4. Reducing rural-urban migration	4. Lack of coordination between agency

The strong political will of the state government could be leveraged by the ministry of agriculture and rural development, and that of tourism to offset the challenges of insecurity and farm produce post-harvest processing difficulties. This could also be used to create a special purpose agency for the development of Idanre Hill and similar multi-sectorial potential locations within the state. The advantages of recognition by international organizations like UNESCO and the presence of a conducive environment could be taken to address the problems of climate. Similarly, the ministries could give justifications for economic diversification and employment generation to source for funds to develop modern amenities, provide farming inputs and develop technological measures for climate change mitigation and adaptation. It could be deduced that the strengths and opportunities abound Idanre Hill are adequate to offset the threats and weaknesses against its development

3.2 Jos Plateau

Located in the North-central region of Nigeria, and covering about 8600 km², Jos Plateau with an average altitude of 1,280m but within which exists Share Hill of 1,829m above the sea level and an average temperature of 15.5°C to 18.5°C during the cold months and 27.4°C to 30.5°C during the hot months (Barbour et al, 1982). Although located in the savannah belt, its altitude (hence cold weather) distinguishes it from the surrounding lowland within the belt and this gives it the unique feature of accommodating diverse varieties of high-value temperate crops in addition to being a tourist destination. It is equally characterized by relatively favourable rainfall of about 1,500 mm in the drier north and 2,000 mm in the southwest part. Nearly 100 per cent of the Jos Plateau family grew up farming maize, and a variety of high-value fruits (berries, tomatoes, etc) and vegetables including Cabbage and Lettuce (Majekodunmi et al 2014). These characteristics make Jos Plateau a haven for high-quality fruits and vegetables, several endemic birds and animals (Olson et al, 2017), and a centre of tourism thereby making a significant contribution to national socio-economic development. However, both natural and anthropogenic-induced climate change effects have distorted the weather pattern resulting in reduced agricultural output and sociocultural and tourism activities in the plateau (UNEP-WCMC, 2020). A vast proportion of the erstwhile agricultural land had also been disturbed by unregulated mining activities. However, there is no single dedicated agency responsible that is responsible for capturing the diverse socio-economic potentials of the entire plateau. Each of the diverse potentials is being overseen by the respective MDAs. Restoring this requires a holistic approach involving the Plateau state government and all stakeholders and this is analysed in the SWOT matrix.

3.2.1 SWOT Analysis of Jos Plateau

Table 3.2: SWOT Matrix Table for Jos Plateau Hill Sustainable Development

Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Political will	1. Lack of access to improved farming inputs

2. Conducive climate for tourism and farming activities 3. Favourable climate for high-value temperate crops	2. Poor climate change mitigation and adaptation measure 3. Unregulated mining activities
Opportunities	Threats
1. Need for economic diversification 2. Good soil and rainfall pattern 3. High demand for high-value crops 4. Location advantage	1. Climate change 2. Insecurity 3. Deforestation 4. Lack of coordination between agency 5. Recurring ethnoreligious crisis

The political will of the Government of Plateau State could leverage to overcome the threats of insecurity, ethnoreligious crisis, and coordinating agency which would also ensure the involvement of all concerned stakeholders. Similarly, the strength of a conducive climate for tourism and farming could be used to offset the threats of deforestation and mitigation of climate change effects through carbon capture by planted crops. This would equally ensure the protection of rare animal species on the plateau. The opportunities of the need for economic diversification and high demand for high-value temperate crops could be used to justify investment in improved and climate-resilient farming systems. From the SWORT matrix analysis, it could be inferred that the strength and opportunities are substantially sufficient to offset the threats and weaknesses associated with the sustainable development of Jos Plateau Hill to enhance its contribution to the state and national socio-economic development

3.3 Mambilla Plateau

Mambilla Plateau is located in the Southeastern part of Taraba state in the Northeastern part of Nigeria. It is the highest plateau in Nigeria with an average altitude of about 1,600m above sea level, covering an area of about 9,389 km² (Mambilla Plateau, 2011). In addition to the panoramic views of its high hills, the Mambilla plateau is the source of a variety of non-seasonal streams, making it a potential site for hydroelectric power (NS Energy, 2018). Due to its altitude, it is also comparatively cold with temperatures that never exceed 25°C. Its weather is also characterised by heavy rainfall (due to orographic effects) during the rainy season and strong wind with the semblance of temperate conditions. The Plateau has naturally low grass with fewer trees except those planted via the government's "Tree Planting Programme". Importantly, Mambilla Plateau is the only place in Nigeria known for the large-scale planting of tea, hence there are quite several tea farms in Taraba state. In addition, it also houses the largest National Park in Nigeria. For instance, Ngel Nyaki Forest Reserve on the plateau is home to rare and endangered plants and animal species in West and Central Africa (Mac, 2007).

The presence of low lush green grasses in the plateau, coupled with the effects of climate change on other grazing areas has led to overgrazing on Mambilla Plateau. This has further exposed the area to more severe conditions such as widespread erosion, leading to a series of crises between the cattle herders and the indigenous people of Mambilla. This has also affected both tea production and the protection of rare animal species on the plateau. Like the Jos Plateau, the development of the Mambilla Plateau requires a multi-agency approach. Hence it is required that Taraba State Government and all concerned MDAs and stakeholders develop a holistic approach towards the socio-economic development of the hill resources. Therefore, the analysis of the sustainable development on the plateau is presented through SWORT analysis in the following section.

3.3.1 SWOT Analysis of Mambilla Plateau

Table 3.3: SWOT Matrix Table for Mambilla Plateau Sustainable Development

Strength	Weaknesses
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Political will2. Conducive climate for tourism and farming activities3. Good soil and rainfall pattern	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Lack of basic amenities2. Low technological development for tea production and storage3. Lack of access to improved farming inputs4. Poor climate change mitigation and adaptation measure
Opportunity	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Need for economic diversification2. Presence of non-seasoned streams for power generation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Climate change2. Insecurity3. Tea value addition and marketing difficulties4. Farmers-Herders crisis

The advantage of the political will of the Government of Taraba State could be used to overcome the threats of insecurity, and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Additionally, a conducive climate, good soil and rainfall pattern could be an attraction for investment in tea value addition and marketing. This could also be used to increase plant cover for carbon capture towards climate change mitigation. In the same vein, the opportunity of hydropower generation potential in this plateau could be used to overcome the weaknesses of basic amenities, and technological development of tea production and storage. Also, the need for economic diversification could be used as a strong basis for investment in improved and climate-resilient tea farming processes.

Policy Issues and Direction for Sustainable Development of Hilly And Mountainous Towns In Nigeria

From the SWOT analysis above, it is realized that the sustainable development of hilly and mountainous towns in Nigeria requires a well-defined policy framework that addresses the unique challenges and opportunities presented by these regions. Moving forward, this paper presents some key policy issues and directions that can guide sustainable development in hilly and mountainous towns:

1. **Environmental Conservation and Land Use Planning:** There is a need to develop and implement policies that prioritize environmental conservation and sustainable land use planning of these hilly towns. The policy should include measures to protect natural resources, prevent deforestation and soil erosion, and preserve biodiversity in ecologically sensitive areas.
2. **Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Resilience:** The existing policy on disaster risk management and climate change need to be looked at to integrate climate change adaptation strategies into development plans and build infrastructure that can withstand natural hazards like landslides, and floods in these towns.
3. **Community-Based Sustainable Tourism:** The Tourism policy of Nigeria need to be looked into for the promotion of sustainable tourism in hilly and mountainous towns. From this study, it is proposed that community-based tourism initiatives that respect local cultures, protect natural resources, and provide economic benefits to residents should be developed.

4. **Infrastructure Development and Connectivity:** A second look at the Infrastructure Policies of Nigeria is necessary to ascertain the availability of policies that improve infrastructure and connectivity in these regions. Specifically, there is a need to invest in reliable transportation networks, access to clean water, electricity, and communication facilities to enhance the quality of life for residents in these towns.
5. **Economic Diversification and Livelihoods:** Based on the huge economic opportunities offered by tea farming, lettuce, potato, green peas and good weather condition, there is a need to encourage economic diversification and sustainable livelihood opportunities in hilly and mountainous towns. Policies to support local industries, agriculture, and non-extractive sectors to reduce dependence on resource-intensive activities need to be put in place.
6. **Cultural Preservation and Heritage:** The socio-cultural-related laws in Nigeria need to be looked into. There is a need to enact policies that safeguard the cultural heritage and traditional practices of the communities living in these regions. More importantly, those policies ensure that development initiatives respect and preserve local customs, languages, and heritage.
7. **Community Participation and Empowerment:** Prioritizing community participation and empowerment in decision-making processes are embedded in Nigerian policies. However, engaging residents in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of development projects to ensure inclusivity and ownership are still challenges. This needs to be looked into.
8. **Conservation Financing and Incentives:** Nigerian government need to establish policies that provide financial incentives for conservation efforts and sustainable practices. This can include tax benefits for eco-friendly businesses or grants for biodiversity conservation projects.
9. **Capacity Building and Knowledge Exchange:** deliberate policies that support capacity building and knowledge exchange among local stakeholders are needed now. This can be achieved by facilitating training programs, workshops, and seminars on sustainable practices and technologies.
10. **Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:** Nigeran needs to introduce policies that require regular monitoring and evaluation of sustainable development initiatives in hilly and mountainous towns. Use data-driven assessments to measure progress, identify challenges, and make evidence-based policy adjustments.
11. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Foster public-private partnerships to mobilize resources and expertise for sustainable development projects. Encourage businesses to invest in environmentally friendly and socially responsible initiatives.
12. **Intergovernmental Collaboration:** Strengthen collaboration between different levels of government to ensure coherent policies and coordinated efforts for sustainable development. This includes aligning national, state, and local government policies to achieve common goals.
13. **Research and Innovation:** Support policies that promote research and innovation in sustainable development practices. Encourage academic institutions and research organizations to explore solutions that address the unique challenges faced by hilly and mountainous towns.

Conclusion

Sustainable development of hilly and mountainous towns in Nigeria requires holistic policy review, development and implementation. This study has utilised SWOT analysis to bring out the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of each of the selected hill towns in Nigeria. The study concludes

that by addressing the highlighted policy issues and adopting the suggested directions, Nigeria can lay a strong foundation for sustainable development in hilly and mountainous towns. These policies should be adaptive and context-specific, considering the diverse cultural, ecological, and socio-economic aspects of each region. Moreover, stakeholder engagement and continuous evaluation of policy outcomes are crucial for effective implementation and long-term success.

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