

Research Article

Contextualising Sustainable Communities in Sub-sahara Africa: A Systematic Review Protocol

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Abstract

Sustainable communities play a critical role in urban development, as they possess the ability to effectively address challenges associated with rapid urbanisation in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Attaining sustainable communities through social inclusiveness, economic vigour, and environmental stewardship is a multifaceted endeavour. Therefore, acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the contextual variables, constraints, and opportunities that exert influence on the advancement of sustainable communities in SSA is of paramount importance to facilitate well-informed policy formulation and strategic planning. Existing studies suggest that contextualization among other aspects, plays a critical role in ensuring that development interventions uphold and combine local values and practices. This approach fosters a feeling of ownership as well as cultural continuity in the community. However, there is a lack of studies that have put together the available information on the impact of contextualising sustainable communities in cities in SSA. This study aims to address these disparities by consolidating the comprehension of how sustainable communities can be included and adapted for urban planning and development in SSA cities. This will consist of a comprehensive analysis of the available urban policies, planning laws, and governance structures in cities in SSA. This protocol will keep to the guidelines defined in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (PRISMA 2020). A systematic review will be conducted to assess the obstacles and barriers encountered in the development and execution of urban policies, planning laws, and governance structures intended for creating sustainable communities in cities in SSA. This study will consider the time frame spanning from 1990 to 2024. A minimum of eight appropriate databases will be searched, including government documents, academic journals, and publications from international development agencies. Two and three concept search structures will be used and documented in Table 3. The Rayyan Reviewer software will be utilized for data management and analysis. Two reviewers will Independently, screen all literature retrieved, full-text articles and extract data. A thorough quality assessment of the included studies will be conducted. Studies included in the review will be analyzed appropriately based on the type of data obtained. This protocol with reference number CRD2024608143 is registered with the PROSPERO global prospective register of systematic reviews.

Keywords

Sustainable Communities, Contextualizing, Systematic Review, Sub-Sahara Africa

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1. Background

The region of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is now experiencing a notable trend of urbanisation, characterised by a substantial section of its people relocating to urban centres in pursuit of enhanced economic prospects and higher standards of life [23, 138, 22, 64]. The phenomenon of urban expansion is accompanied by a variety of obstacles [31, 86], such as the presence of informal settlements, insufficient infrastructure, shortages in housing, and restricted availability of critical services [87, 74, 88, 42, 65, 68]. Consequently, there exists a pressing need to investigate and execute sustainable development solutions that effectively tackle these difficulties and advance the welfare of urban inhabitants.

Furthermore, the urbanisation process seen in SSA is often associated with unplanned growth [69, 98, 9], insufficient provision of urban amenities, and destruction of the environment [50, 57, 6, 125]. The prevalence of informal settlements and slums [136, 53, 75] gives rise to several challenges pertaining to sanitation, health, and safety. Hence, the absence of adequate urban planning and infrastructure exacerbates these difficulties and impedes the overall quality of life in urban areas. [67] posits that the incorporation of indigenous knowledge and practices into planning processes has the potential to augment the cultural appropriateness of sustainable community efforts. According to [28], the integration of disaster risk reduction strategies, such as climate-responsive infrastructure and urban green spaces into sustainable communities may contribute to the enhancement of climate resilience.

Similarly, literature acknowledges that the implementation of waste reduction strategies, the development of green infrastructure, and the adoption of renewable energy sources within urban areas may effectively address the challenges associated with urbanization [2, 63, 17, 105]. Suggesting that the attainment of sustainability is of paramount importance for cities in SSA, since it is necessary for safeguarding the welfare of their inhabitants while simultaneously mitigating adverse effects on the environment. Hence, sustainable communities prioritise the incorporation of economic, social, and environmental factors into the process of urban development, with the objective of establishing cities that are both habitable and resilient, while also promoting inclusivity. In light of the widespread acknowledgement of the significance of sustainable development on a global scale, it becomes imperative to adapt and situate these concepts within the specific circumstances and distinct complexities encountered by cities in SSA. This necessitates comprehending the cultural, economic, and social dynamics of the area and adapting sustainable community methods appropriately.

Furthermore, the SSA region is characterised by unique circumstances [37, 48, 29], that need the implementation of tailored solutions. The region exhibits variations in cultural norms, governance structures, economic realities, and environmental conditions [126, 79, 78, 30, 76], which calls for the

development of ways that align with specific local settings. Consequently, a comprehensive analysis is required to determine the appropriate adaptation and successful implementation of sustainable community principles. The actual application of sustainable development in cities within the SSA region is an area that has not been extensively researched, despite the widespread discussion around this issue. This research seeks to address the existing disparities by synthesizing both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the contextualization and integration of sustainable communities within urban planning and development practices in the region.

In summary, the justification and basis for situating sustainable communities in SSA emphasise the pressing need to confront the obstacles posed by urbanisation and advance sustainable development. This research seeks to provide useful insights on the application of sustainable community concepts in cities in SSA, to improve quality of life, enhance resilience, and ensure a sustainable urban future.

Definition and Components of Sustainable Communities

Sustainable communities can be referred to as urban and rural areas that are intentionally planned and constructed to foster the holistic welfare of their inhabitants, including social, economic, and environmental dimensions [104, 24, 92, 66]. These communities prioritise long-term resilience and overall quality of life for their population. These communities strive to achieve a balance between human activities and natural systems, with the goals of minimising resource use and promoting social fairness. Scholarly literature offers a full comprehension of the concept of sustainable communities. Furthermore, [11] posits that sustainable communities are distinguished by their capacity to fulfill the requirements of the present while safeguarding the potential of future generations to fulfill their own needs. These communities effectively use environmental, economic, and social factors to create conditions that promote both physical well-being and thriving economic activities. In addition, [140] emphasises the need for sustainable communities to attain a harmonious equilibrium between human endeavours and the surrounding natural ecosystem. This entails the implementation of strategies aimed at reducing ecological footprints, advocating for the adoption of environmentally friendly technology, and cultivating a feeling of attachment and community among inhabitants. Sustainable communities also place significant emphasis on promoting social inclusion and fostering active community involvement. According to [11], there is a promotion of participatory decision-making processes, facilitation of local government, and provision of access to essential services and opportunities for disadvantaged communities. In essence, the notion of sustainable communities extends beyond the preservation of the environment to cover the promotion of economic development, social cohesion, and comprehensive well-being. These communities acknowledge the

interdependence of ecological, economic, and social systems, to establish communities that improve the well-being of current and future generations.

Sustainable communities strive to mitigate ecological consequences via the integration of green infrastructure, sustainable transportation alternatives, energy-efficient structures, and waste reduction strategies [39, 84]. Sustainable communities are intentionally planned to prioritise pedestrian mobility, including elements such as walking streets, secure walkways, and interconnected paths. This initiative fosters more engagement in physical activities, reduces dependence on motor vehicles, and cultivates stronger social connections among individuals within the community. Sustainable communities place a high value on the implementation of environmentally conscious practices, such as the adoption of eco-friendly measures, the promotion of energy efficiency, the reduction of waste, and the establishment of green infrastructure. These efforts are aimed at minimising the ecological impact of these communities and safeguarding the integrity of natural resources [15]. Likewise, the promotion of sustainable transport modes, such as walking, cycling, and public transit, is advocated to mitigate the release of greenhouse gas emissions.

Furthermore, Sustainable communities facilitate the cultivation of a varied economy via the promotion of local enterprises, the provision of assistance for job development, and the facilitation of access to economic prospects. The promotion of mixed-use developments, which integrate residential, commercial, and recreational areas, is advocated to support local economic activity. According to [114], the presence of economic success has a positive impact on both social well-being and resilience. Sustainable communities seek to enhance land utilisation by integrating residential, commercial, recreational, and industrial areas, hence reducing the need for extensive commuting and fostering pedestrian-friendly environments [34]. According to [60], sustainable communities contribute to the enhancement of both physical and mental well-being via the provision of green areas, recreational amenities, and convenient access to nutritious food choices.

One fundamental tenet of sustainable communities is the need to establish social justice, which entails providing all inhabitants with equitable opportunities to avail themselves of vital services, educational resources, healthcare provisions, and recreational amenities. These communities seek to mitigate the disparity in economic distribution and foster social integration among heterogeneous groups. These communities place a high value on promoting social inclusion via the provision of inexpensive housing, accessible services, and facilities that cater to the needs of all inhabitants, irrespective of their socio-economic background. According to [62], inclusive planning plays a crucial role in ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities. The provision of diverse housing alternatives that cater to individuals from various economic brackets is vital for the establishment of sustainable

communities. This strategy serves to mitigate displacement, encourage the development of mixed-income neighbourhoods, and encourage social diversity.

Similarly, Sustainable communities use climate adaptation and mitigation methods to effectively survive the adverse effects of climate change. This includes the implementation of infrastructure that is resilient to floods, the construction of buildings that are designed to optimise energy use, and the adoption of measures aimed at conserving water resources. According to [119], the primary objective of these communities is to develop resilience and flexibility in the face of many difficulties, including climate change, natural catastrophes, and economic swings.

The acknowledgment and conservation of cultural heritage and local identity play a significant role in shaping the distinctive characteristics of sustainable communities. Cultural diversity is celebrated and fosters environments that facilitate cultural expression and meaningful engagement. According to [18], these communities participate in the preservation of cultural assets, encourage creative endeavours, and facilitate community participation as a means of celebrating local culture, tradition, and diversity.

Finally, the establishment of governance systems that effectively include citizens in decision-making processes is a crucial element for the development and maintenance of sustainable communities. The active participation of residents in the formulation of policies, planning processes, and development initiatives plays a vital role in ensuring that the needs and aspirations of the community are effectively addressed. For instance, [54] believe that the involvement of people in decision-making processes enables them to actively participate in the planning and development of their communities. Therefore, the achievement of successful governance necessitates the establishment of collaborative efforts among local authorities, stakeholders, and community members to formulate policies that accurately align with the specific requirements of the local context [26].

2. Analytical Framework for Data Extraction and Synthesis

An analytical framework functions as a structured instrument that directs the systematic collection, organisation, interpretation, and synthesis of data in empirical research. This study's framework is designed to analyse the influence of urban policies, planning regulations, and governance structures in Sub-Saharan African (SSA) cities on the development of sustainable communities, emphasising the integration of social equity, environmental sustainability, and economic vitality. This framework is especially critical in SSA, where urbanisation is rapid and often unstructured, institutional capacity is inconsistent. Likewise, the socio-economic landscape is shaped by high levels of informality and inequality [131, 97]. As such, the framework provides a coherent

structure for assessing the complex, multi-dimensional, and context-specific interactions linked to urban development and sustainability transitions (see [Table 1](#)).

The framework aligns with the Research Questions by examining the content of national and local urban policies, such as housing policies and spatial development frameworks. It also addresses the application and enforcement of planning regulations, including zoning and land use laws, as well as the structure and function of governance systems, encompassing decentralisation and participatory mechanisms. This helps assess the extent to which formal structures facilitate or obstruct the advancement of sustainable urbanism [\[80, 133\]](#). Furthermore, the analytical framework employs a three-dimensional perspective derived from the literature on sustainable urban development [\[14, 13\]](#). The key components include social equity, which encompasses access to land, housing, and basic services; inclusive participation in planning; and tenure security. Environmental sustainability involves the integration of green infrastructure, climate resilience, and ecosystem protection. Economic vitality focusses on livelihood support, job creation, affordable service provision, and economic inclusion [\[129\]](#). This part of the framework assesses the degree to which planning instruments embody comprehensive, integrative sustainability visions in contrast to limited sectoral objectives. Also, the analytical framework emphasises implementation dynamics and structural constraints, including institutional fragmentation and coordination failures [\[41\]](#), limited financial and technical capacity at the local level, political economy constraints [\[8\]](#), and the dual nature of planning in SSA, where informal settlements frequently develop outside formal regulations [\[134\]](#). The framework facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the practical limitations to achieving sustainable urban development by mapping these barriers.

Similarly, the framework will facilitate data extraction from multiple sources, including policy documents and strategic plans, urban development legislation and by-laws, municipal implementation reports and evaluations, as well as peer-reviewed academic literature and grey reports. The data will be thematically coded according to the core framework dimensions, facilitating a comparative analysis of the integration of sustainability principles, the functionality and coherence of planning and governance systems, and the barriers and opportunities for reform and innovation. This method is consistent with framework synthesis approaches. It utilizes urban policy and planning research [\[121\]](#) and facilitates theory-informed, context-sensitive interpretation [\[96\]](#).

Finally, this analytical framework provides a comprehensive lens for examining the connections between urban planning instruments and their outcomes in SSA cities. The framework facilitates a comprehensive synthesis by organising data according to the pillars of social, environmental, and economic sustainability. It incorporates institutional and policy analysis that directly address the research questions. It also provides a platform that facilitates the generation of actiona-

ble insights regarding the reorientation of urban planning and governance to foster more inclusive and resilient communities within the African context.

3. Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework aims to direct research and policy analysis regarding the attainment of sustainable communities in Sub-Saharan African (SSA) cities. It focusses on the interplay between urban policies, planning regulations, and governance structures with essential sustainability pillars: social equity, environmental sustainability, and economic vitality. The framework is based on academic discussions and real-world evidence across SSA. The conceptual framework (see [Figure 1](#)) illustrates the mechanisms by which sustainable communities can be achieved.

Urban policies represent strategic frameworks at the national or municipal level that establish the priorities and trajectory for urban development. Urban policies define the overarching developmental and infrastructural framework of a city. These encompass approaches related to land use, transportation, housing, and environmental management. In SSA, policies tend to be implemented from the top down and lack effective coordination, resulting in disjointed urban development [\[94, 131\]](#). Similarly, planning regulations encompass land-use plans, building codes, zoning laws, and environmental standards. Planning regulations implement urban policies by utilising zoning laws, building codes, and environmental mandates. In SSA, these frameworks frequently mirror outdated colonial models and do not adequately address informal settlements, leading to spatial inequity and exclusion [\[133\]](#). Likewise, governance structures encompass the institutions, actors, processes, and accountability mechanisms that play a critical role in urban planning and service delivery. Effective governance requires decision-making that is inclusive, transparent, and participatory. SSA cities frequently experience issues related to institutional fragmentation, inadequate decentralisation, and restricted fiscal autonomy, which impede effective sustainable urban management [\[108, 139\]](#).

Furthermore, this conceptual framework is based on the interplay of three normative objectives such as Social Equity, Environmental Sustainability, and Economic Vitality [\[94\]](#). These dimensions intersect the axes of policy, regulation, and governance, with each interaction either reinforcing or limiting sustainability. For instance, environmentally progressive planning that lacks inclusive governance could lead to green gentrification. Similarly, policies that emphasise economic growth without considering equity could intensify spatial inequality.

This conceptual model systematically integrates the study's three research questions with the core structural and sustainability components to enhance understanding. The model posits that the interaction among urban policies, planning regulations, and governance structures (upper-level structures)

affects the effectiveness of cities in fostering social equity, environmental sustainability, and economic vitality (pillars of sustainable communities). The conceptual model illustrates how structural features, such as policies, planning, and governance, influence the quality and scope of sustainability outcomes, including equity, environment, and economy, and how these elements interact with one another. The model incorporates feedback mechanisms that illustrate the potential for iterative learning and policy reform.

Notwithstanding the conceptual ideal, the implementation of this framework in SSA cities encounters a variety of significant challenges. Institutional fragmentation is evident in urban planning, service delivery, and housing, which are frequently overseen by distinct and inadequately coordinated institutions [95]. Regulatory exclusion arises when planning regulations do not acknowledge informal settlements, categorising them as illegal and outside established planning frameworks [134]. Weak local governance is a significant issue, as many local governments lack the necessary technical and financial resources, hindering their capacity to execute sustainability-oriented policies [108]. Additionally, colonial

planning legacies continue to influence current practices. Urban plans exhibit a tendency to favour elite interests and adhere to Eurocentric design principles [80]. Also, the absence of integrated urban climate resilience within spatial and infrastructure planning intensifies urban risk, especially in cities susceptible to flooding [89].

The conceptual framework serves as a tool for assessing urban sustainability in SSA through institutional structures and their relationships with sustainability outcomes. By focussing on social equity, environmental sustainability, and economic vitality, it provides a comprehensive framework for analysing urban challenges and informing inclusive policy reforms. This framework ultimately encourages the integration of context-sensitive approaches, necessitating that policies are adaptable, regulations are both enforceable and inclusive, and governance is characterised by transparency and accountability. It is essential to note that sustainable communities arise not solely from technical design but also through negotiation, participation, and the equitable distribution of power within urban environments [134].

Conceptual Framework

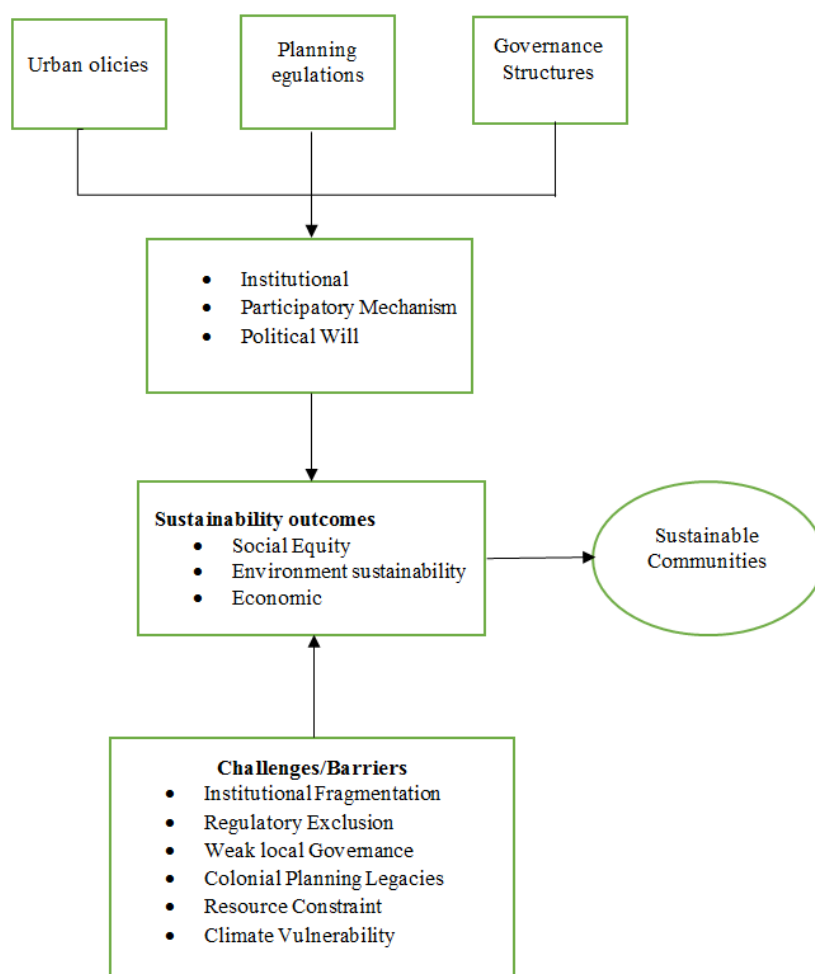


Figure 1. Contextualizing Sustainable Communities Framework.

4. Why This Review

The urbanisation phenomenon in cities within SSA is a multifaceted and evolving process that encompasses several possibilities and problems in the pursuit of sustainable development. This region has seen a notable surge in urbanisation, characterised by a substantial migration of people from rural to urban settings [138]. The occurrence of this phenomenon is influenced by several elements, including but not limited to economic possibilities, job prospects, access to education, and enhanced services [5, 128]. Nevertheless, the process of urbanisation is often accompanied by a multitude of pressures and difficulties that influence the developmental trajectory of cities [93]. Cities in SSA are now experiencing an unprecedented surge in population expansion, resulting in issues such as overcrowding, stretched resources, and insufficient infrastructure [110, 16]. The challenges associated with the provision of housing, sanitation, healthcare, and education services are further intensified by the arrival of rural migrants in search of improved prospects [111].

Moreover, cities in SSA are confronted with significant social and economic disparities arising from income inequality and poverty [85, 61]. These cities also face challenges related to insufficient housing provisions [49, 130], disparities in education and healthcare [59, 4], gender inequalities [3], high rates of youth unemployment [7, 1], social exclusion and discrimination [58], spatial inequalities [117], limited access to basic services [93], and inadequate social services [10]. The discrepancies possess extensive ramifications for the cohesiveness of society, the advancement of the economy, and the general sustainability of metropolitan areas. The mitigation of social and economic disparities in urban areas of SSA necessitates a holistic strategy that incorporates policy interventions, focused initiatives, and cooperative endeavours including governmental bodies, civil society organisations, and foreign entities.

Similarly, cities in SSA encounter a multitude of environmental and resource-related obstacles resulting from the fast process of urbanisation, population expansion, and insufficient infrastructure. The difficulties possess noteworthy ramifications for the welfare of urban inhabitants, as well as the general sustainability of cities within the area. [55] have shown that the phenomenon of air and water pollution in urban areas is influenced by many factors, including increasing industrialization, heightened automobile emissions, and insufficient waste management practices. The presence of inadequate air quality and the contamination of water sources provide significant health hazards to inhabitants, hence diminishing the overall standard of living [38, 73, 52]. Similarly, several urban areas have challenges pertaining to ineffective garbage collection and disposal infrastructures, resulting in the buildup of solid waste in public thoroughfares and informal residential areas [141, 33]. Insufficient waste management practices are a significant factor in the deterioration of the environment and the emergence of health risks [20, 70].

In a similar vein, the process of urban growth often results in the occurrence of deforestation and the subsequent depletion of green areas. The phenomenon described has a significant impact on the urban climate, intensifying the heat island effects and reducing biodiversity [50, 142]. The issue of limited availability and affordability of dependable energy sources is a prevalent and recurring concern faced by several urban areas in SSA. The aforementioned factors result in a shortage of energy, dependence on informal energy sources, and inequitable distribution of power [81]. The issue of insufficient availability of clean and safe drinking water poses a significant and urgent problem, especially within informal settlements [99]. The presence of inadequate sanitation infrastructure and inadequate management of wastewater compounds the existing water-related difficulties [101].

Furthermore, Cities in the SSA region are susceptible to the adverse effects of climate change, including heightened occurrences of floods, droughts, and the escalation of sea levels (see [132, 102]). The aforementioned consequences have the potential to cause disruptions in infrastructure, livelihoods, and economic activity [36, 56]. Habitat damage and biodiversity loss are consequences of urbanisation and land-use changes [44, 106]. The expansion of urban areas often results in the conversion of natural habitats into developed settings, hence posing a danger to the local flora and fauna [71]. The phenomenon of rapid urban growth has the potential to result in several negative environmental consequences, such as land degradation, erosion, and soil pollution. According to [135] and [32], inadequate land management practices and industrial operations have the potential to diminish the quality of soil and restrict its ability to support productive activities. Informal communities often exhibit a dearth of fundamental environmental services, including waste management and sanitation provisions. The phenomenon described above reinforces disparities in environmental conditions, wherein marginalised communities experience heightened levels of pollution and associated health hazards [83]. This systematic review will address the aforementioned gaps by synthesizing evidence on the problems and limitations associated with the development and implementation of urban policies, planning laws, and governance structures in the establishment of sustainable communities within cities in SSA. This study will add to the scarcity body of knowledge on the development of sustainable communities in SSA.

5. The Aim and Review Questions

The review aim is to systematically synthesize evidence on existing urban policies, planning regulations, and governance structures in cities in SSA and assess their alignment with sustainable community development goals. To accomplish the aim of the review, three review questions (RQs) have been developed:

RQ1. What are the prevailing urban policies, planning

regulations, and governance structures in SSA cities, and how do they shape the sustainable communities?

RQ2. To what extent do current urban policies and regulations prioritize and integrate social equity, environmental sustainability, and economic vitality in SSA cities?

RQ3. What are the key challenges and barriers of urban policies, planning regulations, and governance structures in creating sustainable communities in SSA cities?

6. Methods

This protocol adheres to the reporting criteria of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Protocols (PRISMA, 2020) as outlined by [91]. This manuscript will contain a PRISMA 2020 checklist labelled as Additional file 1. Details of PRISMA 2020 checklist may be found in Table 2. This study will employ two main search methodologies: advanced searching on specific databases and manual searching across a selection of databases, namely Google Scholar, JSTOR, Science Direct, EBSCOhost, Springer Link, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, African Journals Online, and Research Gate. The authors will use the phrase searching function, together with the Boolean operators 'OR' and 'AND', to combine keywords using advanced searching approaches. Similarly, this study will include three main techniques for doing manual searches, namely manual selection, retrospective tracking, and prospective tracking.

6.1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

6.1.1. Inclusion Criteria

Inclusion of all articles obtained will be determined by the following criteria. The articles must specifically focus on contextualising sustainable communities in urban areas within the SSA region and must be in English language. The primary emphasis of articles must be directed towards cities and urban regions situated within the SSA context. To guarantee the currency and relevancy of the articles, the review will consider publications that have been released during the last three decades. To uphold scholarly integrity, articles will be sourced only from esteemed academic outlets, including academic publishers, peer-reviewed journals, and well-established research organisations. Eligibility will be extended to articles that employ diverse research approaches, including qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, case studies, and theoretical analyses. Academic articles may include a wide range of topics, including but not limited to socio-cultural issues, economic influences, community involvement, climate resilience, policy and governance, and the incorporation of indigenous knowledge. This study will evaluate both theoretical publications that provide conceptual frameworks and practical articles that show case studies and real-world implementations. This systematic review will

consider for inclusion only primary study.

6.1.2. Exclusion Criteria

Articles that do not discuss topic of contextualizing sustainable communities in SSA will be excluded. Non-peer-reviewed articles including opinion pieces, blogs, and popular articles will not be considered for inclusion. Articles lacking proper citations, references, and adherence to academic standards and articles that offer minimal insights on the topic will be excluded. Duplicate articles or content published in multiple sources will be excluded. Articles published before a specified cutoff date will be excluded.

6.2. Information Sources

This systematic review protocol on sustainable communities will be submitted to Prospero to validate research idea originality. A preliminary database search will collect information for the search strategy. Databases will be chosen to incorporate public safety and education sources. To find relevant articles, the qualifying research reference lists will be thoroughly checked.

6.3. Search Methods

The primary means of accessing relevant research will include consulting various electronic databases, such as the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS) on the ProQuest platform. This database offers a comprehensive selection of academic publications in the field of social sciences. The search methodology will include the identification and selection of appropriate databases, the formulation of keywords and index terms for coding purposes, and the compilation of reference lists of pertinent articles. The scope of the search will be limited to scholarly studies that have been published in the English language. Additionally, the search will focus on works published between the years 1990 and 2024, inclusive. This time frame has been chosen due to the absence of empirical information about the inception of sustainable communities in SSA. The choice of 1990 to 2024 as the period for this systematic review is based on empirical evidence and policy-driven considerations. The year 1990 serves as a significant baseline, aligning with the initiation of globally acknowledged urban transition trends in Sub-Saharan Africa [134]. During this period, numerous countries experienced significant urban population growth [137], driven by internal migration, economic liberalisation, and structural adjustment programs [21]. This period coincides with the initiation of systematic urban data collection by international organisations, including the World Bank, UN-Habitat, and UN DESA, facilitating comparative and longitudinal studies [94, 113]. Furthermore, 1990 marks the beginning of Agenda 21 (1992), an initial global commitment to sustainable development, and acts as a precursor to later urban policy frameworks that significantly shaped urban

governance in Sub-Saharan Africa [27]. The review period is extended to 2024 to encompass the latest developments and academic insights, particularly concerning the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established in 2015 and the New Urban Agenda ratified in 2016. Global commitments have transformed urban policy, infrastructure investment, and planning strategies in numerous cities across Sub-Saharan Africa [116]. The 1990 to 2024 period encompasses more than three decades of transition, policy evolution, and urban transformation, providing a thorough examination of the challenges and responses influencing urban development in SSA. [82] asserts that nations in the SSA region are well noted for their inadequate publishing culture. Therefore, to mitigate any potential bias in the screening process, the search will include published and unpublished study excluding published remarks, book reviews, expert opinions, editorials, or press briefings.

6.3.1. Electronic Searches

The process of conducting electronic database searches will adhere to the systematic review guidelines developed by Cochrane Collaboration, Campbell Collaboration, and the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) [109]. Additionally, the experiences of other researchers will be taken into consideration, as evidenced by studies conducted by [123], and [122].

6.3.2. Databases

Supplementary document, labelled as "Additional file 2," contains the results of scoping exercises that were carried out on ASSIA (Applied Social Services Index and Abstracts) and SSA (Social Services Abstracts) on 20th August 2022. The study included evaluating two concept and three concept groups. This evaluation was conducted via the use of text-term searching techniques (see Table 3). The use of quote marks helps to restrict the search to precise terms, such as "sustainable communities". In addition, the use of truncation, represented by the symbol (_~), will be employed to search various word forms, namely those pertaining to plural keywords. As stated by [124], Boolean operators, including AND, OR, and NOT, are used to establish the handling of search terms. An exemplification of this phenomenon is seen in the use of the Boolean operator AND, which functions to link the fundamental concepts. Furthermore, the expressions used to communicate each notion are linked by the logical operator OR placed inside brackets, to examine them as a cohesive and meaningful entity [124]. The use of the Boolean operator NOT allows for the evaluation of the impact of newly inserted keywords on the search algorithm. The search approach will be implemented across a minimum of eight electronic databases. The databases include a range of reputable sources such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, Science Direct, EBSCOhost, Springer Link, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, African Journals Online, Research Gate, Social Sciences Citation Index, Scopus, Web of Science, and Applied Social

Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA).

6.3.3. Internet Search Engines

This study will explore internet search engines such as Google Scholar and Scirus, using search phrases that are similar to those used in the aforementioned databases. The search will include working papers and dissertations sourced from the websites and online repositories of institutions in SSA. Additionally, the search function will maintain a "search log" to document the process of searching, hence enhancing transparency and facilitating the evaluation of result quality [82].

6.4. Selection Process

The selection procedure will include a two-step screening approach. During the preliminary evaluation stage, two reviewers will individually assess the suitability of research papers by examining their titles and abstracts. The process of excluding research that do not meet the predetermined inclusion criteria will be carried out. The settlement of differences between the two reviewers will be pursued via a process of discussion, whereby a third reviewer will be included if an agreement cannot be reached. Following the first screening phase, a further screening will be conducted on the remaining research. During this secondary screening, the whole texts of potentially relevant articles will be evaluated for their appropriateness by the same pair of independent reviewers. Furthermore, any discrepancies pertaining to inclusion will be thoroughly examined and resolved via a collaborative discussion approach, including involving a third reviewer if considered appropriate. The systematic review will include studies that meet the predetermined inclusion criteria and get a good grade on the quality evaluation. The process of determining which research will be included and excluded will be comprehensively recorded by using a PRISMA flowchart, so ensuring openness in the selection criteria.

7. Data Collection and Analysis

7.1. Screening and Selection of Studies

The Rayyan Reviewer software will function as a centralised repository for storing all relevant downloaded papers or documents. The schedule for the inclusion criteria will be set, and each reference will undergo screening. A methodical and sequential process will be used to choose research. At the first stage, the titles and abstracts will be examined to identify and remove duplicate papers, as well as exclude those that plainly fall beyond the subject of the review. The retrieval process for full-text articles will depend on the examination of titles and abstracts, with the potential for inclusion depending on their content satisfying the specified criteria. Numerous papers, journals, reports, and other scholarly sources will be linked.

The screening process will include a comprehensive evaluation of whole articles, whereby a single independent author will assess their suitability for inclusion. Simultaneously, the input of the second independent author will be sought to establish a consensus and address any potential conflicts that may emerge. The justifications for excluding articles will be presented. The selection procedure will undergo pretesting to identify any possible conflicts that may arise between the eligibility requirements of reviewers and the software interface.

7.2. Assessment of Methodological Quality

Assessing the methodological quality of research is a crucial aspect of doing systematic reviews, particularly when confronted with a variety of study designs such as qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods studies [118, 101]. The current review will use the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (see Additional file 3), which is a widely employed instrument for evaluating the methodological quality of studies included in systematic reviews including qualitative and quantitative research approaches [46]. The use of several study designs in the evaluation of evidence enhances the strength and comprehensiveness of systematic reviews, as it considers the unique characteristics of each research design [90]. This quality appraisal tool aims to include many queries pertaining to methodological quality standards, including aspects such as the coherence and congruence between research objectives and the collected data. The articles will be subject to review using five assessment questions that are relevant to each study design. Within this particular situation, the assessments or standards will be used to evaluate the calibre of the piece.

The aforementioned studies will be evaluated by the authors based on five core criteria pertinent to its methodological category, with ratings of "yes," "no," or "can't tell" assigned to each criterion (see Table 4). Although MMAT advises against deriving an overall numerical score, for the sake of transparent decision-making in data synthesis, studies will be classified according to the number of criteria fulfilled.

- a) High quality: Satisfies 4-5 criteria
- b) Moderate quality: Satisfies 2-3 criteria
- c) Low quality: Satisfies 0-1 criteria

Low-quality studies will be excluded from the final synthesis if their methodological deficiencies compromise the credibility of the findings or introduce significant bias. Where exclusions occur, a justification will be documented clearly. During synthesis, whether narrative, thematic, or meta-analysis, higher interpretive weight will be assigned to studies of high and moderate quality. Studies of low quality, if included, will serve mainly for hypothesis generation or contextual illustration instead of establishing definitive conclusions. Each author will conduct an individual evaluation of each item and provide a score depending on the degree of procedural fulfilment. In accordance with the agreement

reached by the reviewers, only articles that have attained a rating of three or above will be considered suitable for inclusion. If the writers have contrasting opinions about a certain article, the final decision will rely on the perspectives of experts. The inclusion criteria for publications in the review, data extraction, and synthesis procedures will adhere strictly to the minimal standards specified in the MMAT [115].

7.3. Data Gathering and Management

The extraction of data from quantitative studies relating to RQ1 and RQ2 will be conducted using the guidelines outlined in the suggested Guide for Developing a Cochrane Protocol. An additional file, namely Additional file 4, has a suggested form for the extraction of quantitative data. The proposed quantitative data extraction form will encompass various components, including the study's characteristics such as the country of origin and the aim of the study (see Tables 5, 6, 7, and 11). Additionally, it will encompass the characteristics of sustainable communities, specifically focusing on their social, economic, and environmental aspects. The form will also incorporate details regarding the methods employed in the study, encompassing the study design, study population, sampling techniques, and data collection methods. Furthermore, the form will include a section dedicated to presenting the study's results, as well as a section for the authors' opinions and conclusions.

The data extraction form developed by the Joana Briggs Institute will be modified, labelled as Additional file 5 and used for the purposes of data extraction and process assessment in qualitative investigations. Therefore, Tables 8, 9, 10, and 11 provide comprehensive information on the qualitative data extraction form. The data gathering forms will go through pretesting and refinement in order to mitigate bias and improve the review's validity and reliability [82]. The Rayyan Reviewer tool will be used for the purposes of data management and analysis. Any opposing results that have been published in either quantitative or qualitative form shall be duly acknowledged. In cases where reports lack essential information or need further explanations, the authors will be contacted to provide the necessary details.

7.4. Risk of Bias and Quality Assessment

To examine the potential bias of the review, the study will use the critical appraisal technique recommended by [19]. The specific criteria for evaluating the risk of bias will be outlined in Additional file 6. The inclusion of quantitative studies will be evaluated based on their risk bias profile, which may be categorised as high, low, or unknown provided in Table 12. For qualitative and process assessment research, the Joana Briggs Institute's [51] Qualitative Assessment and Review Instrument (JBI-QARI) will be used to undertake the critical appraisal. [43] assert that the JBI-QARI tool is the most complete instrument for appraising qualitative studies. The

guidelines for evaluating qualitative research will be outlined in Additional file 7. The inclusion of qualitative studies will be assessed based on information provided in Table 13. Similarly, the review will include a matrix depicting the internal validity of the papers that have been included. The quality evaluation will require the participation of two reviewers. The first reviewer will do an independent evaluation of risk and quality, while the second reviewer will carefully examine the outcomes of the assessment. In the event of any possible dispute between the two reviewers, the third reviewer within the team will be engaged to address the issue and facilitate the establishment of a consensus.

7.5. Handling Missing Data

The study authors will be contacted through electronic communication (email) in cases where there is uncertainty or unavailability of research designs, methods, or results. In situations where missing data cannot be obtained, this will be duly noted in the narrative description of the study. Furthermore, the potential influence of the extent of missing data on the review's findings and conclusions will be thoroughly examined and discussed.

8. Data Synthesis

The retrieved data will go through thematic analysis in order to discover recurrent themes, patterns, and significant insights concerning the importance of contextualization in sustainable development within the SSA cities. The study will undertake a comparative analysis to ascertain the shared characteristics and disparities among the sources in relation to their viewpoints on contextualization, as well as the specific settings and difficulties they address. This study will assess case studies and practical examples to examine the use of contextualization, the resulting effects, and the insights gained. The synthesis of information from many sources will be undertaken to construct a cohesive narrative that emphasises the principal arguments, consequences, and suggestions pertaining to the process of contextualization within the realm of sustainable development in SSA. The study aims to identify gaps or areas in the existing literature that need further investigation. Additionally, it will assess any limitations in the current body of knowledge.

8.1. Identifying and Analyzing Contextualization Process

This review will utilise a complexity-aware, mixed-methods synthesis to analyse the adaptation of sustainable community strategies to local realities across Sub-Saharan Africa, emphasising the process of contextualisation. Contextualisation refers to the adaptation, reinterpretation, or localisation of frameworks and interventions to align with specific socio-cultural, political, and institutional

contexts [12, 100]. In this review, contextualisation refers to the processes by which global or national sustainable development principles are tailored to fit local contexts. This involves the integration of local knowledge, local governance, institutional capacity, community participation, policy alignment, equity and social inclusion, as well as environmental responsiveness [72, 100, 133]. In the data extraction phase, each included study will be evaluated for indicators of contextualisation, including the integration of local cultural norms, traditional knowledge, community values, and stakeholder or citizen participation in decision-making processes, among other factors. The coding will be conducted deductively utilising the Context and Implementation of Complex Interventions (CICI) framework, which classifies context into geographical, sociocultural, political, legal, and institutional domains [100]. A thematic synthesis approach [120] will be utilised to extract and categorise data regarding the conceptualisation, implementation, and evaluation of contextualisation across various case studies. This review will adhere to the complexity-sensitive principles outlined by [12] and [35] to illustrate the interdependence of interventions and context. This involves the identification of feedback loops, emergent behaviours, and co-evolving factors that influence sustainable community initiatives.

8.2. Quantitative Analysis and Synthesis

Quantitative analysis and data synthesis are approaches with strong validity and reliability, indicating substantial promise in summarising evidence, providing precise assessments of treatment effects or associations, and influencing evidence-based decision-making in numerous professional domains and academic disciplines. To address RQ1 and RQ2, a meta-analysis will be carried out to synthesise the quantitative data from studies that have the same outcomes. To synthesise quantitative data pertaining to RQ1 and RQ2, the technique of narrative synthesis, as proposed by [103], will be utilized for heterogeneity investigations.

8.2.1. Heterogeneity Assessment

Before carrying out the quantitative synthesis, this research will assess the heterogeneity of the included studies. Heterogeneity refers to the degree of variety noticed in the results of a research investigation. Hence, to assess heterogeneity, statistical tests such as the I-square statistic and the Cochran's Q test will be employed. The I² statistic will be calculated to evaluate heterogeneity among the included quantitative studies, alongside the Chi-squared (χ^2) test. I² values measure the proportion of variation in effect sizes that can be ascribed to heterogeneity instead of random variation. The I² values will be analysed according to established thresholds [45, 25], which will guide the selection of synthesis strategies (see Table 14). When I² surpasses 75%, further analysis will be conducted to examine sources of heterogeneity, including variations in urban policy contexts, methodological quality,

and geographic differences. If sources are inadequately explained, a meta-analysis will not be performed for that outcome, and results will be synthesised narratively with contextual interpretation. For instances of moderate to substantial heterogeneity (I^2 between 50–75%), prediction intervals can be computed to indicate the probable range of effect sizes in analogous future scenarios [107].

8.2.2. Publication Bias Assessment

Publication bias relates to the tendency to selectively publish research that provide statistically significant or favourable results, while ignoring studies that yield non-significant or negative outcomes. Techniques such as Egger's test, funnel plots and statistical tests, may be employed to evaluate the existence of publication bias.

8.3. Qualitative Analysis and Synthesis

This study intends to conduct a thorough examination of qualitative studies that address research questions RQ1 and RQ2. The aim is to enhance comprehension of the planning and governance barriers and effective mechanism for the development of sustainable communities in cities located in SSA. Similarly, the same methodology will be used in tackling R3. The approach of conducting a theme synthesis of qualitative investigations will involve combining evidence, as outlined by [127]. The review team will use a deductive method to identify and analyse themes emerging from the qualitative data that are specifically related to Sustainable communities. Following this, the qualitative research included in this review will be evaluated using the ConQual methodology as proposed by [77]. This methodology will entail evaluating the results in terms of their reliability and trustworthiness, categorising them as having very low, low, moderate, or high quality. According to [40], the ConQual framework is comparable to the GRADE approach as it enables the evaluation of the level of confidence that may be included into synthesised research outcomes. The themes uncovered in the process of appraising qualitative research will be used to enhance the interpretation of the data from quantitative studies. A structured, multi-step analytical framework will be utilised to systematically evaluate the extent to which urban policies and planning regulations in SSA cities prioritise and integrate the three core dimensions of sustainability (social equity, environmental sustainability, and economic vitality). Policy documents, planning regulations, and academic or institutional reports will be analysed using a predefined framework grounded in established sustainability criteria. A coding manual will facilitate thematic extraction and ensure inter-coder reliability when multiple reviewers are engaged. Each policy or regulatory document will be evaluated using a 3-point or 5-point Likert-type scale across each sustainability dimension. This enables the quantification of qualitative data and the identification of the relative emphasis on each sustainability dimension across cities or

policy frameworks. The aforementioned will be carried out as part of the narrative synthesis, and to offer suggestions for the implementation of sustainable communities in cities in SSA.

8.4. Mixed-methods Synthesis

Mixed-methods synthesis is an advanced technique in systematic reviews that enables researchers to integrate various types of evidence to tackle complex, multi-dimensional research questions. This review integrates quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of urban policies, planning regulations, and governance structures on sustainable community development in SSA cities. The integration will employ a convergent synthesis design, enabling simultaneous analysis and interpretation of findings from both data types. The integration will be operationalised through the application of the three-stage framework established by [112] and subsequently refined by [47], within the context of the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT). Each dataset, comprising quantitative evidence and qualitative data, will be synthesised separately. For post-synthesis, the results will be aligned through either convergent parallel integration or data transformation. The final phase will encompass meta-inference, wherein synthesised results will be analysed concerning the three fundamental dimensions of sustainability such as social equity, environmental sustainability, and economic vitality. The synthesis will examine qualitative and quantitative findings that support similar conclusions (Convergence), where findings from one dataset enhance or elucidate the findings of another dataset (Complementarity), and instances of conflicting results that require a detailed investigation of contextual or methodological factors (Dissonance).

9. Discussion

This systematic review protocol describes the methodology for carrying out analysis of the extant literature relating to sustainable community development in SSA. The significance of this study is heightened by the rise in urbanisation in the SSA cities. The SSA cities are now experiencing the highest rates of urbanisation in the world. This rapid urbanisation has caused a variety of difficulties, such as those pertaining to housing, social equality, infrastructure, and environmental sustainability. A comprehensive understanding of the contextual elements, snags, and opportunities in the establishment of sustainable communities is important for effectively tackling the multifarious urban concerns. The main objective of this review is to examine and assess the contextual elements that have an impact on sustainable community development in SSA. These elements include urban policies, planning laws, and governance systems. By comprehensively reviewing the existing scholarly primary studies, this study seeks to offer a deeper understanding of the difficult dynamics and impact of these elements have on the establishment of

sustainable communities within the SSA cities. The review protocol recognises that the attainment of sustainable community development is a highly desired objective, but it poses considerable challenges, particularly within the context of SSA. This study will explore the difficulties and opportunities encountered by governments, communities, and development organisations in their efforts to foster sustainable practices. The identification of these problems and prospects will offer valuable insights for developing strategies aimed at overcoming obstacles and capitalizing on existing strengths.

The findings of this systematic review are anticipated to have substantial significance for urban planners, policymakers, development organizations, and scholars working in SSA. This study will enhance evidence-based policy and planning choices by providing a thorough examination of the current body of study. This approach can provide guidance in the distribution of resources, the formulation of interventions, and the establishment of strategies with the objective of fostering the creation of sustainable communities. One of the anticipated outcomes of this study is gaps identification in the existing body of literature. The identification of these gaps will aid in determining the priority of future research endeavours. The review protocol will duly recognise potential shortcomings. This protocol for a systematic review provides a description of the thorough approach for investigating the contextual elements, problems, and prospects linked to the establishment of sustainable communities in SSA. The findings of this study will enhance the comprehension of the challenges associated with sustainable community development in SSA and offer insights for devising approaches to tackle the challenges posed by urbanisation in the area. Finally, this protocol will comprehensively delineate the essential steps involved in conducting a systematic review, with the aim of mitigating any biases that may arise throughout the systematic review process.

Abbreviations

ASSIA	Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts
DoP	Department of Planning
IBSS	International Bibliography of the Social Sciences
JB I	Joana Briggs Institute
PICO	Population (Problem), Intervention, Comparator and Outcome
PRISMA-P	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-analysis Protocols

PROSPERO	International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews
SSA	Sub-sahara Africa
RQs	Review Questions

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Michael Poku-Boansi: Supervision, Writing - review &
editing

Benjamin Doe: Supervision, Writing - review & editing

Michael Osei Asibey: Supervision, Writing - review &
editing

Dissemination Plans

This systematic review will be a two chapter of DSA's
doctoral thesis. Upon completion and official presentation, the
findings will be disseminated via peer-reviewed publication.
While the current focus is not on updating the study, it will be
given due attention if a significant quantity of fresh data be-
comes available.

Study Registration

This systematic review protocol with reference number
CRD2024608143 is registered with PROSPERO international
prospective register of systematic reviews.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Appendix

Table 1. Data Extraction and Synthesis Framework.

Dimension	Key Variables	Analytical Focus
Urban Policies	National/municipal policy frameworks	Alignment with sustainability goals, clarity of objectives
Planning Regulations	Zoning laws, land use Acts, environmental standards	Rigor, enforceability, integration of green and inclusive principles
Governance Structures	Institutional arrangements, decision-making, decentralisation	Participation, coordination, autonomy, and legitimacy
Social Equity	Access to land/services, housing security, participatory planning	Inclusion of vulnerable groups; distributive justice
Environmental Sustainability	Climate adaptation, green spaces, risk management	Long-term ecological health and risk mitigation in urban development
Economic Vitality	Employment, local economies, infrastructure access	Support for livelihoods, especially in informal and peri-urban areas
Barriers and Challenges	Political interference, technical deficits, informal practices	Practical constraints in applying sustainability principles

Table 2. PRISMA 2020 Checklist.

Section and Topic	Item	Checklist item	Location where item is reported
TITLE			
Title	1	Identify the report as a systematic review.	Page 1
ABSTRACT			
Abstract	2	See the PRISMA 2020 for Abstracts checklist.	Page 1
INTRODUCTION			
Rationale	3	Describe the rationale for the review in the context of existing knowledge.	Page 7
Objectives	4	Provide an explicit statement of the objective(s) or question(s) the review addresses.	Page 8
METHODS			
Eligibility criteria	5	Specify the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the review and how studies were grouped for the syntheses.	Page 9
Information sources	6	Specify all databases, registers, websites, organisations, reference lists and other sources searched or consulted to identify studies. Specify the date when each source was last searched or consulted.	Page 10
Search strategy	7	Present the full search strategies for all databases, registers and websites, including any filters and limits used.	Page 10
Selection process	8	Specify the methods used to decide whether a study met the inclusion criteria of the review, including how many reviewers screened each record and each report retrieved, whether they worked independently, and if applicable, details of automation tools used in the process.	Page 11
Data collection process	9	Specify the methods used to collect data from reports, including how many reviewers collected data from each report, whether they worked inde-	Page 12

Section and Topic	Item	Checklist item	Location where item is reported
		pendently, any processes for obtaining or confirming data from study investigators, and if applicable, details of automation tools used in the process.	
Data items	10a	List and define all outcomes for which data were sought. Specify whether all results that were compatible with each outcome domain in each study were sought (e.g. for all measures, time points, analyses), and if not, the methods used to decide which results to collect.	Page 12-14
	10b	List and define all other variables for which data were sought (e.g. participant and intervention characteristics, funding sources). Describe any assumptions made about any missing or unclear information.	Page 12-14
Study risk of bias assessment	11	Specify the methods used to assess risk of bias in the included studies, including details of the tool(s) used, how many reviewers assessed each study and whether they worked independently, and if applicable, details of automation tools used in the process.	Page 13
Effect measures	12	Specify for each outcome the effect measure(s) (e.g. risk ratio, mean difference) used in the synthesis or presentation of results.	N/A
	13a	Describe the processes used to decide which studies were eligible for each synthesis (e.g. tabulating the study intervention characteristics and comparing against the planned groups for each synthesis (item #5)).	Page 15
	13b	Describe any methods required to prepare the data for presentation or synthesis, such as handling of missing summary statistics, or data conversions.	Page 15
Synthesis methods	13c	Describe any methods used to tabulate or visually display results of individual studies and syntheses.	N/A
	13d	Describe any methods used to synthesize results and provide a rationale for the choice(s). If meta-analysis was performed, describe the model(s), method(s) to identify the presence and extent of statistical heterogeneity, and software package(s) used.	N/A
	13e	Describe any methods used to explore possible causes of heterogeneity among study results (e.g. subgroup analysis, meta-regression).	N/A
	13f	Describe any sensitivity analyses conducted to assess robustness of the synthesized results.	N/A
Reporting bias assessment	14	Describe any methods used to assess risk of bias due to missing results in a synthesis (arising from reporting biases).	Page 13
Certainty assessment	15	Describe any methods used to assess certainty (or confidence) in the body of evidence for an outcome.	N/A
RESULTS			
Study selection	16a	Describe the results of the search and selection process, from the number of records identified in the search to the number of studies included in the review, ideally using a flow diagram.	Page 11
	16b	Cite studies that might appear to meet the inclusion criteria, but which were excluded, and explain why they were excluded.	N/A
Study characteristics	17	Cite each included study and present its characteristics.	N/A
Risk of bias in studies	18	Present assessments of risk of bias for each included study.	Page 13
Results of individual studies	19	For all outcomes, present, for each study: (a) summary statistics for each group (where appropriate) and (b) an effect estimate and its precision (e.g. confidence/credible interval), ideally using structured tables or plots.	N/A
Results of syntheses	20a	For each synthesis, briefly summarise the characteristics and risk of bias among contributing studies.	N/A

Section and Topic	Item	Checklist item	Location where item is reported
	20b	Present results of all statistical syntheses conducted. If meta-analysis was done, present for each the summary estimate and its precision (e.g. confidence/credible interval) and measures of statistical heterogeneity. If comparing groups, describe the direction of the effect.	N/A
	20c	Present results of all investigations of possible causes of heterogeneity among study results.	N/A
	20d	Present results of all sensitivity analyses conducted to assess the robustness of the synthesized results.	N/A
Reporting biases	21	Present assessments of risk of bias due to missing results (arising from reporting biases) for each synthesis assessed.	N/A
Certainty of evidence	22	Present assessments of certainty (or confidence) in the body of evidence for each outcome assessed.	N/A
DISCUSSION			
Discussion	23a	Provide a general interpretation of the results in the context of other evidence.	Page 15
	23b	Discuss any limitations of the evidence included in the review.	N/A
	23c	Discuss any limitations of the review processes used.	N/A
	23d	Discuss implications of the results for practice, policy, and future research.	N/A
OTHER INFORMATION			
Registration and protocol	24a	Provide registration information for the review, including register name and registration number, or state that the review was not registered.	PROSPERO
	24b	Indicate where the review protocol can be accessed, or state that a protocol was not prepared.	N/A
	24c	Describe and explain any amendments to information provided at registration or in the protocol.	N/A
Support	25	Describe sources of financial or non-financial support for the review, and the role of the funders or sponsors in the review.	N/A
Competing interests	26	Declare any competing interests of review authors.	N/A
Availability of data, code and other materials	27	Report which of the following are publicly available and where they can be found: template data collection forms; data extracted from included studies; data used for all analyses; analytic code; any other materials used in the review.	Page 15

From: Page et al. (2020). The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021; 372: n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71

For more information, visit: <http://www.prisma-statement.org>

Table 3. Search Strategy.

Key word	Alternative words or Variation
1 Sustainable Communities	Eco-friendly neighborhoods OR Green living developments OR Resilient urban planning OR Regenerative settlements OR Environmentally conscious communities OR Eco-villages OR Low-impact living OR Climate-smart towns OR Earth-conscious housing OR Conservation-oriented neighborhoods OR Self-sustaining communities OR Sustainable housing projects OR Renewable living areas OR Green urban development OR Eco-centric neighborhoods OR Permaculture towns OR Carbon-neutral communities OR Eco-residential planning OR

Key word		Alternative words or Variation
		Sustainable urbanism OR Walkable and bike-friendly neighborhoods OR Green building communities OR Eco-housing initiatives OR Net-zero energy developments OR Community sustainability initiatives OR Environmentally responsible neighborhoods OR Sustainable suburban planning OR Green infrastructure projects OR Eco-friendly housing options OR Sustainable neighborhood design
2	Sustainable	Eco-friendly OR Environmentally friendly OR Conservation-minded OR Earth-conscious OR Regenerative OR Low-impact OR Climate-smart OR Resilient OR Eco-efficient OR Conservation-oriented OR Environment-conscious OR Earth-friendly OR Planet-friendly OR Green-minded
3	Communities	Neighborhoods OR Suburbs OR Villages OR Residential areas OR Hamlets OR Settlements OR Localities Communal living OR Human settlements OR Towns OR Residential districts OR Communes OR Habitat OR Boroughs OR Quarters OR Habitat clusters OR Urban and rural areas OR Township OR Regional communities OR Gated communities
4	Cities	City OR Urban OR Urbans OR Urbanisation OR Centers
5	Sub-Saharan Africa	Africa filter: Angola OR Benin OR Botswana OR Burkina Faso OR Burundi OR Cameroon OR Cape Verde OR Central African Republic OR Chad OR Comoros OR Congo OR Democratic Republic of Congo OR Djibouti OR Equatorial Guinea OR Eritrea OR Ethiopia OR Gabon OR Gambia OR Ghana OR Guinea OR Guinea Bissau OR Ivory Coast OR Cote d'Ivoire OR Kenya OR Lesotho OR Liberia OR Madagascar OR Malawi OR Mali OR Mauritania OR Mauritius OR Mozambique OR Namibia OR Niger OR Nigeria OR Principe OR Reunion OR Rwanda OR Sao Tome OR Senegal OR Seychelles OR Sierra Leone OR Somalia OR South Africa OR Sudan OR Swaziland OR Tanzania OR Togo OR Uganda OR Western Sahara OR Zambia OR Zimbabwe OR Central African OR West Africa OR Western African OR Eastern African OR South African OR Southern Africa OR sub Saharan Africa
6	Urban policies	Urban planning policies OR Urban growth policy OR Land use policy OR Urban renewal policies OR Urban transport policy OR Urban economic policy OR Urban environmental policy OR Urban health policy OR Urban housing policy OR Local government policy OR Spatial planning policy OR Regional development policy OR Urban resilience planning OR Urban regeneration policy OR Urban landscape policy OR Slum upgrading policy OR Urban equity and inclusion policies OR Climate adaptation policy for cities OR Urban social policy OR Urban mobility policy OR Urban welfare policy OR City beautification policy
7	Planning regulations	Zoning laws OR Land use regulation OR Urban planning law OR Land development regulations OR Spatial regulation OR Town planning legislation OR Spatial planning law OR Environmental planning law OR Real estate development law OR Regional planning regulation OR Urban renewal legislation OR Master planning laws
8	Governance structures	Administrative structures OR Institutional structures OR Decision-making structures OR Government systems OR Bureaucratic structures OR Power structures OR Political systems
9	Challenges	Challenge OR Problems OR Problem OR Snags OR Snag OR Obstacles OR Obstacles OR Difficulty OR Difficulties
10	Barriers	Barrier OR Limitation OR Limitations OR Obstruction OR Obstructions OR Constraint OR Constraints OR Interference OR Interferences
#	Research Questions	Searching terms
1	Two concept searching term for: R1	("Urban Policies") AND ("Sustainable Communities" OR " Sub-Sahara Africa ") AND ("Regulat*" OR "Governance") ("Urban" OR "City") AND ("Policy" OR "Governance") AND ("Sustainab*" OR " Sub-Saharan Africa ") AND ("Regulat*" OR "Plan*" OR "Zon*")
2	R2	"Social Equity" OR "Equitable Development") AND ("Environmental Sustainability" OR "Sustainable Environment") AND ("Economic Vitality" OR "Economic Prosperity") AND "Sub-Saharan Africa"
		("Inclusive Communities" OR "Social Inclusion") AND ("Green Practices" OR "Environmental Conservation") AND ("Economic Growth" OR "Financial Well-being") AND "SSA"
3	R3	("Challenges" OR "Barriers") AND ("Urban Policies" OR "City Planning" OR "Municipal Governance") AND ("Planning Regulations" OR "Zoning Laws" OR "Governance Structures") AND

Key word	Alternative words or Variation
4	Three concept searching term for: R1 ("Sustainable Communities" OR "Sustainability") AND "Sub-Saharan Africa" ("Obstacles" OR "Constraints" OR "Hurdles") AND ("Urban Policy" OR "City Planning" OR "Municipal Governance") AND ("Sustainable Development" OR "Eco-Friendly Communities") AND ("Regulat*" OR "Zon*") AND "SSA" ("Urban Policies" OR "City Planning" OR "Municipal Governance") AND ("Sustainable Communities" OR "Sustainability") AND ("Planning Regulations" OR "Zoning Laws" OR "Governance Structures") AND "Sub-Saharan Africa" ("Urban Policy" OR "City Planning" OR "Municipal Governance") AND ("Sustainable Development" OR "Eco-Friendly Communities") AND ("Regulat*" OR "Zon*") AND "Sub-Saharan Africa" ("Urban Policies" OR "City Planning" OR "Municipal Governance") AND ("Community Sustainability" OR "Green Living" OR "Eco-Villages") AND ("Regulat*" OR "Governance Structures") AND "Sub-Saharan Africa" ("Urban Policies" OR "City Planning" OR "Municipal Governance") AND ("Sustainable Communities" OR "Sustainability") AND ("Planning Regulations" OR "Zoning Laws" OR "Governance Structures") AND "Sub-Saharan Africa"
5	R1 ("Urban Policy Challenges" OR "Planning Regulation Barriers" OR "Governance Structure Issues") AND ("Sustainable Communities" OR "Sustainability") AND "SSA" ("Urban Policies in Africa" OR "City Planning Challenges" OR "Municipal Governance Obstacles") AND ("Sustainable Development" OR "Eco-Friendly Communities") AND ("Regulat*" OR "Zon*") AND "Sub-Saharan Africa" ("Social Equity" OR "Inclusive Development" OR "Community Equality") AND ("Environmental Sustainability" OR "Eco-friendly Practices" OR "Green Initiatives") AND ("Economic Vitality" OR "Financial Prosperity" OR "Sustainable Economies") AND "Sub-Saharan Africa"
6	R2 ("Equitable Society" OR "Environmental Conservation" OR "Economic Growth") AND ("Sustainable Communities" OR "Green Living" OR "Economic Prosperity") AND ("Regulat*" OR "Zon*") AND "Sub-Saharan Africa" ("Social Inclusion" OR "Eco-consciousness" OR "Financial Well-being") AND ("Community Sustainability" OR "Eco-villages" OR "Economic Resilience") AND ("Regulat*" OR "Governance Structures") AND "Sub-Saharan Africa" ("Social Equity" OR "Equitable Development") AND ("Environmental Sustainability" OR "Sustainable Environmental Practices") AND ("Economic Vitality" OR "Economic Development") AND "Sub-Saharan Africa"
7	R2 ("Equity" OR "Fairness" OR "Social Justice") AND ("Sustainable Environment" OR "Green Practices") AND ("Economic Prosperity" OR "Vibrant Economy") AND "SSA" ("Inclusive Development" OR "Social Inclusion") AND ("Environmental Conservation" OR "Green Initiatives") AND ("Economic Growth" OR "Financial Well-being") AND "Sub-Saharan Africa" ("Challenges" OR "Barriers" OR "Obstacles") AND ("Urban Policies" OR "City Planning" OR "Municipal Governance") AND ("Planning Regulations" OR "Zoning Laws" OR "Governance Structures") AND ("Sustainable Communities" OR "Sustainability") AND "Sub-Saharan Africa"
8	R3 ("Limitations" OR "Constraints" OR "Issues") AND ("Urban Policy" OR "City Planning" OR "Municipal Governance") AND ("Sustainable Development" OR "Eco-Friendly Communities") AND ("Regulat*" OR "Zon*") AND "SSA" ("Urban Policy Challenges" OR "Planning Regulation Barriers" OR "Governance Structure Obstacles") AND ("Sustainable Communities" OR "Sustainability") AND "Sub-Saharan Africa" ("Challenges" OR "Barriers" OR "Obstacles") AND ("Urban Policies" OR "City Planning" OR "Municipal Governance") AND ("Planning Regulations" OR "Zoning Laws" OR "Governance Structures") AND ("Sustainable Communities" OR "Sustainability") AND "Sub-Saharan Africa"
9	R3 ("Constraints" OR "Limitations" OR "Issues") AND ("Urban Policy" OR "City Planning" OR "Municipal Governance") AND ("Sustainable Development" OR "Eco-Friendly Communities") AND ("Regulat*" OR "Zon*") AND "SSA" ("Challenges and Barriers" OR "Obstacles and Constraints" OR "Issues in Urban Policies") AND ("Planning Regulations" OR "Governance Structures for Sustainable Communities") AND "Sub-Saharan Africa"

Table 4. Using Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), Version 2018.

Category of study designs	Methodological quality criteria	Yes	No	Can't Tell	Comment
Screening questions (for all types)	S1. Are there clear research questions? S2. Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?				
1. Qualitative	1.1. Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question? 1.2. Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question? 1.3. Are the findings adequately derived from the data? 1.4. Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data? 1.5. Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?				
2. Quantitative randomized controlled trials	2.1. Is randomization appropriately performed? 2.2. Are the groups comparable at baseline? 2.3. Are there complete outcome data? 2.4. Are outcome assessors blinded to the intervention provided? 2.5 Did the participants adhere to the assigned intervention?				
3. Quantitative nonrandomized	3.1. Are the participants representative of the target population? 3.2. Are measurements appropriate regarding both the outcome and intervention (or exposure)? 3.3. Are there complete outcome data? 3.4. Are the confounders accounted for in the design and analysis? 3.5. During the study period, is the intervention administered (or exposure occurred) as intended?				
4. Quantitative descriptive	4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question? 4.2. Is the sample representative of the target population? 4.3. Are the measurements appropriate? 4.4. Is the risk of nonresponse bias low? 4.5. Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?				
5. Mixed methods	5.1. Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question? 5.2. Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question? 5.3. Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted? 5.4. Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed? 5.5. Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?				

Table 5. Quantitative Studies Data Extraction Form (Adapted from CPHG, 2011).

Study ID:	Report ID:	Date form completed:
First author:	Year of study:	Data extractor:
Citation:		
Journal/Source		
DOI or URL		
<i>Publication type</i>		
Journal Article ☐	Working paper ☐	Dissertation ☐
Report ☐	Conference Presentation ☐	Draft report ☐
Aim of study:	Other (specify e.g. book chapter)_____	
Country of study:		
Funding source of study:	Possible conflict of interest from funding? Y / N / unclear	
Public institution ☐	Private institution ☐	Is it an independent evaluation (not funded by the implementing agency)? Y / N / unclear
Government ☐	Multilateral Organisation ☐	
Not clear ☐	N/A ☐	Is there possible conflict of interest connected with study which could affect results collected/reported? Y/N/ N / unclear

Table 6. Quantitative Study Eligibility.

Study Characteristics	Research Design	Sample Size	Sampling Method	Location
Study Type				
Randomized control trial ☐				
Non-Randomized control trial ☐				
Descriptive ☐				
Mixed Methods ☐				
	Does the study design meet the criteria for inclusion?			
	Yes ☐	No ☐ Exclude	Unclear ☐	
	Does the location of study meet the criteria for inclusion?			
	Yes ☐	No ☐ Exclude	Unclear ☐	
	Description in text:			
Mixed-use Developments Characteristics	Study Results	Author(s) Opinion	Author(s) Conclusion	
Diversity				
Intensity				
Integration uses				
Study Variables	Review Inclusion criteria	Yes/ No / Unclear	Page	
key Variables	Sustainable Communities			
	Urban Policies			

Study Variables	Review Inclusion criteria	Yes/ No / Unclear	Page
	Planning Regulations		
	Governance Structures		
	Social Equity		
	Environmental Sustainability		
	Economic Vitality		
	Challenges		
	Barriers		
Is the article peer reviewed?			
Yes ☐	No ☐ Exclude	Unclear ☐	
Does article meet the criteria for inclusion?			
Yes ☐	No ☐ Exclude	Unclear ☐	

Summary of Assessment for Inclusion.

Include in review ☐	Exclude from review ☐
Independently assessed, and then compared? Yes ☐ No ☐	Differences resolved Yes ☐ No ☐
Request further details? Yes ☐ No ☐	Contact details of authors:
Notes:	

DO NOT PROCEED IF PAPER EXCLUDED FROM REVIEW

Table 7. Quantitative Study Details.

Study intention	Descriptions as stated in the report/paper	Page
Study aim		
Study objective (s)		

Methods & Results	Descriptions as stated in the report/paper	Page
Ethics - how ethical issues were addressed		
Any theoretical/conceptual framework used in the study?		
Indicate the sampling approach		
Inclusion/exclusion criteria for participation in study		
Data collection methods		
Data analysis techniques		
List and define the key variables examined in the study		
How these variables were measured (e.g., surveys, GIS data, etc.)		
Statistical Methods used (e.g., regression analysis, ANOVA)		
Statistical Software used (e.g., SPSS)		

Methods & Results	Descriptions as stated in the report/paper	Page
Effect sizes		
Confidence intervals		
P-values		
Report on statistically significant findings		
Key study findings/results		
Authors explanations		
Authors conclusions		
References to other relevant studies		
Additional notes by review authors		
Correspondence required for further study information (from whom, what and when)		

Table 8. Qualitative Studies Data Extraction Form (Adapted from CPHG, 2011).

Study ID:	Report ID:	Date form completed:
First author:	Year of study:	Data extractor:
Citation:		
Journal/Source		
DOI or URL		
<i>Publication type</i>		
Journal Article ☐	Working paper ☐	Dissertation ☐
Report ☐	Conference Presentation ☐	Draft report ☐
Aim of study:	Other (specify e.g. book chapter) _____	
Country of study:		
Funding source of study:	Possible conflict of interest from funding? Y / N / unclear	
Public institution ☐	Private institution ☐	Is it an independent evaluation (not funded by the implementing agency)? Y / N / unclear
Government ☐	Multilateral Organisation ☐	Is there possible conflict of interest connected with study which could affect results collected/reported? Y/N/ N / unclear
Not clear ☐	N/A ☐	

Table 9. Qualitative Study Eligibility.

Study Characteristics	Research Design	Sample Size	Sampling Method	Location
Study Type				
Qualitative ☐	Is the study design clearly stated?			
	Yes ☐ No ☐ Exclude	Unclear ☐		
	Is it conducted alongside quantitative study?			
	Yes ☐ No ☐ Exclude	Unclear ☐		

Study Characteristics	Research Design	Sample Size	Sampling Method	Location
	Does the location of study meet the criteria for inclusion?			
	Yes ☐	No ☐ Exclude	Unclear ☐	
	Description in text:			

Summary of Assessment for Inclusion

Include in review ☐	Exclude from review ☐
Independently assessed, and then compared? Yes ☐ No ☐	Differences resolved Yes ☐ No ☐
Request further details? Yes ☐ No ☐	Contact details of authors:
Notes:	

DO NOT PROCEED IF PAPER EXCLUDED FROM REVIEW

Table 10. Qualitative Study Details.

Study intention	Descriptions as stated in the report/paper	Page
Study aim		
Study objective (s)		

Methods & Results	Descriptions as stated in the report/paper	Page
Ethics - how ethical issues were addressed		
Any theoretical/conceptual framework used in the study?		
Indicate the sampling approach		
Inclusion/exclusion criteria for participation in study		
Data collection methods		
Data analysis techniques		
Themes emanating from data		
Data extracts related to the key themes		
Key study findings/results		
Authors explanations		
Authors conclusions		
References to other relevant studies		
Additional notes by review authors		
Correspondence required for further study information (from whom, what and when)		

Table 11. Summary of Included Study.

Reference
Study setting

Study and methods

Key findings related to urban policies of sustainable communities

Key findings related to planning regulations of sustainable communities

Key findings related to governance structures of sustainable communities

Key findings related to social equity of sustainable communities

Key findings related to environmental sustainability of sustainable communities

Key findings related to economic vitality of sustainable communities

Key findings related to challenges of urban policies in sustainable communities

Key findings related to challenges of planning regulations in sustainable communities

Key findings related to challenges of governance structures in sustainable communities

Key findings related to barriers of urban policies in sustainable communities

Key findings related to barriers of planning regulations in sustainable communities

Key findings related to barriers of governance structures in sustainable communities

Table 12. Risk of Bias Assessment (Adapted from EPOC, 2013).

Study Title

Authors

Publication Year

Attributes	Domain	Yes	No	Unclear	Page
Selection Bias	Was the sampling technique well documented and suitable for the study?				
	Was the sample size deemed suitable and adequate for addressing the study question?				
	Were the research participants accurately representative of the intended population?				
Measurement Bias	Were the measuring tools or instruments well expounded and suitable for the study?				
	Did the measuring methods show uniformity among the participants of study?				
	Were the measuring instruments tested and deemed trustworthy, or were they obtained from sources that have already been validated?				
Confounding Bias	Were any possible confounding factors identified and accounted for in the study?				
	Were suitable statistical methods employed to mitigate the influence of confounding variables (e.g., regression analysis)?				
	Was the analysis carried out considered possible impact of the modifiers?				
Attrition Bias	Was there a significant incidence of attrition or data missing in the study?				
	Were suitable statistical methods utilized to handle data missing?				

Attributes	Domain	Yes	No	Unclear	Page
	Were any missing data addressed by using imputation techniques or sensitivity analyses?				
	Were all results thoroughly evaluated and accurately reported according to the initial plan, without any instances of selective reporting?				
Reporting Bias	Was there any biased reporting or selective presentation of findings?				
	Were the research outcomes compared with the research objectives and propositions?				
Other Bias	Were there any more possible bias sources not addressed above?				

* Note: For each section above 'Yes' indicates a 'low risk of bias'; 'No' indicates a 'high risk of bias'; 'Unclear' indicates an 'uncertain risk of bias'.

Overall Risk of Bias Assessment: Low Risk ☐ High Risk ☐ Uncertainty Risk ☐

Table 13. Critical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Studies (Adapted from JBI, 2011).

Reviewer	Date				
Author	Year				Record #
Question	Yes	No	Unclear	N/A	
1 Is there congruity between the stated philosophical Perspective and the research methodology?					
2 Is there congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives?					
3 Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?					
4 Is there congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data?					
5 Is there congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results?					
6 Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?					
7 Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice-versa, addressed?					
8 Are participants, and their voices, adequately represented?					
9 Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body?					
10 Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data?					

Risk of bias: High ☐ Moderate ☐ Low ☐ Very low ☐

Overall appraisal: Include ☐ Exclude ☐ Seek further information ☐

Comments (Including reason for exclusion):

Table 14. I^2 Interpretation Thresholds and Analytical Implications.

I^2 Value	Interpretation	Analytical Strategy
0-25%	Low heterogeneity	Proceed with a fixed-effect model, assuming homogeneity of effects.

I ² Value	Interpretation	Analytical Strategy
26-50%	Moderate heterogeneity	Use a random-effects model to account for between-study variation.
51-75%	Substantial heterogeneity	Apply a random-effects model; consider subgroup analysis or meta-regression.
>75%	Considerable heterogeneity	Avoid meta-analysis; use narrative synthesis or qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) to explore diversity and context.

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