

STRATEGIES THAT PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

Project sustainability is a concern for community development practitioners. An aspect of community development is sustainability which implies that benefits derived from executed projects are maintained and continue as long as the project exists. The strong commitment of the local people, leadership and other local resources are needed to re-suscitate executed projects in the community. This study explores strategies for promoting the sustainability of community development projects in Southeast Nigeria.

The study adopted cluster and purposive sampling techniques. A total of eight communities from four Local Government Areas (LGAs) from two states in Southeast Nigeria were sampled for the study. The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) served as data collection instruments. The study sample size comprised 88 participants. The information produced for the research was analyzed thematically.

Findings showed that while the numerous community development projects in the study areas can account for some developmental interest, they also created opportunities for neglect. To promote the sustainability of community development projects, a holistic approach is crucial and interventions must be indigenous and people-oriented. Also, social workers need to create dialogue forums with community members to help attain the goal of project sustainability.

Keywords: community development, development, projects, strategies, sustainable development.

1. Introduction

Developing nations are faced with the challenges of development. In spite of popular participation in the execution of projects, there seems to be inadequate information on the need for sustainable development. Goal 11 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is about creating inclusive, secure, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements (UNDP, 2015, p. 1). In other words, it seeks to make human settlements secure, resilient, and sustainable. Sustainable development is all about the potential of man to live through the use of fair management of sustainable resources without damaging the natural environment or through overexploitation of natural resources and without undermining human and social communities (Ballara, 1991, p. 44). Sustainable development promotes indigenous culture. Don and Kutzmark (2006, p. 1) assert that sustainable development will increase traffic flow, decrease waste, reduce crime, lessen the impact of natural catastrophes, preserve energy and resources, safeguard culture and history, and conserve energy. As the rivalry between towns for high-quality businesses intensifies, it may promote more feasible economic growth and assist in integrating and connecting a community's diverse components to create a synergistic whole.

Sustainable development fundamentally started from the environmental preservation standpoint in order to ensure the growth and advancement of human culture. Natural resources, ecological potential, environmental development, national management, demand for present and future generations, and other important themes are all discussed (Lijing, Yonghong and Yanli, 2011, pp. 629–632).

Community development aims to establish and enhance democracy at the grass-roots level by developing structures designed to act as instruments of local participation. It makes use of existing institutions and organizations within the community. Njoh (2002, pp. 233–248) justified the need for community participation in development by asserting that it promotes better decision-making, and enables a project to be built on strength, traditional beliefs, and sustainability because of the psychological motivation that results from participation. However, UNESCO (2005, p. 1) maintained that rural people are predominantly illiterate and have a low level of education. Therefore, social education becomes paramount. This type of learning has the major role of eliminating illiteracy and enhancing the flow of technical knowledge. This is because poverty is rampant in rural communities. The highest education level of the majority of people in rural communities is secondary education. This has implications for community development project sustainability.

Globally, poverty has remained a bane in project sustainability, especially in developing societies. The UNDP (2015, p. 1) listed poverty as one of the goals of the SDGs. It emphasized that poverty is not all about a lack of income and resources. This includes lack of access to basic resources such as education, lack of involvement in decision-making processes, social inequality, and alienation that have a negative effect on children's mental well-being by the atmosphere created by it. Hsueh and Yan (2011, pp. 135–144) maintained that project sustainability helps to integrate community development with economic, social,

and environmental goals. It focuses on understanding the ties between economic issues and other aspects of the neighborhood, including shelter, job opportunities, training, environment, ease of access to healthcare, and arts. Additionally, it has become a strong challenger to conventional methods. A participative, comprehensive, and equitable approach to community development results in good, noticeable improvements in communities. It improves and stabilizes local economies, reduces poverty, increases community control, and restores the health of the environment. In most developing nations, access to land is not a problem. Often, the constraint to development is premised on finance. Green (2015, p. 1) noted that there are people who still live on less than \$1.25 per day.

In Nigeria, laudable programs have been designed at various levels by successive governments to enhance community development. According to Gana *et al.* (2019, pp. 34–40) one such program was the establishment of the River Basin Development Commission (RBDC) across the country in the 1970s. The River Basins Development Commission emphasized the management of water resources for agricultural purposes. Other programs include Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) among others which have been channeled into rural development (Uche *et al.*, 2019, pp. 115–131). At their inception, these programs were seen as a solution to the problems of community development. However, notwithstanding the successes recorded in the execution of projects such as roads, hospitals, electricity, schools, and water, there is a need to examine the strategies for promoting the sustainability of community development projects in Southeast Nigeria. Consequently, the research will respond to the following questions:

- What are the sustainable community development projects?
- What are the strategies that promote the sustainability of community development projects?
- What are the measures that enhance the strategies for sustainability of community development projects?

We believe that addressing the aforementioned research questions will help enhance the potential of community members within the study area and possibly other developing nations alongside seeking for projects' sustainability. Above all, it could help in formulating policies to promote the sustainability of community development projects. The paper explored the theoretical framework, study methodology, results, discussion of findings, implications of the study to other developing countries, conclusions, and recommendations to promote the sustainability of community development projects in Southeast Nigeria.

2. Theoretical framework

The study is anchored on the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) which is often referred to as Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF). The notion of SLA was first introduced by the Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development formally

known as the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). However, the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development promoted a broad goal of eradicating poverty (Krantz, 2001, pp. 1–38). The Sustainable Livelihood Approach is based on participatory approaches and was established to coordinate and reinforce the activities of the organization to alleviate poverty (Serrat, 2017, pp. 21–26). The SLA is both a principled and pragmatic position since it is impossible to imagine being able to enforce it without people’s involvement. Therefore, SLA forces engagement with those expected to be supported by an intervention or policy. It is not an operation that can be carried out in an office. The SLA allows people to learn from each other in a community-based learning setting and from outsiders through participatory approaches (Butler and Mazur, 2007, pp. 604–617). As a result, SLA draws on the long tradition of the participatory movement in development, and within SLA, strategies and approaches that have been used for years of stakeholder engagement can still be used. It also acknowledges that multi-sector markets must be taken into consideration, meaning it is comprehensive (Tao and Wall, 2009, pp. 137–152).

The sustainable livelihood approach activates the consideration of interactions and trade-offs in a community. In order to investigate livelihoods in North-West Costa Rica, McLennan and Garvin (2012, pp. 119–130) used SLA and demonstrated how the action was important to help reduce the negative effects of ‘local-felt’ trade-offs between conservation on the one side and resource usage on the other. Such trade-offs are popular where there is no alternative for people, and SLA will also serve to illustrate the challenges and explore possible solutions. Indeed, the dilemma is not only for the rural population, since SLA has been used in urban contexts (Simon and Leck, 2010, pp. 263–275).

Elasha *et al.* (2005, p. 1) further illustrated the use of a sustainable livelihood framework in assessing the communities’ capacity to respond to the impacts of climate change. The framework was used to test the Community-Based Rangeland Rehabilitation for Carbon Sequestration and Biodiversity pilot project. The pilot project was conducted with a grant from the United Nations Development Programme, Global Environment Facility in Giveighik, Bara Province of North Kordofan State. The main goals of the community project were twofold: (a) carbon sequestration by the implementation of a sustainable, local-level natural resource management system that prevents degradation, rehabilitates, or improves rangelands; and (b) minimizing the likelihood of production loss in a drought-prone area by providing an alternative for sustainable production, an increasing number of livelihood alternatives so that out-migration will decrease and production will stabilize. Institution-building, training, rangeland rehabilitation, and community development initiatives such as water harvesting and management, rural energy management, revolving credit program, and drought contingency planning are included in the bundle of sustainable livelihood measures undertaken by the project villagers. A project assessment by an independent panel of experts found that the community project is exceptionally successful in achieving the development goals and efforts are being made to expand the project to more communities.

A major attraction of SLA is to identify what the objective of an intervention should be: the need for diversification as a way of reducing risk exposure. Once this sustainable livelihood strategy has been adopted, it sets out a procedure from which it is possible to extract the 'broad vision'. There are no comprehensive schematics, blueprints, or precise procedures to be used, only a framework. Thus, SLA is a modular approach that can be applied in several different ways based on the local context expertise available for the analysis. It may also be used as a tool to develop metrics to assist policymakers and others chart progress in achieving sustainable livelihoods in the community (Bondad-Reantaso *et al.*, 2009, pp. 161–179; Bueno, 2009, pp. 145–160; Nha, 2009, pp. 3–26).

Brocklesby and Fisher (2003, pp. 185–198) noted that SLA promotes thinking out of the box and it frees development practitioners from conventional approaches that are mostly limited to problem detection and finding solutions. It encourages them to look at contexts and relationships in order that development activities may become more process-oriented. It compels them to quest for different points of entry and shift beyond a homogeneous 'community' view and narrow sectoral viewpoints. It poses a major change away from the focus on project inputs and outputs and the assumed mechanical connections between them. Specifically, the SLA emphasizes the importance of understanding institutions by mapping the institutional structure and connecting the micro and macro and the formal and the informal.

In sustainable community development, SLA is considered appropriate because it emphasizes people and the strengths of people (DFID, 2000, pp. 1–150; Altarelli and Carloni, 2000, p. 171). The emphasis given to a 'people focus' is at least in part because SLA has evolved in rural development contexts where natural resource management has traditionally been separated into distinct sectors focused on resource management. Adopting a livelihood approach involved a critical shift from saying 'how do we plan for people's livelihood (in a particular manner)'. On the face of it, having a 'people focus' could be an essential commonality with community development projects.

The question of how to build upon local knowledge is a very critical problem in the sustainability of community development projects. Within the SLA, knowledge is located within the compartmentalized category of 'human capital' which is seen as a 'building block' for the utilization of other forms of capital. SLA will lead to understanding the interfaces of knowledge and the different manners in which multiple ways of knowledge come together, with the potential to bring consensus (Arce and Fisher, 2003, pp. 74–97). The sustainable livelihood approach acts as a platform to bring people together around the table of community development. It provides a common language, framework, and a set of values (Brocklesby and Fisher, 2003, pp. 185–198).

The sustainable livelihood framework relies on the involvement of those at the center of the analysis, but the problem raised, for example, may be vulnerable to asset ownership for all kinds of reasons, and it would not be shocking if households withhold information felt that the question is too sensitive (Elasha *et al.*, 2005, pp. 5–8).

3. Case and methodology

The study was carried out in Southeast Nigeria. The area is one of the six geo-political zones in the country and is made up of five states; the southeast states are Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. Two states Abia and Ebonyi were purposively sampled for the study. Our choice of a sample of the two states from the Southeast against other states is informed by the fact that they have a long history of self-help community development projects.

The participants used in study were 88 as 44 respondents were selected from each of the two states chosen for the study. In total, 44 males and 44 females participated in the study. Two local government areas were purposively selected from each of the two states sampled. The local government areas selected were Bende and Ohafia from Abia State as well as Afikpo North and Afikpo South from Ebonyi State. Also, from each of the selected local government areas, two communities were sampled. Therefore, the number of communities used for the study was eight. The study communities from Abia State include Item and Ozuakoli from Bende L.G.A; and Nkporo and Elu from Ohafia L.G.A. The communities from Ebonyi States were Amasiri and Uwana from Afikpo North L.G.A; and Nguzu Edda and Owutu Edda from Afikpo South L.G.A. Ejionye (1995, pp. 238–254) maintained that town unions, age-grades and voluntary association in these communities were the earliest traditional grass-roots agents that funded rural development before the introduction of co-operative societies, government grant-in-aid and matching grants.

Eight focus group discussions (FGDs) were held in all. Four FGD sessions were held in Abia and Ebonyi States. In each of the eight communities, one FGD session was conducted. In all, eighty people participated in the FGD sessions. Each FGD session was made up of ten participants. The FGD participants were male and female members of Community Based Organizations (CBOs). The CBOs were social clubs, age grades, town unions and youth organizations. Moreover, in each of the selected communities for the study, one in-depth interview (IDI) was conducted. The IDI was conducted with the community leaders. Four female community leaders and four male community leaders from the eight communities under study were involved. In all, eight respondents participated in the in-depth interviews.

Data collection was done with eight research assistants who were undergraduates and indigenes of the study area and speak the local dialect fluently. The instruments used for data collection were FGD and IDI. The goals of the study were explained to the research assistants during training. The data collection lasted for eight weeks between March and May 2022. Data collection was centered on strategies for promoting the sustainability of community development projects. The themes were: (i) sustainable community development, (ii) strategies for sustainability of community development projects, and (iii) measures that enhance the strategies for sustainability of community development projects.

A qualitative analysis of the data was conducted. The process entails careful transcribing of the raw data; the raw data were transcribed verbatim in the local dialect to preserve the participants' original opinions. The research assistants who were indigenes of the area and fluently speaks the local dialects helped in the transcription. Furthermore, the

researchers verified that the participants' original meanings were preserved by comparing the transcribed conversations to the recorded discussions.

4. Findings

4.1. Participants' views on sustainable community development projects

Participants' views on sustainable community development which was one of the themes developed for the study revealed that all participants have sound knowledge of sustainable community development projects. They identified the sustainable projects that exist in their respective communities. Some of the members that participated were able to narrate how some of the projects were executed. The participants reported that it was the quest to address their felt needs that led them to sustainable development projects through self-help efforts. According to them, some executed projects in the community are not sustainable. The majority of the respondents agreed that the sustainable community development projects that exist in the communities include town halls, schools, water boreholes, roads, electricity, health centers, and skill acquisition centers among others. A participant revealed:

'Project execution is part of our culture. We inherited it from our ancestors. The good thing is that it is a collective process that involves every member of the community. It is a thing of joy and we derive pleasure in having successfully executed projects in our community' (Male age grade member, Elu).

Another participant was of the view that:

'Presently, there is a shift from the traditional sustainable projects that were executed in my community to modern ones. In the past, we embarked on projects such as building markets and village squares, opening footpaths that lead to farms and streams but today, we embark on borehole projects, town halls and health centers among others. The important thing is that we put in our best to make sure that we utilize them' (Male town union member, Uwana).

Another participant said:

'It is interesting to note that we enjoy popular participation in community development projects execution. Participation comes in diverse ways. Whereas some contribute financially through levies and donations, others participate in decision-making processes and yet others offer manual labor' (Female youth member, Uzuakoli).

The participants revealed that it was the quest to address the felt needs of the people that led them to embark on sustainable development projects. They asserted that it is not every project executed in the community that is sustainable. One participant stated:

'Yes, if you look around the community, you will know that it is not the same value that is attached to all our projects. It is the utility of the projects that determines

the value attached to them. Indeed, we make sacrifices to ensure that some projects like water bore-holes keep yielding the needed services’ (Male community leader, Nguzu Edda).

Another participant affirmed that:

‘We have various types of projects in our community. Some of them are substandard projects, while others are duplicate projects. The substandard and duplicate projects do not add value to our quality of life; hence we find it difficult to further invest in such projects’ (Female age grade member, Owutu Edda).

According to the research, most of the respondents maintained that sustainable community development projects enjoy popular participation. To them, it covers all aspects of participation such as project identification, project site location, labor, and finance among others. Accordingly, they maintained that involvement in decision-making processes is vital to projects’ sustainability.

One remarkable thing about the various views was that the participants believe that successfully executed projects that address their felt needs must be sustained. This view was strongly held by both male and female participants. A female community leader from Uwana said: ‘community development project execution is not a day’s affair. It is a long-term project and sometimes it takes years to complete a single project’. In an attempt to disaggregate in terms of sustainable and non-sustainable projects in the community, the participants gave their opinions. One participant asserted that:

‘The truth is that those projects that enjoy popular participation are sustainable. They are mainly projects executed by the Community Based Organization (CBOs) namely, age grade associations, town unions, social clubs, and women’s associations among others. These associations have successfully executed projects such as maternity/health centers, roads, pipe-bore water, and schools among others. Although some of these projects are old, efforts are made by community members to ensure they keep on yielding the needed services’ (Female youth, Item).

Another respondent said:

‘You cannot expect us as a community to contribute our material and financial resources to sustain a project that does not benefit the entire community. Yes, such projects exist in our community. For example, the elected politician that abandoned our major roads and constructed a 500 meters road project that led to his compound cannot expect us as a community to sustain his project. The issue of sustainability is completely his responsibility’ (Male community leader, Nkporo).

4.2. Strategies that promote sustainability of community development projects

Our data revealed vital strategies for enhancing community development projects in the study area. They include improvement in the level of community participatory investment in human development, creating growth and empowerment incentives, empowering the community members and environmental protection. Respondents maintained that

participation suggests that members of the community should be actively involved in all areas of community development initiatives aimed at enhancing their quality of life. A participant maintained that:

'Participation brings about common understanding. It enhances the possibility of success in project execution designed to enhance the well-being of our people. In addition, it is through participation that we, the beneficiaries, effectively influence the direction and execution of projects. Also, the common understanding between us in project execution goes a long way to enhance the maintenance culture' (Male age grade member, Elu).

Another participant said:

'Ideally, we come together as a group to maintain projects that address our felt needs. We owe it as a duty to ensure that the community development projects keep yielding the needed services. This is as a result of the enormous consequences of its failure' (Female town union member, Amasiri).

Yet another participant stated:

'Yes, we were able to sustain our community development projects through the organization of local development competitions and award of prizes. The Local Authority (LA) awarded prizes to communities that sustained executed community development projects and it brought about competition between communities. Communities with more functional community development projects received more prizes from the LA than those with few' (Male social club member, Nguzu Edda).

A male community leader mentioned that 'our community-based organizations (CBOs) stand before others when it comes to issues of sustainability of projects. We all belong to age grades associations, town unions, and women's organizations among others'. Remarkably, a participant revealed that 'our involvement is the key to the sustainability of community development projects. The external agents should involve us in all aspects of the projects so that we will be part of the success story'.

We found that improving the literacy status and health of community members increases participation which is key to the sustainability of community development projects. Community members need low-cost primary education. To reduce the burden of adult literacy, communities need free education at primary/secondary levels. Primary healthcare programs need to be encouraged and expanded into community health networks. A participant stated:

'To me, the primary education program at the village level for school-age children is powerful in the sustainability of community development projects. We need local teachers/instructors who are vast with the way of life of our people and can communicate in the language/dialect the children understand. The internal agents will add more to our value orientation than the external agents' (Male youth, Uzuakoli).

Another participant was of the opinion that:

'Health is wealth. Awareness of child immunization opportunities in our community is necessary. It helps in stabilizing the population of the community. A sustainability measure in community development projects has to do with women's access to health and education. We need to address the problem of primary health care and reproductive health to enhance project sustainability' (Female social club member, Owutu Edda).

There is evidence that creating growth and empowerment incentives is a factor in the sustainability of community development projects. It was revealed that participants stressed fair and just marketing systems and streamlining credit facilities to the farmers. They also emphasized the need to bring production inputs and technologies to the reach of rural producers as well as the adoption of agricultural technologies. A participant said:

'Our land is fertile and we produce enough food. The problem is that our farmers trek a long distance to the market where they sell their products. Sometimes they sell at a giveaway price to avoid trekking back home with their goods. We do not have a fair and just market system for our products. The middlemen buy at a relatively cheap price from us at the farm and sell at an exorbitant price at the market. We need markets to raise our income and contribute to the sustainability of our community development projects' (Male community leader, Item).

Another asserts:

'We did not do much in the sustainability of community development projects in the past. We were limited by primitive technologies like hoe and cutlass technology on our farm. It greatly affected our production and the sustainability of our community development projects. Presently, production inputs and technologies are getting to us. Our adoption of appropriate agricultural and artisanal technologies is facilitated and we can do better in projects' sustainability' (Male age grade association member, Elu).

Data generated from the study also revealed that most communities in the study area are agrarian communities. Agriculture relies on natural resources such as land, forests, and plants. Environmental degradation can be ameliorated if appropriate agriculture is practiced: that simultaneously increases yields while maintaining the land's productive base. It was revealed that environmental-friendly systems such as agro-forestry, mixed cropping, mixed farming, and reduced tillage need to be vigorously promoted among farmers. A participant revealed:

'Development has provided us with alternative choices of energy. Today, we have a gradual shift from firewood sources of energy to clean energy such as ethanol, natural gas, and solar power which has helped us to reduce cost and enhance the sustainability of our community development projects' (Male social club member, Nguzu Edda).

4.3. Measures that enhance strategies for sustainability of community development projects

Data shows that there are measures that promote strategies for the sustainability of community development projects. The participants opined that effective mobilization of the community members is one of the measures to promote participation which is a factor to reckon with in project sustainability. The community members that participated in the study also reported that mobilization emanates from within the community when Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) mobilize community members for active participation in projects' sustainability. One participant stated:

'Oh yes! I belong to the age grade association that has executed projects in our community. Effective mobilization is a tool for galvanizing the people into some kind of action towards the sustainability of our community development projects. Our leaders have done much in this regard and we very much appreciate their efforts' (Female age grade association, Nkporo).

Another said:

'Sensitizing and conscientizing our members goes a long way to ensure that our community development projects are sustained. We ensure that our members are organized for collective action towards the sustainability of our community development projects. Organizing members towards actions for goal attainment should always be our collective interest' (Male town union member, Uwana).

Data generated for the study also revealed that adult literacy is a measure to promote the sustainability of community development projects in the study area. The participants maintained that the ability of the community members, especially the adults, to read, write, decode and encode symbolic representations in order to enhance communication is necessary. A participant affirmed:

'The interaction that goes on in adult education processes can refine and make us better citizens. It will bring about attitudinal change in the community. Moreover, it will empower us in all spheres of life and such empowerment will help in the sustainability of community development projects' (Female social club member, Owutu Edda).

Another said:

'Education is a political reality for every society. Therefore, we should key into adult education to move our community forward in terms of sustainable community development. We can dialogue and conscientize our people on literacy education. Through dialogue, our adult learners will become active participants in the learning process. The dialogue will also promote the participation of adult learners in enhancing strategies in sustaining community development projects' (Female town union member, Amasiri).

Yet another participant revealed that: ‘adult education programs will help in promoting the strategies for the sustainability of projects when they are designed to ensure that the quality of life of the learners is enhanced through the new learning acquired’ (Female community leader, Uwana).

Findings show that effective communication must be employed in achieving the goal of sustainable community development. The participants saw communication as a measure to promote the strategies that promote the sustainability of community development projects. Notably, a participant said: ‘from the needs of the community such as classroom blocks, health centers, culverts/bridges, roads and markets among others, communication should be able to identify those which are in dire need of a given community’ (Male community leader, Item). Another participant asserts:

‘Communication is vital in all our efforts to sustain community development projects. It is useful in all aspects of the project execution. We communicate at the level of project identification and such interactions enable us to identify and execute projects that address the felt needs. Decision-making is crucial in project execution and effective communication between members plays an important role in the sustenance of community development projects’ (Female youth member, Uzuakoli).

5. Discussion of findings

The research explored the strategies that promote the sustainability of community development projects in Southeast Nigeria. Findings have particular reference to knowledge and awareness of sustainable community development projects, strategies that promote sustainability of community development projects, and measures that enhance the strategies for sustainability of community development projects.

Participants in the study were very much aware of sustainable development projects in the communities. They listed the projects to include town halls, health centers/hospitals, schools, roads, and electricity among others. Ejionye (1995, pp. 238–254) argued that most self-help community development projects predate the colonial era, while others began when support from successive government and missionary societies was either denied to some communities or was rather critically inadequate. In such circumstances, many communities looking inward were able to organize themselves and mobilize their resources to provide the much sought infrastructural facilities and amenities such as roads, markets, schools, postal agencies, town halls, electricity, pipe-borne water, and mass transit services in recent times.

We found that not every community development project is sustainable. Whereas some projects are sustainable, others are not. The participants maintained that sustainable projects are those that address the felt needs of the community. The people are always willing to offer land, labor, and finance and participate effectively in decision-making processes of projects that address the community’s felt needs.

According to Ukaegbu and Agunwamba (1995, pp. 42–53) the ability to resolve conflicts over core values that arise from beliefs and convictions viewed as socially intrinsic

helps in the sustainability of community development projects. Situations that come under this include traditional beliefs and customs as in the case of even distribution of projects across different sections of the community.

In order to improve the quality of people's lives, a sustainable community development approach focuses on a participatory process that includes planning, prioritizing, and making decisions that are pertinent to a community's sustainable requirements. Participatory development, human development, and environmental conservation are all components of sustainable development. When locals are involved in the implementation of initiatives, they get invested in the project's success (Eboh, 1995, pp. 3–12). Participation is indispensable in project sustainability. According to UN-Habitat (2009, p. 32), notwithstanding efforts to promote community members' involvement in community development in developing countries, participation continues to be regularly low.

Strategies that promote projects' sustainability were revealed. We found that improvement in community participation, investment in human development, involvement of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), creation of growth and empowerment incentives, and environmental protection were effective strategies. The study participants noted that participation brings about a common understanding in the execution of community development projects. Local action was viewed as an effective technique by Honadle and VanSant (1985, pp. 1–128) to ensure the sustainability of community development initiatives. Without some sort of resource commitment from the recipients, development efforts cannot be maintained. It entails transformation, the most significant of which is the attitude and behavior of individuals who join the process itself as participants – individually or in groups.

The results of the study showed that one tactic for ensuring the durability of community development initiatives is the participation of CBOs in their execution. This supports Nwankwo and Okonkwo's (2010, pp. 195–205) results, which claimed that employing CBOs as a primary instrument is particularly beneficial in ensuring the sustainability of community development programs. The CBOs are constantly in the communities, from which they draw their membership, making them the most accessible organizations to the general public. They comprise, among other things, age grade associations, town unions, women's groups, and youth organizations. The study's conclusions concur with those of Morna (1993, pp. 15–17), who identified educational empowerment as a tactic for encouraging the sustainability of community development initiatives; he views reading as a foundational element and a springboard that empowers people to actively engage in all facets of development.

Furthermore, there is evidence of theoretical relevance from the study findings. The Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) is built on participatory approaches and was developed to organize and improve community's efforts in addressing their challenges. The theory depends on the involvement of the people and cannot be implemented without their participation. The study findings revealed that creating growth and empowerment incentives and empowering the community members are strategies for promoting the sustainability of community development projects. SLA provides opportunities for

community-based learning where people interact and learn from each other as well as from outsiders through participatory approaches.

5.1. Implications of the study to other developing countries

The study has implications for community development projects in other developing countries. According to Abose and Uwakwe (1995, pp. 164–170), underdevelopment manifests itself in poverty, ignorance, superstition, disease, inflammatory violence, economic insecurity, political instability, and a number of dehumanizing problems. Although these problems are widespread in developing countries, some of the countries have more direct contact with them. Literacy education is a condition without which development, especially the sustainability of community development projects, cannot take place. Illiteracy has remained a plague in the projects' sustainability in developing countries. Thus, the need for adult literacy programs becomes imperative. Attainment of adult literacy is also paramount since most of the problems associated with underdevelopment namely drought, poverty, famine, disease, political instability, and economic insecurity among others are problems that require solutions from adults. Communities in developing countries live in poverty, with the majority being subsistence farmers without access to modern technologies. Both the income and education levels appear to be relatively low in these cases (Dafione, 2007, p. 46). Therefore, it becomes crucial to start sustainable community development initiatives in order to improve people's quality of life.

Community development relies much on effective participation. The indigenous knowledge and skills of the participants and major actors in the process should be harnessed. Participatory community development implies that all stakeholders collaborate at all levels of the project execution. It has the ultimate aim of establishing the sustainability of the completed projects and a sense of ownership. Participation also places a stronger emphasis on the interconnections, capacity empowerment, independence, and sustainability of community development programs.

In accordance with the Social Development Policy for Nigeria (SDP) (1989, p. 38), some past attempts at rural development failed due to the non-involvement of the people. This problem was exacerbated in the 1970s by the oil boom that gave the erroneous impression that the government could provide all their needs. Consequently, the spirit of self-help was relegated to the background. The relatively inadequate government assistance as a result of the present economic reality in the country has compelled a critical appraisal with a view to finding a lasting solution to the problem. The government grants-in-aid to community development projects and matching grants are no longer available as it was the case in the 1970s. Coupled with the insufficiency of funds, there is also the problem of technical assistance by the government.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The issue of project sustainability is proven to be a major task in community development. Despite the huge amount of resources spent in executing community development projects which is a burden to many communities, the sustainability of executed projects has remained a herculean task. To address this, it was accepted that there is no magical weapon to project sustainability in community development. Consequently, there is a need to study its nature, dynamics, strategies, and measures to enhance it.

Social mobilization emerged as a remarkable factor to reckon with projects' sustainability. It is all about sensitizing and conscientizing community members towards the realization of community development objectives. Social mobilization emanates from within the community when Community-Based Organizations mobilize community members for active participation in project execution. Moreover, it could come from external agents such as government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) when they mobilize community members towards action for the attainment of community development goals.

Adult literacy programs have played an enormous role in empowering community members to cope with projects' sustainability. Empowerment is concerned with knowledge and information. It also stimulates skill acquisition processes. A distinct finding is that empowering the people at the center of the development is crucial to the sustainability of community development projects.

Some recommendations from the evidence the study has generated include:

- Stimulating and encouraging the government and NGOs to mobilize actions towards empowering the people. The people are poor and find it difficult to contribute to the sustainability of projects. The government and NGOs should therefore empower the people economically and politically to enable them to cope with the sustainability of community development projects.
- Conducting campaigns that promote educational programs in the communities, especially for adults. In addition to equipping rural manpower with the desired skills, and vocational education, community members should be prepared for the sustainability of community development projects. It makes community members more productive, helps them earn more revenue for their families, and improves people's quality of life.
- Aligning social work, academic, and practice interests by creating dialogue forums and inspiring community development workers using core social work knowledge and methods will go a long way in empowering community members. The implication is that social workers should be posted to communities to help the people attain goals of community development.

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