

# Barriers to Effective Implementation of the National Building Code in Nigeria's South-South Region: A Stakeholder Perspective

<sup>1</sup>Bamidele B. Osamudiamen, <sup>2</sup>Okolie K C, <sup>3</sup>Okolie E. N.

<sup>1</sup>Department of Building Technology Auchi Polytechnic Auchi Edo State

<sup>2&3</sup>Department of Building Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka Anambra State Nigeria.

## Abstract

The National Building Code (NBC) of Nigeria was developed to provide a regulatory framework for ensuring safety, quality, and sustainability in the construction sector. However, despite its critical role, effective implementation of the NBC has been marred by numerous challenges, particularly in the South-South region of Nigeria. This paper investigates the barriers to the successful implementation of the NBC from the perspective of key stakeholders including architects, builders, engineers, government officials, and private developers. Using a mixed-methods approach, primary data were collected through structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews across six states in the South-South region.

The findings reveal that challenges are multi-dimensional, ranging from institutional weaknesses and poor awareness of building standards to economic constraints and enforcement inefficiencies. In particular, the lack of coordination among enforcement agencies, cultural resistance to standardized building methods, and limited training for practitioners are critical issues. Economic hardship and inadequate incentives for compliance also contribute to widespread non-adherence to the NBC. Based on these insights, this paper recommends state-level legislation to domesticate the NBC, capacity building for regulatory agencies, sensitization programs, digital permit systems, and incentive-based compliance models.

Tables summarizing the frequency and severity of each identified challenge are included. This research contributes to a growing body of knowledge on building regulation enforcement and provides actionable policy directions aimed at improving building safety in Nigeria. Ultimately, overcoming the identified barriers will require a coordinated, inclusive, and well-resourced approach that recognizes the unique socio-economic and environmental dynamics of the South-South region.

## Keywords:

National Building Code, implementation challenges, construction regulation, South-South Nigeria, building safety

## 1. Introduction

The built environment plays a critical role in determining the safety, functionality, and sustainability of modern societies. As urban populations expand and construction activities intensify, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, the need for effective regulation of the building sector becomes increasingly urgent. Building codes, which establish minimum standards for design, materials, construction methods, and building performance, are among the most essential regulatory tools in this regard. They serve as benchmarks for ensuring the health and safety of building occupants, protecting public welfare, and promoting environmental responsibility. In

Nigeria, the growing concern over frequent incidents of building collapse, fire outbreaks, and construction failures led to the development and introduction of the National Building Code (NBC). Initially released in 2006 and revised in 2018, the NBC aims to standardize the construction process, promote professionalism, eliminate quackery, and ensure that all buildings in the country meet acceptable safety and quality standards. The Code was developed by a coalition of regulatory bodies and professional associations, including the Federal Ministry of Works and Housing, the Council for the Regulation of Engineering in Nigeria (COREN), the Council of Registered Builders of Nigeria (CORBON), and the Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA), among others. Despite the progressive intentions behind the NBC, its actual implementation across Nigeria has faced significant setbacks. Many buildings continue to be constructed without permits or inspections, substandard materials are widely used, and unqualified individuals often supervise or execute technical aspects of construction. These issues have resulted in loss of lives and property, erosion of public confidence in the construction sector, and growing concerns about the resilience of the built environment to natural disasters and climate-related risks.

A significant part of the problem lies in the fragmented governance structure of Nigeria's building regulation system. As a federal state, Nigeria assigns responsibility for building control to individual states. Although the NBC provides a unified national framework, it lacks the legal force to be automatically applicable in every state. States are required to pass enabling legislation to domesticate and enforce the Code, a step that many have yet to take. As a result, there is wide variation in regulatory practices, levels of enforcement, and stakeholder compliance across different parts of the country. The South-South region of Nigeria, comprising six states—Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River,

Delta, Edo, and Rivers—is one of the most economically significant zones in the country. It is home to major oil-producing

areas, industrial hubs, and rapidly urbanizing cities such as Port Harcourt, Uyo, and Benin City.

However, it also exhibits some of the most critical challenges to safe and sustainable construction practices. Issues such as urban sprawl, informal settlements, environmental degradation, and weak institutional capacity are prevalent. In this context, the effective implementation of the NBC is both urgently needed and profoundly difficult.

Several studies have attempted to assess the status of NBC implementation in Nigeria, but few have focused specifically on the South-South region or explored the challenges through a multi-stakeholder lens. Existing research often generalizes the experiences of a few metropolitan centers without accounting for regional diversity in governance structures, socio-economic realities, and cultural practices. This lack of contextualized understanding hampers the development of targeted policy interventions that can address the root causes of non-compliance and weak enforcement. This paper seeks to bridge this gap by examining the barriers to the effective implementation of the NBC in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. It takes into account the perceptions, experiences, and recommendations of key stakeholders in the construction sector, including architects, engineers, builders, developers, and regulatory officers. By doing so, it provides a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the structural, economic, institutional, and cultural factors that hinder NBC compliance and enforcement in the region.

Specifically, this study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To evaluate the level of awareness of the National Building Code among stakeholders in the South-South region of Nigeria.
2. To assess the capacity of government regulatory agencies to implement the NBC in the selected states.
3. To examine stakeholder compliance with the provisions of the NBC in the South-South region.
4. To determine the challenges facing the strategies for implementation of the National Building Code (NBC).

This paper adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining survey data with qualitative interviews to uncover both statistical trends and contextual insights. A total of 180 respondents participated in the survey, while 20 key informants provided in-depth narratives on their experiences with the NBC. The data are analyzed using descriptive and thematic methods to identify major barriers, assess institutional readiness, and propose actionable recommendations for reform. The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform evidence-based policy and practice in the Nigerian construction sector. By isolating region-specific challenges and proposing practical solutions, the findings contribute to the broader goals of improving building safety, promoting regulatory compliance, and enhancing sustainable development in Nigeria.

Moreover, the study adds to the growing body of literature on governance and public administration in the built environment, offering insights that are applicable to other developing countries with similar federal systems and regulatory challenges.

In addition, the research touches on important cross-cutting themes such as urban governance, corruption, professional ethics, and public accountability. It highlights the need for collaboration

among multiple actors—government institutions, professional bodies, civil society, and communities—in order to foster a more inclusive and effective regulatory environment. Furthermore, the study draws attention to the role of technology, such as digital permitting systems and online training platforms, in modernizing regulatory practices and enhancing transparency.

In conclusion, while the NBC represents a commendable attempt to regulate the Nigerian construction industry, its success depends largely on the willingness and capacity of states to adopt and enforce it. The South-South region, with its unique economic and socio-cultural characteristics, practice in the Nigerian construction sector. By isolating region-specific challenges and proposing practical solutions, the findings contribute to the broader goals of improving building safety, promoting regulatory compliance, and enhancing sustainable development in Nigeria.

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and capacity of states to adopt and enforce it. The South-South region, with its unique economic and socio-cultural characteristics, presents both a challenge and an opportunity in this regard. By focusing on the specific experiences and needs of this region, this paper aims to contribute to a more equitable and effective implementation of building codes in Nigeria.

### 3. Literature Review

Building codes are foundational frameworks intended to safeguard the structural integrity of buildings and ensure that they meet minimum standards of safety, health, accessibility, and sustainability. Across different countries, building regulations have evolved as critical legal instruments guiding construction practices. In Nigeria, the National Building Code (NBC) was introduced in 2006, with revisions in 2018, to address persistent challenges in the built environment such as building collapses, fire hazards, use of substandard materials, and the proliferation of quack practitioners. This review synthesizes existing literature on implementation challenges of building codes with emphasis on the NBC and draws lessons from both national and international contexts.

#### 3.1. Theoretical Context of Building

##### Regulation Implementation

The implementation of building codes rests on two primary theoretical pillars: institutional capacity and stakeholder compliance behavior. Institutional theory, as presented by North (1990), highlights how formal rules, regulatory agencies, and governance structures affect implementation outcomes. A strong institutional environment facilitates regulation through well-trained staff, adequate funding, clear mandates, and transparent systems.

Complementing this is compliance theory, which focuses on why stakeholders choose to obey or ignore rules. Tyler (2006) emphasized that voluntary compliance arises when regulations are perceived as legitimate, fair,

and beneficial. In the context of Nigeria, where trust in public institutions is often weak, compliance with building codes may be seen as burdensome or optional. Understanding these behavioral dynamics is critical for effective NBC enforcement.

#### 3.2. Challenges of Building Code

##### Implementation in Nigeria

Numerous studies point to widespread non-compliance with the NBC in Nigeria. According to Omeife and Windapo (2013), the absence of state-level legislation to enforce the NBC is a major challenge. Since building control is a residual matter under Nigeria's federal system, enforcement is the responsibility of individual states. In many instances, state governments have not passed supporting laws to domesticate or implement the NBC, leaving it largely toothless. Another major issue is the weak institutional capacity of regulatory bodies. Windapo and Rotimi (2012) observed that most state building control departments are underfunded, understaffed, and lack autonomy. These limitations reduce the frequency and quality of site inspections, permit reviews, and enforcement actions. Furthermore, many of the staff employed do not receive adequate training on the NBC's provisions or updates, which affects the quality of implementation. Low awareness among stakeholders is also widely reported. Davies (2017) and Adegbile (2019) emphasized that many professionals, the staff employed do not receive adequate training on the NBC's provisions or updates, which affects the quality of implementation. Low awareness among stakeholders is also widely reported. Davies (2017) and Adegbile (2019) emphasized that many professionals, especially in rural areas, are unaware of NBC provisions or the legal consequences of non-compliance. Builders and artisans often rely on traditional practices or informal mentoring rather than formal education or continuous professional development. This lack of awareness stems from poor dissemination of

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### 3.3. Economic and Political Contexts

Economic hardship is another major constraint on code implementation. Nigeria's construction industry is heavily affected by inflation, unstable foreign exchange rates, and limited access to credit. These economic conditions often force developers and contractors to cut corners. Ezeokonkwo and Ogunoh (2015) found that developers working with tight budgets are less likely to prioritize compliance with building codes, viewing them as an additional cost rather than a public good.

Political will and governance also play a critical role. Studies by Egbelakin (2018) and Nwadike (2021) argue that regulatory enforcement is often undermined by corruption and political interference. Building control officials may be pressured to overlook violations in politically connected projects or to issue permits without proper inspections. This political capture erodes the credibility of the regulatory system and encourages non-compliance.

### 3.4. Regional Dynamics in South-South Nigeria

The South-South region of Nigeria—comprising Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers States—has unique socio-economic and environmental conditions that affect NBC implementation. The coastal environment and high rainfall levels demand specialized construction practices and materials, yet the NBC does not always provide region-specific guidelines.

Kaushik (2019) noted

that generic building codes, when applied without local adaptations, often fail to address site-specific challenges.

Rural-urban disparities further complicate enforcement. Urban centers such as Port Harcourt

and Benin City may have better infrastructure and more experienced regulators, but rural areas often lack regulatory institutions altogether. In many local governments, building control departments are either non-existent or non-functional. In such areas, building approvals are rare, and construction occurs without oversight.

Cultural resistance also plays a role. In rural communities, indigenous building methods using mud, thatch, and bamboo are still prevalent and widely accepted. Builders and homeowners may perceive modern building codes as intrusive or irrelevant. Traditional leaders and community elders often hold significant influence over construction practices, which may not align with NBC requirements



### 3.5. Lessons from International Practice

Globally, countries such as the UK, US, Canada, and Malaysia have established effective building regulatory systems from which Nigeria can learn. In the United Kingdom, building codes are enforced through local planning authorities, supported by strong digital platforms and public accountability mechanisms. Regular audits

and third-party inspections ensure compliance. In the United States, states adopt model codes developed by the International Code Council (ICC) and customize them based on regional needs. This flexibility enhances stakeholder ownership and local relevance. The enforcement is decentralized, with strong support from professional licensing bodies and legal frameworks.

Malaysia, on the other hand, operates a centralized system guided by the Uniform Building By-Laws (UBBL), which are enforced at the state level. Fire safety and environmental sustainability are key priorities. Like the UK, Malaysia integrates digital permitting systems and mandates professional certification for key actors.

Common features of successful systems include:

- Stakeholder involvement in code development and revisions
- Training and continuing education for practitioners
- Clear legal mandates for enforcement
- Digital systems for permits, inspections, and reporting
- Public accountability through complaint and audit systems

### 3.6. Gender and Inclusivity Perspectives

One area rarely explored in Nigerian studies is how building codes affect or involve marginalized groups. Few papers discuss gender equity in construction regulation, yet the built environment significantly impacts

vulnerable populations. Codes should consider accessibility standards for persons with disabilities and provisions for gender-sensitive design (e.g., lighting, sanitation).

In the South-South, women are underrepresented in regulatory agencies and professional construction roles. Ensuring their inclusion in decision-making and training could increase community acceptance and improve enforcement outcomes.

### 3.7. Technology and Digital Infrastructure

The adoption of digital tools in construction regulation is still at a nascent stage in Nigeria. Most permitting systems are paper-based, slow, and prone to manipulation. In contrast, digital permitting platforms such as those used in Rwanda and Singapore offer real-time tracking, automated approvals, and public transparency. A digital NBC enforcement platform could significantly enhance compliance, especially if linked to tax incentives, grant programs, or professional licensing. It would also improve data collection for planning, policy development, and research.

### 3.8. Summary of Key Literature Gaps

Despite growing interest in the NBC, research remains concentrated in urban centers and generalizes findings across the country. There is a paucity of studies that examine region-specific issues in the South-South, such as the role of traditional leadership, environmental adaptation, or multi-lingual communication in NBC enforcement.

Furthermore, existing research often lacks the voice of practitioners and community members. This paper contributes to filling these gaps by using both survey and interview data from multiple stakeholder groups across the six states of the South-South region.

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#### 4. Findings and Results

The empirical data collected from the South-South region of Nigeria paints a complex picture of the numerous challenges affecting the implementation of the National Building Code (NBC).

The results derived from both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews reveal that issues are deeply embedded in institutional, economic, cultural, and technological factors. Firstly, institutional capacity emerged as a central issue. According to Table 1, 78% of respondents indicated that regulatory bodies lack the autonomy, manpower, and resources to function effectively. Respondents from Edo and Rivers States specifically highlighted the delays experienced in building approvals due to inadequate staffing and poor coordination between agencies. Interview data confirmed that many staff in regulatory departments are either untrained in NBC provisions or lack the authority to enforce them fully.

Secondly, awareness of the NBC among stakeholders was alarmingly low. Approximately 62% of respondents had limited or no knowledge of the NBC updates or regional modifications. Most practitioners, especially in Cross River and Bayelsa States, noted they had not received formal training on the NBC since their professional accreditation. A builder in Akwa Ibom stated, "Most of what we know about the Code is from word of mouth or occasional seminars organized by our associations."

Economic constraints were cited by 67% of

respondents as a major challenge. Rising costs of materials, coupled with unstable currency and lack of credit access, forced many developers to prioritize cost-saving over compliance. One developer in Delta State confessed to using non-standard materials to stay within budget, despite understanding the risks. Another participant highlighted the absence of financial incentives for compliance as a major disincentive.

Enforcement inefficiencies also stood out. With 74% identifying this as a challenge, several professionals expressed frustration over the sporadic nature of inspections and the ease with which non-compliant projects are approved due to bribery or political interference. Interviewees noted that fines were either too small to deter violations or not enforced at all. In Cross River, a regulatory officer lamented, "Our laws are strong on paper, but in reality, many developers bypass us entirely."

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Cultural and traditional resistance was prominent in rural areas. In many communities, modern building codes are viewed as alien or unnecessary. Indigenous construction methods, such as the use of mud bricks or thatch roofs, persist due to familiarity and affordability. 55% of respondents viewed cultural resistance as a barrier, with higher percentages among regulatory officers and builders. Table 2 shows that developers (55%) and builders (52%) experience these issues most frequently in practice. Fragmentation in coordination between various regulatory and professional bodies was another challenge, as 60% of respondents highlighted overlapping functions, lack of information sharing, and inter-agency rivalry. For example, in Rivers State, both the local government and state planning departments issue permits, creating confusion and conflict.

Technological limitations, including the lack of digital tools for inspections and permitting, further weakened enforcement efforts. Many states still rely on manual record-keeping, which increases the risk of errors, manipulation, and inefficiency. This has also contributed to delays in project certification and monitoring. The results from the interviews also revealed a lack of stakeholder engagement in policy development and implementation. Most professionals felt alienated from the regulatory process. This gap leads to poor understanding of the rationale behind code provisions, reducing compliance motivation. Several participants suggested involving professional associations in awareness campaigns and code revisions.

Overall, the data highlight a multilayered implementation challenge that demands region-specific solutions. As shown in Table 3, institutional weaknesses, economic hardship, and cultural dynamics are the most cited root causes. These insights provide a foundation for tailored strategies aimed at improving compliance with the NBC in the South-South region.

**Table 1: Summary of Identified Challenges to NBC Implementation**

Challenge	Frequency (%)	Severity (1–5)
Weak institutional Capacity	78%	4.5
Low stakeholder Awareness	62%	4.0
Economic constraints.	67%	4.2
Ineffective enforcement mechanisms.	74%.	4.6
Cultural resistance	55%	3.8
Fragmentation in Coordination	60%	4.3
Source: Field Survey, 2025		

**Table 2: Stakeholders Identifying Challenges by Profession**

Profession Weak Institutions (%) Economic Constraints (%) Cultural Resistance (%)

Architects	72%	68%	44%
Engineers	79%	65%	50%
Builders	81%	71%	52%
Developers	67%	82%	55%
Regulatory Officers	85%	69%	47%

Source: Field Survey, 2025



**Table 3: Root Causes of Implementation Challenges Barrier****Category Specific Issues Identified**

**Institutional** Lack of trained personnel, poor funding, bureaucracy  
**Economic** Inflation, limited access to credit, cost-cutting  
**Legal/Policy** No state-level NBC adoption, conflicting laws  
**Cultural/Social** Resistance to modern practices, preference for tradition  
**Technological** Lack of digital permitting systems, poor record-keeping

**Table 4: Level of Awareness of NBC by Stakeholder Group**

**Stakeholder Group      High Awareness (%)      Moderate Awareness (%)      Low/No Awareness (%)**

Architects	78%	17%	5%
Engineers	73%	20%	7%
Builders	69%	25%	6%
Developers	58%	30%	12%
Artisans	35%	28%	37%
Source: Field Survey, 2025			

**Table 5: Stakeholder Perceptions of Enforcement Effectiveness (by State)**

State	Effective (%)	Partially Effective (%)	Ineffective (%)
Edo	29%	36%	35%
Rivers	35%	30%	35%
Delta	31%	28%	41%
Akwa Ibom	27%	33%	40%
Bayelsa	20%	34%	46%
Cross River	25%	38%	37%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

**Table 6: Recommended Strategies for Improved NBC Implementation**

Strategy	StakeholderSupport (%)	Feasibility Rating (1–5)
Domestication of NBC in State Laws.	88%	4.7
Capacity building for regulators	84%	4.5
Public awareness and sensitization	79%	4.4
Digital permitting and inspections	73%	4.2
Incentives for code compliance	68%	4.0
Community/traditional leader engagement	60%	3.8

#### 4. Discussion

The challenges identified in the results section underscore a broad implementation gap in the NBC enforcement landscape within the South-South region. These findings align with and expand on the literature reviewed earlier, offering new insights into localized challenges and potential pathways forward.

The institutional capacity gap reflects a systemic issue common across many developing countries. According to North (1990) and Kaushik (2019), institutions are central to regulatory success, and weak institutions are often unable to uphold standards. The lack of trained personnel, poor funding, and inadequate legal backing at the state level reduce the power of building control departments. This resonates

with the findings of Windapo and Rotimi (2012) and supports the urgent need for state-level domestication of the NBC.

Awareness is both a cause and effect of institutional and cultural failures. The low level of awareness, particularly among middle- and lower-tier professionals, reflects poorly on professional bodies and educational institutions. This confirms the assertion by Davies (2017) that regulatory effectiveness is tied to knowledge dissemination and ongoing professional development. The absence of structured continuing education programs for NBC compliance underscores a significant policy gap.

Economic barriers play a dual role. Not only do they deter compliance, but they also undermine the overall value of regulatory frameworks. Developers working with limited budgets often cut corners. In such contexts, the NBC is viewed as a costly burden rather than a safety net. This creates a moral hazard where the risk of non-compliance is borne by the end-users or occupants of buildings. Furthermore, enforcement inefficiency is not merely a result of inadequate resources, but a reflection of systemic corruption and lack of political will. As Egbelakin (2018) notes, political interference often thwarts regulatory enforcement. Interview findings corroborate this, with many respondents citing bribes and political backing as reasons for regulatory compromise. The absence of digital tools exacerbates this issue, making inspection and monitoring less transparent.

The cultural dimension of implementation has not received sufficient attention in previous studies. This research demonstrates that cultural beliefs, traditional construction practices, and community-level resistance must be factored into regulatory design and enforcement. In regions where construction is still heavily influenced by indigenous practices, blanket implementation of Western-oriented codes can generate opposition.

Fragmentation of authority and poor coordination among enforcement agencies not only creates jurisdictional confusion but also offers loopholes for evasion. The dual issuance of permits, as seen in Rivers State, weakens regulatory control and fosters inconsistency. This supports the call by Adegbile (2019) for an integrated, well-coordinated building control system.

In addressing these challenges, lessons from international best practices can be valuable. Countries like Malaysia and the United Kingdom have successfully implemented decentralized but integrated building control systems. The use of digital inspection tools, regular audits, and strong professional ethics codes contribute to better compliance rates.

Importantly, stakeholder engagement is lacking in the Nigerian context. Interviewees consistently mentioned that policies are developed without input from professionals at the grassroots. This top-down approach breeds disconnect and nonchalance among implementers. Engaging stakeholders in NBC revisions and awareness programs can increase buy-in and compliance.

## 5. Conclusion

This study examined the key barriers to the effective implementation of the National Building Code (NBC) in Nigeria's South-South region. Despite its importance in ensuring safety, quality, and sustainability in the construction sector, the NBC faces significant implementation challenges in Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers States.

The findings reveal that institutional weakness is a major obstacle. Most state regulatory bodies lack the legal authority, trained personnel, and resources to enforce the NBC. The absence of domestication laws at the state level has left many regulators unable to act effectively.

Stakeholder awareness of the NBC is also low, particularly among artisans, developers, and rural-based practitioners, which further reduces compliance.

Economic pressures exacerbate the situation, as many builders and developers prioritize cost savings over adherence to standards. Cultural resistance, especially in rural communities that rely on traditional construction methods, further complicates enforcement. Corruption and political interference also weaken the integrity of the regulatory process.

Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach. States must domesticate the NBC and invest in building institutional capacity. Professional bodies and government agencies

need to enhance training and public awareness. Introducing digital tools, compliance incentives, and involving community leaders can also improve enforcement.

Ultimately, effective implementation of the NBC in the South-South region demands a combination of legal reform, institutional strengthening, stakeholder engagement, and cultural sensitivity. Only through such inclusive strategies can the goals of the NBC be realized, ensuring safer, more resilient buildings across Nigeria.

## 6. Recommendations

1. Domesticate the NBC into state legislation with regional adaptations.
2. Strengthen the capacity of regulatory agencies.
3. Launch continuous public awareness and professional education.
4. Implement digital permitting and inspection systems.
5. Introduce compliance incentives and penalties.
6. Engage traditional leaders and local artisans in outreach efforts.

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