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Governance Failures in Solid Waste Management in Makurdi, Nigeria

A Presentation @ the
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Québec City Convention Centre
Québec City, Canada

Conference theme: *Misinformation, Disinformation, Communication, & Impact Assessment*



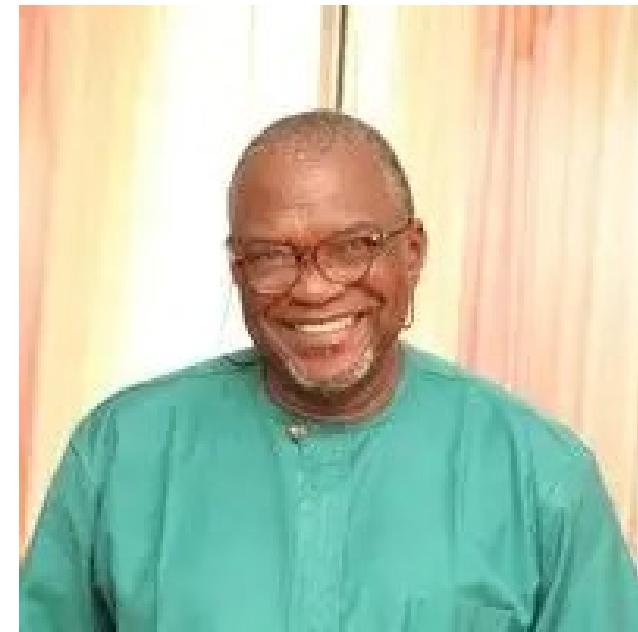
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Introduction & Context

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a sustainability tool – it ensures that “development” does not compromise environmental or social integrity
- But an EIA is only as effective as the quality of the governance environment in which it operates.
- This presentation explores how governance shortcomings undermined the Benue Integrated Solid Waste Management Pilot (2004) - and its failure despite an EIA with operable recommendations
- The way forward
- How the SPESSE Project could contribute



Background: DFID-SLGP

- In the early 2000s the United Kingdom Department for International Development (UK DFID) through its State and Local Government Programme (SLGP) supported the Government of Nigeria in embarking on **governance reforms** with the objective to institutionalize good governance more sustainably, enhance capacity in the public service, reduce poverty and poverty-vulnerability, amongst other benefits.

A good governance and poverty reduction initiative across selected States in the Nigerian Federation

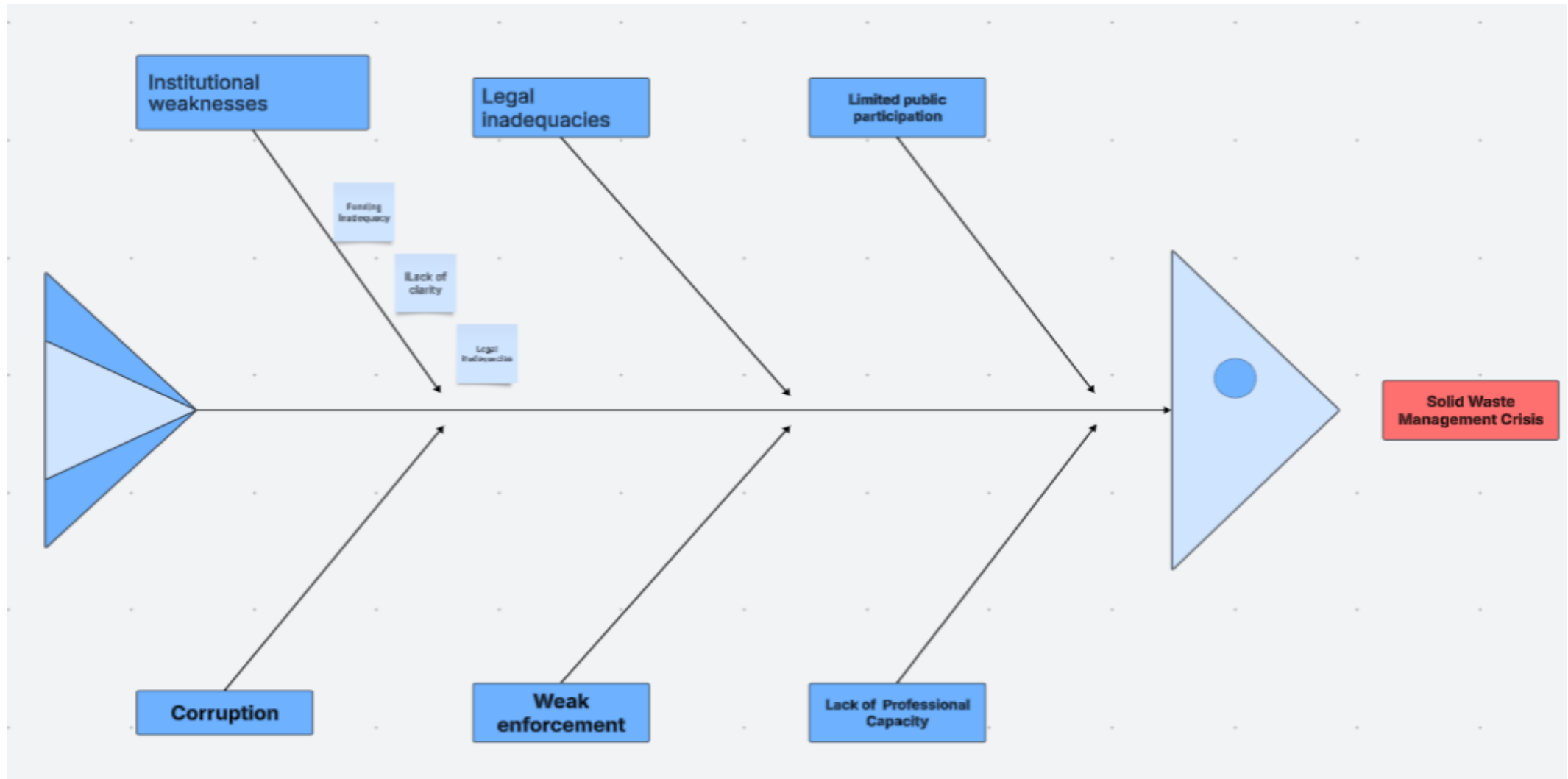


In Benue State

- The Programme identified Solid Waste Management as an entry point to demonstrate good governance in public service delivery, transparency and accountability.
- To achieve this, DFID-SLGP supported the State (through its Ministry of Water Resources & Environment) to develop a modern Solid Waste Management system with a Pilot IWTF in Makurdi.
- The pilot project was intended to demonstrate a scalable model for the entire State – with a rollout plan once implemented and lessons learned.
- **Preceded by expert studies, including a full EIA, for the Integrated Waste Treatment and Disposal Pilot Facility**

Poor waste management is visibly evident





Governance failures responsible for the waste crisis in Benue State



Why the Project Mattered

Urban waste crisis in (Makurdi) Benue (*circa* 49,054 tonnes/annum of poorly managed SW as at 2003)

Environmental and public health risks

Expected benefits:

- Cleaner environment
- Job creation
- Improved sanitation

Governance Benefits

1. Institutional arrangements strengthened and roles made clearer
2. Legal instruments reviewed to meet current needs
3. Guaranteed public participation
4. Significant reduction in or elimination of corruption (in procurement, funds allocations , etc)
5. Stronger and more sustainable enforcement mechanisms (violations transparently sanctioned, etc)

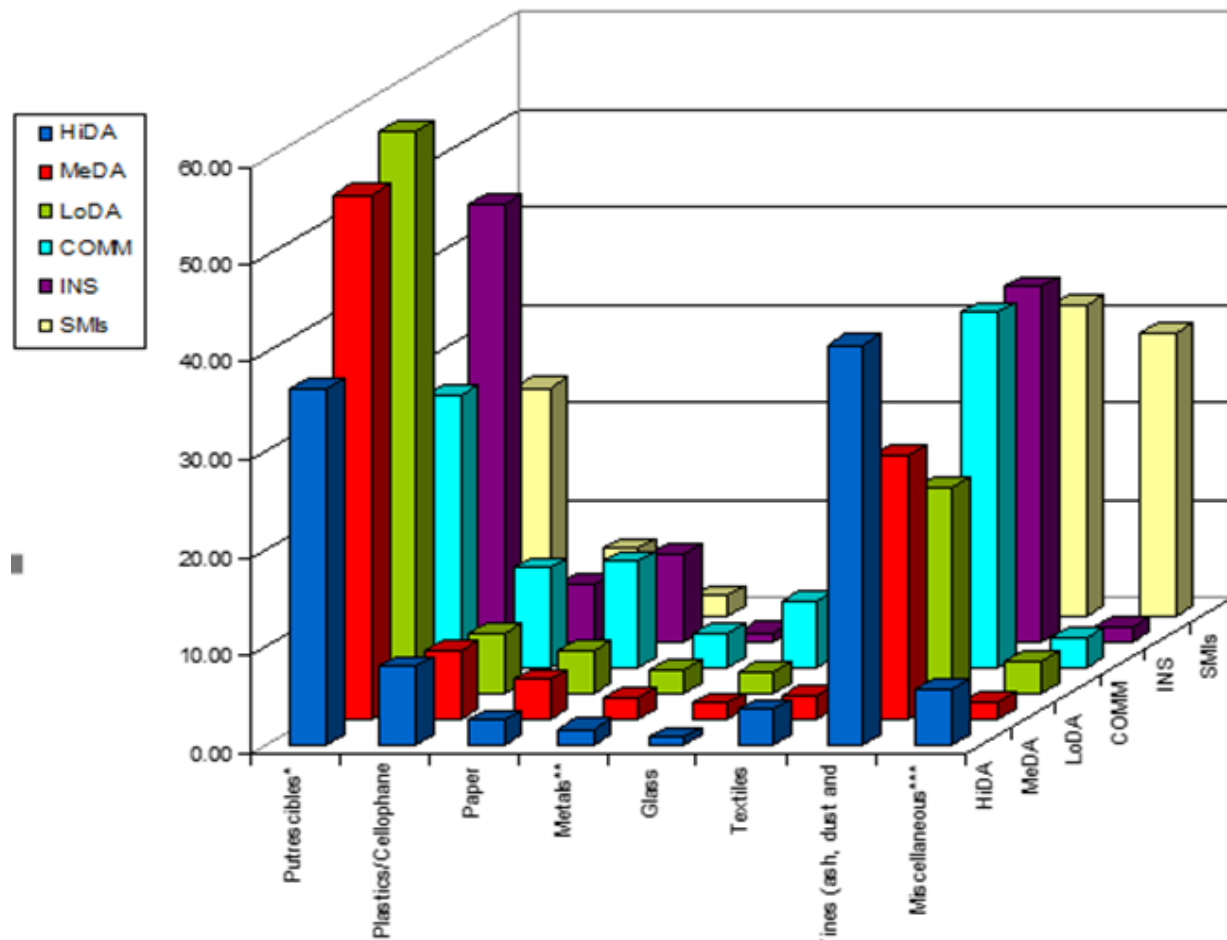


Fig 1. Composition of Solid Waste Generated in Makurdi Urban Area (July/August 2003).

*Putrescibles include food remnants, fresh and decaying leaves, other vegetation

**Metals – mostly cans and bottle caps; some ferrous and aluminium items

***Others includes wood planks and shavings (from carpenters', atones and pebbles, discarded shoes and other footwear, Styrofoam materials, snail shells, etc.

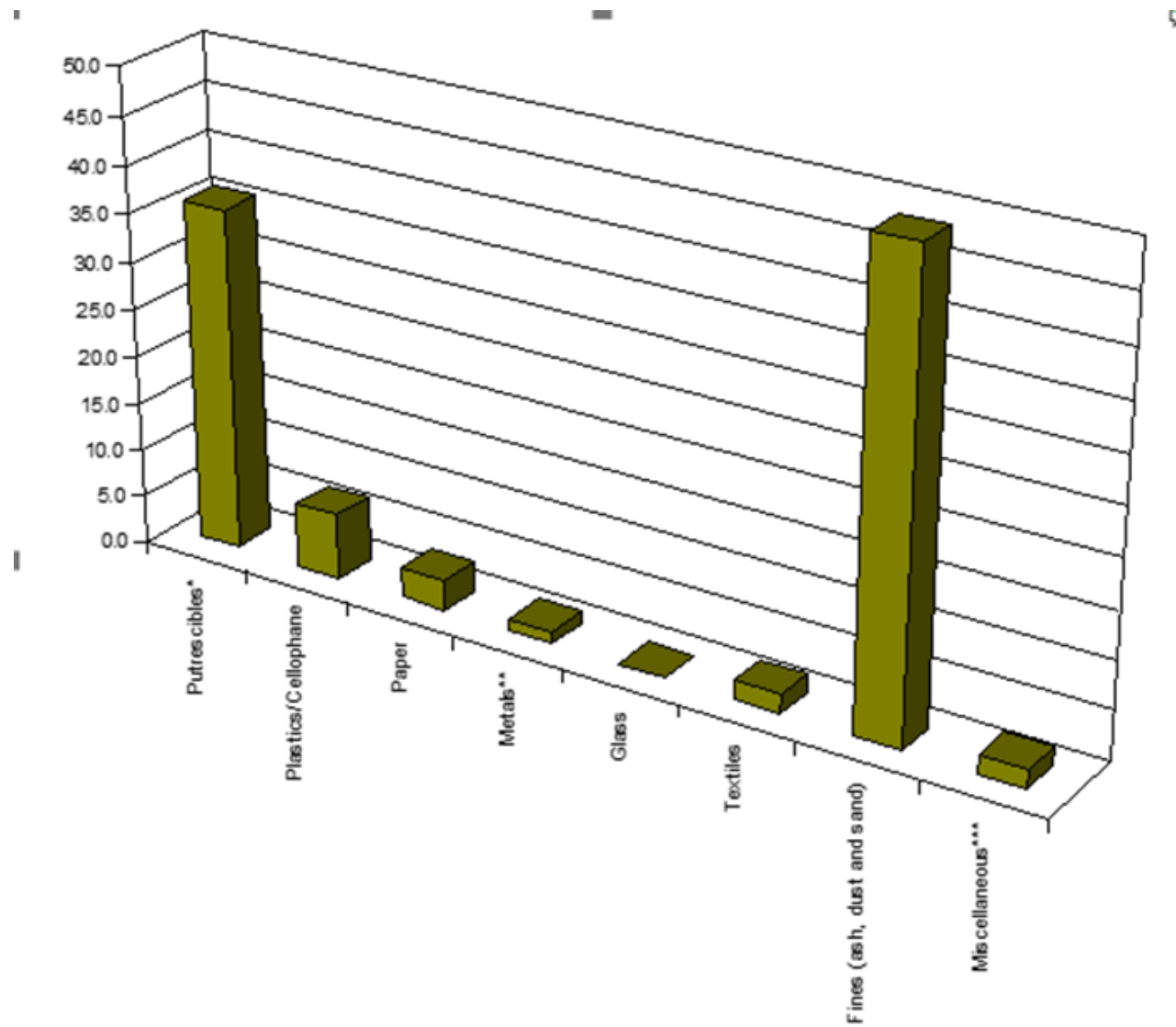
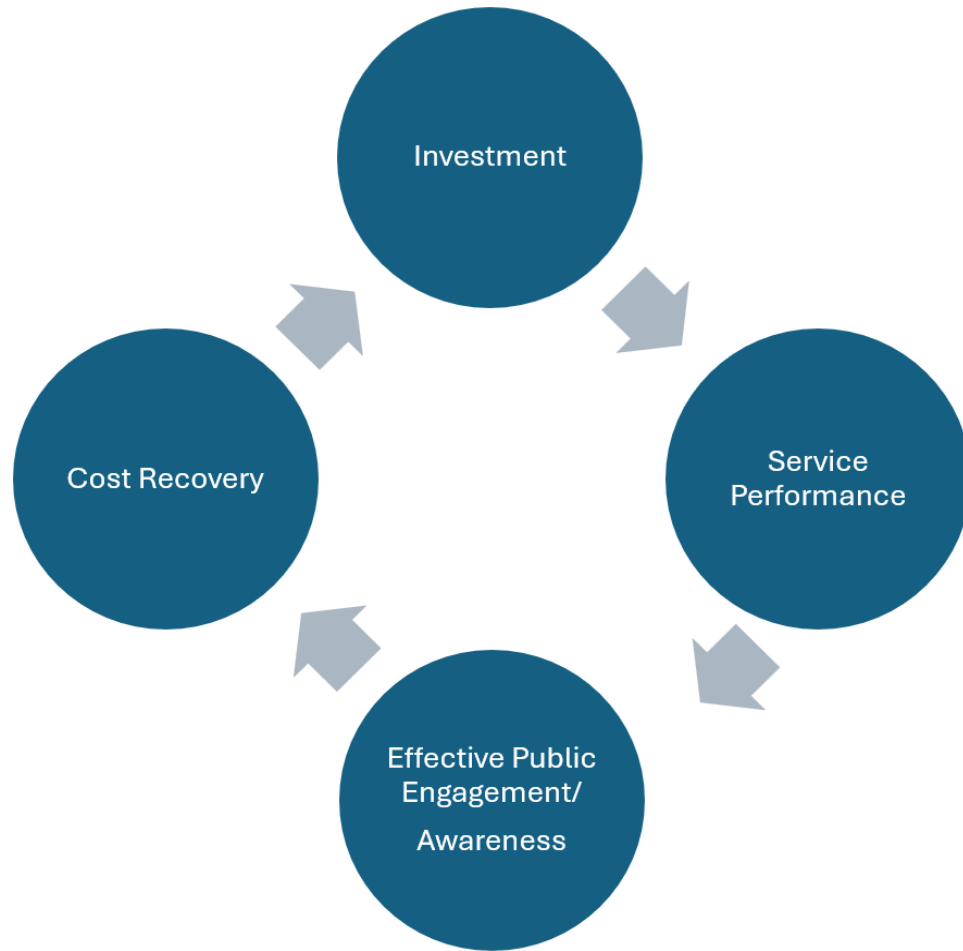


Fig. 2. Typical composition of waste contained in a UDB skip bucket in the vicinity of Wadata Market (July/August 2003)



The Project Strategic Framework

Sustainability Criteria:

1. Institution active and free of corruption
2. Participation and ownership of the public
3. Rights of citizens to demand quality service
4. Guaranteed financial support
5. Service performance guided by sound governance policies
6. Adherence to EIA recommendations **esp. the social engagement and community participation**



SO HOW DID THE PROJECT FARE?

Visible evidence of a Failed Project:

The pilot project was expected
to reduce pollution, improve
sanitation, and create jobs.

Its failure therefore has real
environmental and social
consequences.



Plate 1: High-Level Dumpsite



Plate 2: Wadata Dumpsite

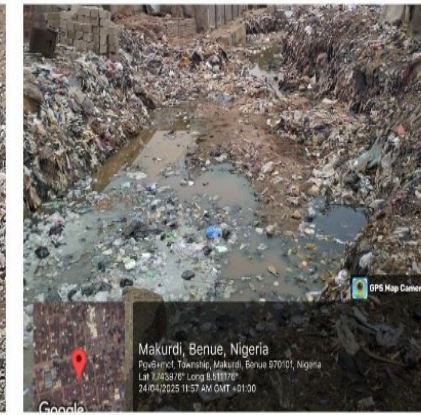


Plate 3: Wadata Dumpsite



Plate 4: Modern Market Dumpsite

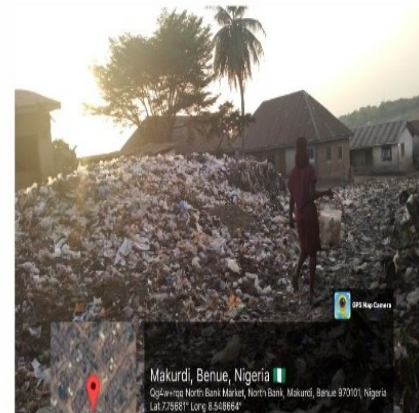


Plate 5: North Bank Dumpsite

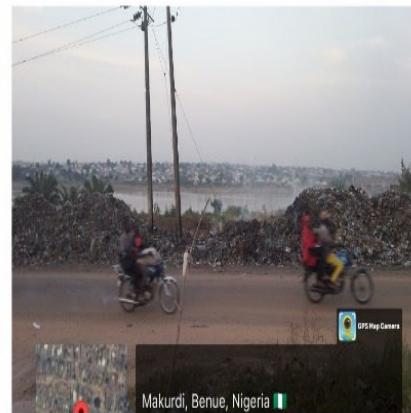


Plate 6: Dumpsite Around Makurdi Water Works

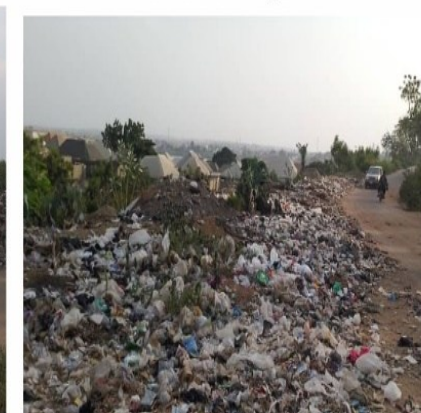


Plate 7: Air force Base Dumpsite

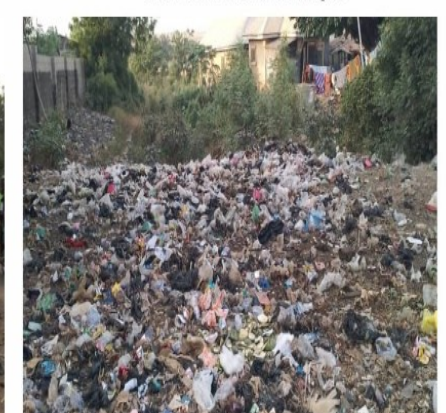


Plate 8: Apir Dumpsite

Fig. 3. Images of current solid waste disposal practices in Makurdi **twenty-two (22) years** after the Integrated Solid Waste Management Pilot was instituted (**Image from Agena, R. N., 2026**)

- ❑ Governance refers to the rules, institutions, and processes that shape decision making.
- ❑ In environmental management, governance determines whether EIA recommendations are implemented or ignored.
- ❑ This case study uses **communication and public engagement** governance as the analytical lens to understand the project's failure

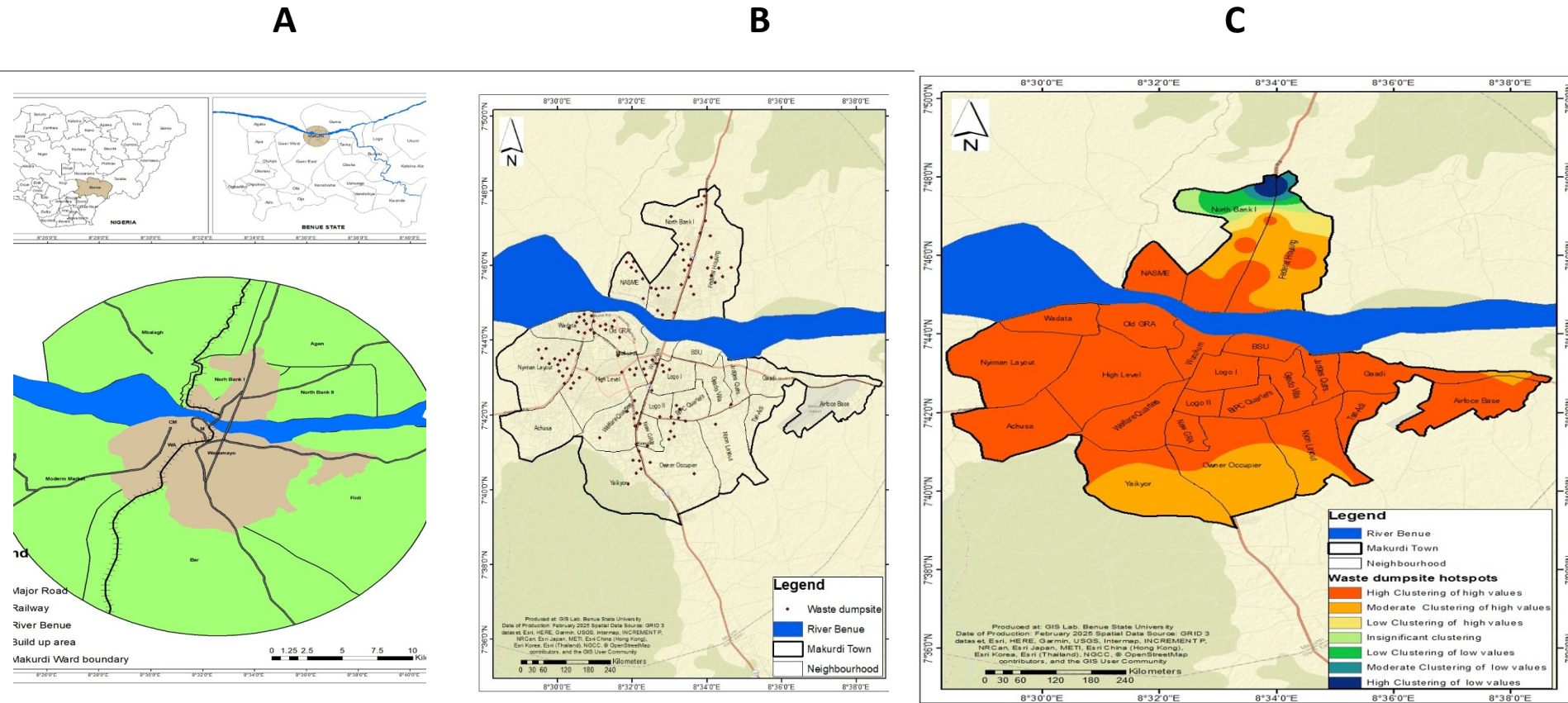


Fig. 4. The Study area (Makurdi Metro) (A); Spread of waste dumpsites (largely informal) (B), and hotspots of waste generation clusters (C) (Chia, 2026)

Table 1: Awareness of Solid Waste Dumpsites in Makurdi Metropolis (2025-2026; Agena, 2026)

Awareness	General population		BENSESA staff	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency [□]	Percentage (%)
Yes	250	76.45	71	97.26
No	77	23.55	2	2.74
Total	327	100.0	73	100

Table 2: Awareness of Designated and Undesignated Waste Dumpsites within Makurdi Metropolis (Agena, 2026)

Number of Dumpsites (Aware of)	Govt. Approved		Non-Govt. Approved	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
None	318	79.5	150	37.5
1 - 3	65	16.2	212	53.0
4 - 6	10	2.5	17	4.2
7 - 10	3	0.7	6	1.5
>10	4	1.0	15	3.7
Total	400	100	400	100

Synthesis of Why the Project Failed

- **Technical design was not the problem, governance failures were decisive**
 - Most EIA guidance ignored (e.g. agreed to stakeholder engagement actions not achieved, financial support from government not received, etc).
 - The EIA provided guidance, but governance failures prevented that guidance from being applied -
 - The institutions responsible for waste management (BENSESA, MWRE, UDB) still lacked technical capacity, clear mandates, and coordination mechanisms.
 - Agencies operated in silos. As a result, EIA recommendations were not integrated into project execution.
 - Institutional fragility created implementation paralysis
 - **Public participation not cultivated (poor communication) beyond the EIA Stakeholder engagement phase; communication channels were weak, and public participation was minimal**
 - Institutional re-alignments, legal instruments were made, but little support was provided to move forward

Going Forward

Benue State still faces significant waste management challenges: growing urban populations, inadequate disposal systems, and environmental health risks.

This presentation argues that going forward there is need to

- Strengthen and adequately fund institutions in the SWM space
- Update legal frameworks, to meet up with changes that have occurred in the last 2 decades
- Build credible and functional participatory mechanisms to guarantee public trust – this can be achieved through effective communication of credible information in the SWM protocol
- **Professionalize environmental management – here the The World Bank's SPESSE Project offers a promising platform**

The SPESSE Project Opportunity

The World Bank's SPESSE Project aims to build capacity in procurement, environmental, and social standards across Nigeria.

SPESSE can help address many of the governance gaps identified in this case—especially in:

- Capacity building
- Standardization and professionalization of environmental & social systems within the SWM nexus
- Prepare SWM workers for Professional certification
- Improved governance culture and best practices within the SWM institutions
(procurement and social standards)

Policy Recommendations

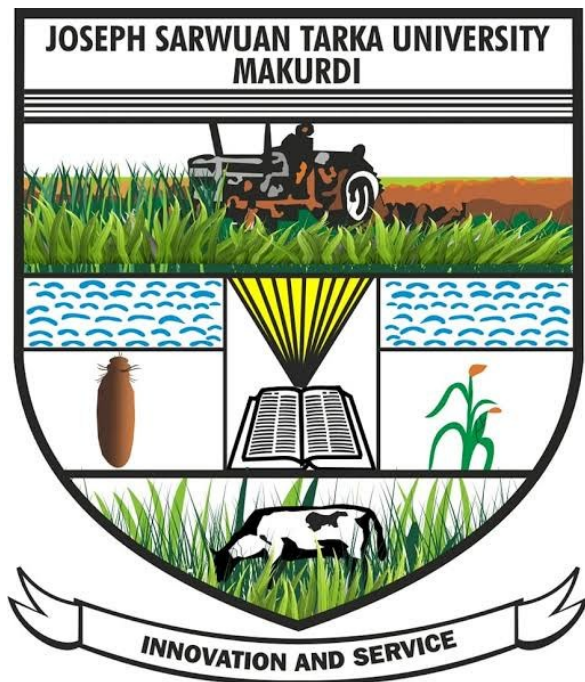
- Governance reforms must precede infrastructure
- Recognize EIA for what it truly is and integrate it into decision-making
- Institutionalize participation through continual stakeholder engagement
- Strengthen anti-corruption safeguards within SWM line institutions
- **Use SPESSE for long-term capacity development**

Conclusion

We maintain our argument that

- Governance determines environmental project success
- The Benue case illustrates how environmental management outcomes depend on the strength of governance systems
- It shows that an EIA (report) alone is insufficient – a report was produced alright, but that did not translate to effective project execution
- Effective communication and follow-up on EIA recommendations are key.

The Bottomline: Without strong governance, even well-designed projects with EIAs will fail. Strengthening governance is therefore essential for sustainable development in Nigeria



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NUC

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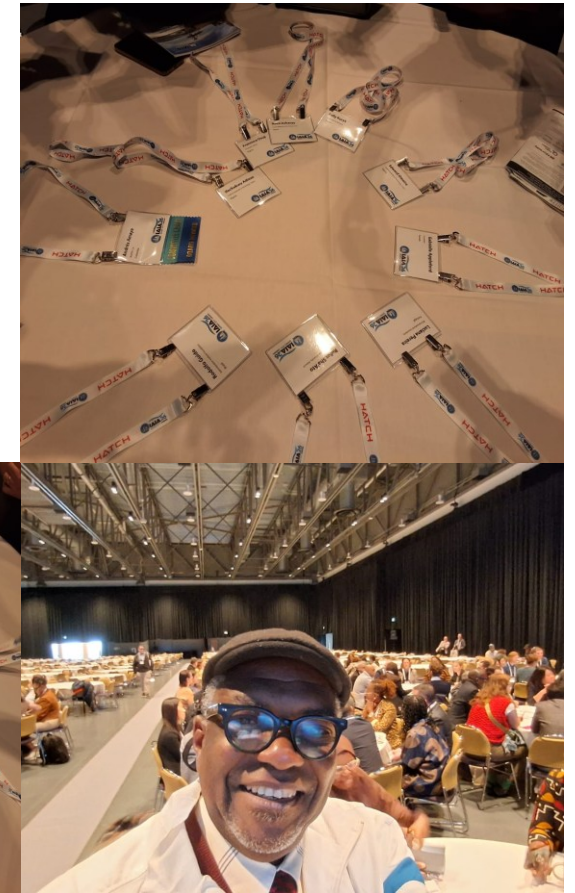
MERCI, THANKS .. For your attention!
As I return to my university with lessons from this
45th IAIA Conference



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Let's continue the conversation!

Message me your questions or comments in the IAIA26 app.



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